

POLICY COMMITTEE MINUTES - 16 JANUARY 2017

Present: Councillor Lovelock (Chair)

Councillors Davies, Duveen, Eden, Gavin, Gittings, Hopper, Hoskin, Jones, Skeats, Stevens, Terry and White.

Apologies: Councillor Page.

69. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved -

That pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of items 70-72 below as it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to that Act.

70. READING HALF MARATHON LICENCE

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the outcome of negotiations with Brasher Leisure Limited (BLL) for the renewal of their licence to deliver Reading Half Marathon on behalf of the Council.

Resolved -

That the report be noted and that BLL be granted a new licence for the delivery of Reading Half Marathon from 2017, on the terms set out in the report.

(Exempt information as defined in paragraph 3).

71. READING TRANSPORT LIMITED - REPORT TO SHAREHOLDER

The Reading Transport Limited (RTL) Director of Resources submitted a report providing an update to the Council, as shareholder of RTL, on financial performance to P13 2015/16, Pension Scheme commitments, and Fleet Replacement 2016/17 & Capital Investment.

Resolved -

- (1) That the report from Reading Transport Ltd be noted;**
- (2) That the provision of lease finance to RTL by means of an extension of the existing Master Lease Agreement, should it be required to facilitate the purchase of vehicles as set out in the report, be approved and that the Head of Finance be authorized to agree terms with the company.**

(Exempt information as defined in paragraph 3).

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72. BUDGET 2017-20: PROPOSAL IN RELATION TO A COUNCIL ASSET

The Director of Finance and Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report seeking approval for a transaction associated with a significant council asset, subject to due diligence and various other processes as set out in the report, as part of the 2017-20 budget strategy.

Resolved -

That the Directors of Finance and Environment & Neighbourhood Services be authorised to arrange, with the assistance of appropriate specialist property agents, the transaction set out in the report, and be authorised, with the Head of Legal & Democratic Services, and in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Chair of Audit & Governance Committee, to finalise and conclude the transaction once the best value option had been identified.

(Exempt information as defined in paragraph 3).

(Councillors Jones, Terry and Gittings declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item, insofar as the report made reference to equal pay claims. Nature of interests: Councillor Jones, and Councillor Gittings' partner, were employed by UNISON which was representing a number of equal pay claimants. Councillor Terry was Councillor Jones' partner.)

73. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair reported the decision taken in closed session to approve a transaction associated with a significant council asset, as part of the 2017-20 budget strategy (Minute 72 above refers).

74. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

75. QUESTIONS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by members of the public:

	Questioner	Subject	Reply
1.	Roger Lightfoot	Arthur Hill Pool	Councillor Gittings
2.	Tina Kislingbury	Mental Health Services	Councillor Hoskin

Questions on the following matters were submitted by councillors:

	Questioner	Subject	Reply
1.	Councillor White	Arthur Hill Pool	Councillor Gittings
2.	Councillor White	Interim Managers and Consultants	Councillor Lovelock

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3.	Councillor White	Children's Centres	Councillor Gavin
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(NB - The full text of the questions and responses was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

76. NEW THEATRE - RESULTS OF THE PRELIMINARY MARKET CONSULTATION

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report summarising the feedback obtained from a Preliminary Market Consultation, as the initial stage of a process to secure a development partner for the delivery of a new theatre / performing arts centre in Reading.

The report explained that the responses to the consultation indicated a strong interest in developing and operating a new theatre in Reading, which was seen as an attractive proposition in terms of the market to sustain a new theatre. There was an overall view that the capacity of any new theatre should be larger than that suggested in the brief, in order to attract 'premium product', and an ideal capacity of between 1,500 and 1,700 seats had been suggested. However, the consultation feedback also indicated that the Council's aspirations for zero-subsidy for either the capital build or ongoing operating costs were not deliverable. It was also clear that the further feasibility work required to develop and test out more detailed options would need to be extensive and costly, with little immediate prospect of deliverability, and could not be justified in the context of the Council's difficult financial position.

The report proposed that the Council continue its dialogue with key stakeholders, including Arts Council England and Theatre and Arts Reading, in order to be able to exploit any future opportunities that might arise. The market consultation had reinforced the fact that delivery of a new theatre for Reading was likely to be a protracted process, and in the short to medium term it was essential that the Hexagon remained fit for purpose as the town's primary large theatre, and that it continued to be able to attract both touring product and audiences. There had been prioritised selective investment over recent years to maintain and enhance the fabric and interior of the building and it was proposed that this judicious approach continued.

A copy of the brief and the questions asked in the Preliminary Market Consultation were attached at Appendix 1.

Resolved -

- (1) That the feedback from the Preliminary Market Consultation be noted;**
- (2) That the Committee endorse the Council continuing its dialogue with key stakeholders, including Arts Council England and Theatre and Arts Reading, in order to be able to exploit future opportunities that might arise to deliver a new theatre;**

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- (3) That the Committee endorse the continued and appropriate investment in the Hexagon to ensure that it remained attractive to both touring product and audiences.**

77. SYRIAN VULNERABLE PERSON'S RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME INTEGRATION AND SUPPORT PROVISION 2017 - 2021

Further to Minute 67 of the meeting held on 18 January 2016, the Managing Director submitted a report reviewing the first six months of the Council's participation in the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement (SVPR) programme, and seeking approval to continue in the programme and award a contract to an external provider to provide case work and integration support.

The report noted that the Council had committed to take three families per year over five years (subject to review) through the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Person's Resettlement programme, and three families had been accommodated in 2016/17. The report set out a review of the first six months covering the adequacy of the Home Office funding, availability of accommodation and school places, ability to cope with needs, and support requirements and arrangements for the refugees in the future.

