

Report to Woolhampton Parish Council

District Councillor: Chris Read, Member of West Berkshire Council for Bucklebury Ward

Date: 17-11-2025

Full Council 27th November

Local Work

You may have also noticed a new pedestrian crossing in Midgham Parish between the bus stops at the Coach and Horses and the Brimpton Road community. This was brought about by a request and idea to resolve the problem of people with disabilities crossing the fast road to get to the Village Hall and amenities on the north side of the Bath Road with a national speed limit.

I also visited newly repair Trim Trail at Bucklebury Primary School hosted by the new Parent Association Chair, Sarah Grieve, and Headmaster, Mr Higgs. The funds were raised by the Parent Association, and I am glad to say the 2024-25 Members Bid from myself. I am looking to Midgham Parish for next years bid if anyone has any ideas they can promote.

Children's Services

West Berkshire Council is celebrating a significant achievement following its latest Ofsted inspection of children's services, which concluded that the overall effectiveness of the service is 'Good'. This rating reflects the dedication and hard work of staff and leaders who have placed children and families at the heart of their mission.

The inspection assessed four key areas:

- The impact of leaders on social work practice
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection
- The experiences and progress of children in care
- The experiences and progress of care leavers

All four areas were judged Good, marking a strong endorsement of the quality of care and support provided across West Berkshire.

Since the previous inspection in 2022, West Berkshire has faced challenges, including leadership changes and financial pressures that slowed progress. However, the appointment of a dedicated Director of Children's Services in late 2023 and the formation of a stable leadership team have

been transformative. This renewed focus has driven improvements in key areas such as the multi-agency 'front door', tackling extra-familial harm, and permanence planning for children in care.

Inspectors praised the council's commitment to children, noting that leaders have made them a high priority. Workforce stability has improved significantly, with reduced turnover and reliance on agency staff. The introduction of assistant team managers and investment in professional development through a dedicated academy are helping to build a skilled and confident workforce.

Collaboration with health services, police, and schools is strong, contributing to effective joint decision-making and safeguarding.

West Berkshire Children's Services has turned a corner, demonstrating resilience, ambition, and a clear commitment to children's welfare. With continued focus on early help, participation, and system improvements, the future looks bright for the district's most vulnerable children and young people.

You can [read the Ofsted inspection report here](#).

Council and Voluntary Sector

West Berkshire Council has formally adopted a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

West Berkshire Council has formally adopted a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with key Voluntary and Charitable Sector (VCS) organisations, reinforcing a shared commitment to working together to support communities and improve outcomes for vulnerable residents.

The MOU has been developed collaboratively with Volunteer Centre West Berkshire and Connecting Communities in Berkshire, with broader engagement from across the sector. Greenham Trust and Berkshire Community Foundation also provided valuable input, alongside officers from the Council's Place Directorate and Children's Services.

While collaborative working is already well established, particularly through Health and Wellbeing Board subgroups and VCS-led forums, the MOU provides a formal framework to strengthen strategic relationships which will enable earlier, more structured communication and more effective joint delivery of services aligned with the Council's priorities.

The initiative also supports the Council's strategic objective to build on strong operational relationships and develop strategic partnerships that unlock wider opportunities, including apprenticeships and social value.

This Memorandum of Understanding marks an important milestone in our relationship with the voluntary and charitable sector. We already work closely together, but this strategic agreement will help us go further, enabling earlier collaboration, clearer communication, and stronger alignment with our shared goals to benefit the people of West Berkshire.

Libraries

The Summer Reading Challenge is presented by The Reading Agency and delivered in partnership with libraries. The theme of this year's challenge was Story Garden, which aimed to inspire children's imaginations and explore the connection between storytelling and nature through the power of reading.

2721 children visited a West Berkshire library to take part in the challenge to read six books over the summer holidays, while ninety more joined in digitally via the Summer Reading Challenge website. All the children who completed their challenge received a certificate and a medal to celebrate their achievement.

Additionally, 409 pre-school children participated in a Mini Challenge, and 634 people participated in the challenge for older children and adults.

The most popular children's books borrowed during the challenge were 'Diary of a Future Billionaire' by Pamela Butchart and 'Impossible Creatures' by Katherine Rundell.

It is free to join and borrow books from West Berkshire Libraries for all people living, working, or studying in West Berkshire. Babies and young children can have their own library cards and borrow up to fifteen books at a time.

There are also e-books and e-audiobooks available to borrow for free. Find details, including current library opening hours, at www.westberks.gov.uk/libraries.

As always any questions or concerns on Council Services please contact me anytime.

Kind Regards

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