

Report to Woolhampton Parish Council

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

Date: 15-06-2026

Full Council – 17th July

Extraordinary Executive Meeting – 11th June (Contract Award for the Highways Term Maintenance Contract & Local Plan Contract Award for the Highways Term Maintenance Contract)

Executive Meeting – 2nd July

Consultations

- Draft Adult Social Care Strategy 2026-2030. Ends on 2026-06-22

Devolution of West Berkshire Council

Councils across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire are working closely together to prepare for a key government announcement expected in July regarding the future shape of local government in the area.

A government consultation for local government reorganisation (LGR) closed in late March with three options on the table for potential future structures- two of which include West Berkshire. This followed the government's invitation in February 2025 to submit proposals for a unitary council or councils in areas of England that currently have two-tiers of local authorities (counties and districts), as is the case in Oxfordshire.

The options are:

- A single unitary council for Oxfordshire : Oxfordshire Council responsible for all services for Oxfordshire residents.
- Two unitary councils: Oxford and Shires Council created from the existing district councils of Cherwell, Oxford City and West Oxfordshire. Ridgeway Council created from the existing district councils of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse and the unitary council of West Berkshire.
- Three unitary councils: Greater Oxford Council - covering Oxford and its immediate surroundings. Northern Oxfordshire Council - covering most of the existing Cherwell and West Oxfordshire districts. Ridgeway Council - covering most of the existing South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts combined with West Berkshire.

It will not be known whether there will be one, two or three unitary authorities for Oxfordshire until the government announces its 'minded-to' decision, which is its preferred, provisional decision before it's put into law. **This announcement is expected before the parliamentary summer recess, which starts on 16 July.**

Green Issues

West Berkshire residents invited to access greener home upgrades through Switch Together

From 1 June residents can register for Switch Together

West Berkshire Council is working with Switch Together to help local residents access affordable green home improvements and reduce their energy bills.

From 1 June 2026, residents across West Berkshire can register for Switch Together, a trusted scheme that brings together a range of low-carbon home solutions under one name. Previously known as Solar Together, the scheme has already helped thousands of households across the UK to install solar panels and cut their carbon footprint.

Switch Together now offers a wider range of options, including solar panels, battery storage, heat pumps, Electric Vehicle (EV) chargers and smarter energy tariffs, making it easier for residents to explore what works best for their home and budget.

By taking part, households receive a tailored recommendation and benefit from expert support throughout the process, from registration to installation. The scheme uses group-buying to secure competitive prices, helping residents save money while investing in reliable, high-quality green technologies installed by vetted suppliers.

The initiative supports West Berkshire Council's commitment to tackling climate change, reducing carbon emissions and helping residents manage the rising cost of energy.

Young Families

New playground at Shaw House set to transform family days out

Work has begun on a new playground at Shaw House, giving families a fun and accessible space to enjoy together.

Funded through the Community Infrastructure Levy, the new play area is expected to open later this summer, offering more opportunities for relaxed family days out.

At its centre will be a 'Great Hall' play structure inspired by Shaw House's historic architecture, encouraging imaginative play while connecting children to the site's heritage, which dates back to 1581.

Situated on the old netball court, the playground will combine traditional equipment with inclusive features to support a wide range of needs. Sensory panels will provide quieter, accessible play, while a nest swing, accessible carousel and balance trails will encourage movement, confidence and shared experiences.

Designed to complement the historic setting, the space will use natural materials alongside durable, low-maintenance surfaces. Accessible paths and safety surfacing will ensure it is practical and welcoming for all.

New crisis and resilience funding to support West Berkshire residents

Residents facing financial hardship can now access support from the Crisis and Resilience Fund

West Berkshire residents facing financial hardship can now access support through a government-funded Crisis and Resilience Fund, delivered by West Berkshire Council.

The new Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) replaces previous support schemes and is designed to help households experiencing sudden financial difficulties, while also strengthening longer-term financial stability across West Berkshire.

The fund can help with essential costs such as emergency food, household items including furniture and appliances, support with rent and energy bills, and assistance during periods of unexpected

financial pressure. Support will be tailored to individual circumstances to make sure help is provided where it is needed most.

West Berkshire Council is working closely with trusted local partners, including West Berkshire Foodbank, Newbury Community Resource Centre, Citizens Advice West Berkshire and other voluntary organisations, to ensure residents can access support quickly and effectively. Funding will also help expand services that support people to maximise their income, manage debt and access benefits advice.

Alongside immediate crisis support, the fund places a strong emphasis on building long-term resilience. This includes helping residents develop stronger financial skills and reduce the risk of needing emergency assistance in the future, supporting the Council's priority of building resilient and inclusive communities.

Children and families will continue to receive support during school holiday periods through the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, offering free activities and nutritious meals for eligible children, with additional help available from local community partners.

New Chairman

Councillor Stephanie Steevenson has been elected as the new Chairman of West Berkshire Council following the Annual Meeting of Council on 14 May.

Councillor Steevenson was formally appointed by fellow councillors at the meeting and will be supported in her role by Councillor Martha Vickers, who was elected as Vice Chairman. This marks the first time both the Chairman and Vice Chairman of West Berkshire Council are women.

The appointment supports the Council's priority of building strong, connected communities by promoting civic pride, encouraging community involvement and strengthening links between the Council and local organisations across the district.

Speaking after her election, Councillor Stephanie Steevenson, Chairman of West Berkshire Council said:

"It is a real privilege to be elected as Chairman of West Berkshire Council. I am looking forward to meeting residents, supporting our fantastic community and voluntary groups, and representing the district with pride over the coming year."

Councillor Steevenson takes over from outgoing Chairman Councillor Tony Vickers and will act as an ambassador for West Berkshire, attending a wide range of civic, community and charitable events to highlight local achievements and connect with residents. This year Councillor Steevenson will be supporting Girlguiding West Berkshire (Valley Division) and the Royal Berkshire Army Cadet Force.

Community organisations and charities are encouraged to invite the Chairman to attend events and activities taking place across West Berkshire by emailing chairman@westberks.gov.uk.

New Support for Unpaid Carers

Unpaid carers across West Berkshire can now benefit from a powerful new set of digital tools designed to make caring easier

Unpaid carers across West Berkshire can now benefit from a powerful new set of digital tools designed to make caring easier, healthier and better connected. The Digital Resource for Carers, developed by Carers UK and provided free of charge by West Berkshire Council (via an access code),

brings together trusted online tools, e-learning courses, practical guides and links to local information - all in one place.

As part of this offer, West Berkshire Council has also subscribed to the Carers UK Jointly app. Jointly is designed to reduce some of the day-to-day pressure of caring by helping carers coordinate tasks, share information and build strong support networks around the person they care for.

With Jointly, carers can create a personalised circle of care, keep health notes and logs in one place, upload text or images, and stay organised with shared task lists. It works on iPhone, iPad, Android devices and modern web browsers, meaning it can be used at home or on the go.

The app is free to download, and while creating a Jointly circle usually costs £2.99, West Berkshire residents can access this feature for free by entering the code WESTBERKS when prompted. Once a circle is created, carers can invite unlimited people to share the care at no extra cost or use the app independently if they prefer (a circle is still required).

Together, the Digital Resource for Carers and the Jointly app represent a significant step forward in supporting unpaid carers in West Berkshire - giving them practical tools to stay connected, stay organised and feel better supported in their vital role.

To access the Digital Resources and find out more about Jointly, search for: Carers UK Digital - online information and app - West Berkshire Council

Sport and Leisure

West Berkshire issues new Playing Pitch Strategy

Communities across West Berkshire are set to benefit from improved access to high-quality sports pitches, helping people of all ages and backgrounds to stay active, connect with others and enjoy the many benefits of outdoor sport.

At a meeting of the Council's Executive on 21 May, councillors agreed to adopt the district's new Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS), a long-term plan to support and enhance facilities for sports including football, cricket, rugby, hockey, tennis, lacrosse and netball through to 2041.

While the strategy sets out a clear delivery plan, its focus is ultimately on people. Playing pitches are important community assets, giving residents welcoming and accessible places to play, train and compete, while helping local clubs continue to thrive.

These spaces bring people together, support physical and mental wellbeing, help young people build skills and confidence, and reduce loneliness by strengthening social connections. They also encourage healthy lifestyles and support grassroots sport.

The new strategy recognises the growing and changing needs of local communities, including the continued rise in participation among women and girls. It sets out a coordinated approach to ensure that facilities keep pace with demand, with recommendations on improving supporting infrastructure, such as changing facilities to ensure they are suitable for all users.

The PPS has been developed in line with Sport England's national framework, with input from a wide range of partners, including national governing bodies such as the FA, England Netball, RFU, England Hockey, the LTA, and the ECB.

This collaborative approach ensures the strategy reflects both current demand and future growth across all sports and provides a shared framework for West Berkshire Council and its partners to deliver the recommendations.

Importantly, improvements identified in the strategy are already being delivered. Recent projects include the redevelopment of courts at Henwick Worthy, the Cotswold Sport Centre and Kennet School, helping to ensure quality local facilities are suitable for a wider range of sports, including netball, and accessible to more people.

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

Kind Regards

Mr Chris Read

Chris.read1@westberks.gov.uk

07714 081 565