The report proposed that an external provider be contracted for a four-year period, to provide the required case work and integration support for the first 12 months after arrival, for each of the three families that arrived each year. For Years 2 - 5 after arrival, families would be expected to be largely independent, and the types of services that might be needed had already been commissioned from the voluntary sector up to June 2018, through the Narrowing the Gap Commissioning Framework.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Council continue receiving three families a year from 2017 to 2021, on the same basis as that previously agreed by the Committee on 18 January 2016;**
- (2) That the Head of Customer Services be authorised to award a 4-year contract to the value of £33,000 per annum, with a total value of £132,000, for the provision of case work support and integration for the period 2017 to 2021.**

78. RESIDENTS PARKING SCHEME - RECOMMENDATIONS FROM TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

Further to Minute 63 of the meeting of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee held on 12 January 2017, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report asking the Committee to consider recommendations made by Traffic Management Sub-Committee regarding the residents' parking scheme. The report submitted to the Traffic Management Sub-Committee was attached at Appendix 1, and the recommendations agreed by the Traffic Management Sub-Committee were tabled at the meeting.

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The report explained that the Traffic Management Sub-Committee had considered a report on a review of Residents Parking and options for future changes to the Residents' Parking Scheme that had been identified by a Scrutiny Task & Finish Group. The Sub-Committee had made recommendations concerning the introduction of a charge for the first residents' parking permit, the charge for second permits, and whether the proposed first permit charge should be applied to some or all of the free discretionary permits.

Resolved -

(1) That, on the recommendation of Traffic Management Sub-Committee:

- (a) a charge for the first residents' parking permit be introduced;**
- (b) the annual charge for the first permit be set at £30, with the charge for the second permit to remain at £120 per annum;**
- (c) an annual charge of £30 be set for:**
 - Discretionary Resident Permits (first permit)
 - Doctor (Medical Practitioner) permits
 - Healthcare Professional permits
 - School staff permits;
- (d) consideration of any charge for charity first permit and carer (first and second permits) be deferred pending further investigation;**
- (e) the charges be introduced from 1 April 2017, with the charge for the first permit only falling due at the renewal of individual existing first permits.**

79. READING TRANSPORT LIMITED - REPORT TO SHAREHOLDER

The Reading Transport Limited Director of Resources submitted a report providing an operational update for the Council on the activities of Reading Transport Ltd (RTL) during 2015/16.

The report explained that the year to date for RTL had seen the continuation of the strong network growth and expansion reported previously. It summarised service changes made in September 2015 and 2016, and explained that RTL had secured the contract to run local buses in Newbury, Thatcham and the Kennet Valley. Fares had been reviewed for the first time in two years in response to increased operating costs, and new cash prices and simplified structures had been introduced from 5 September 2016. Advances in ticketing technology continued with smartphone, app-based mobile tickets and contactless bank card payments were expected to improve boarding times as they were fully rolled out.

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The report also explained that RTL had been nominated for 19 national and local awards in 2016, winning in six categories and achieving three runner-up awards.

Resolved -

- (1) That the report from Reading Transport Ltd be noted;**
- (2) That Reading Transport Ltd staff and management be congratulated on the company's achievements in 2015/16.**

80. NATIONAL CYCLE NETWORK ROUTE 422 - SPEND APPROVAL

Further to Minute 55 of the meeting of Traffic Management Sub-Committee held on 3 November 2016, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report seeking spend approval for the new National Cycle Network route (NCN 422) Phase 1 works programme along Bath Road, funded through the LEP Growth Deal.

The report explained that NCN 422 had been granted full funding approval from the Berkshire Local Transport Body in November 2015 to the value of £4.2 million. The cross-Berkshire cycle route between Newbury and Windsor would provide an enhanced £1.2 million east-west cycle facility through Reading, linking to existing cycle routes to the north and south of the borough and directly serving schools and other local facilities/services.

The report summarised the Phase 1 scheme along Bath Road from the borough boundary to Southcote Lane, consisting of shared-use facilities linking to three secondary schools and Prospect Park. The costs associated with the design and delivery of Phase 1 would be met by £400,000 of LEP Growth Deal funding and £50,000 Section 106 monies for the Bath Road Lidl development.

Resolved -

That spend approval be given for the National Cycle Network route (NCN 422) Phase 1 works programme.

81. DEPUTIES SERVICE

Further to Minute 40 of the meeting held on 26 September 2016, the Director of Adult Care and Health Services submitted a report on a consultation and an Equality Impact Assessment carried out on a revised policy for the Council's Deputy's Office.

The report explained that it was proposed to replace the Council's current Deputy's Office Policy with the revised Policy as attached to the report at Appendix C. The main provisions of the new policy were to:

- (a) reaffirm the alignment of the Council's charging schedule to any current or future Court of Protection fixed amounts, or specified rates which was the maximum permissible;**

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- (b) apply the means testing and thresholds outlined by the Court of Protection directive for deputyship;
- (c) implement a local exemption criteria in cases where undue hardship might be caused by the payment of any fees, application for exemptions to be considered by the Council's deputies and appointeeship authorising officer (currently the Director of Adult Care and Health Services); and
- (d) implement local discretionary charging (Category III, IV and disbursement) of specialist services that customers would otherwise be expected to pay for e.g. funeral arrangements, conveyancing for house sales etc, to both deputyship and appointeeship customers.

The report explained that a six-week consultation on the proposed policy had been carried out from 3 October to 14 November 2016 and a total of 38 responses had been received. A large majority of respondents had felt it was important to keep the Deputy Office service in Reading and general feedback had been that the service was good, efficient and important to service users as it helped them manage and meet their financial responsibilities and that staff were friendly and approachable. The consultation material had explained the need to make changes to the charging rules, in order to make the service financially sustainable, and the responses showed that, while service users would rather not have to pay or pay more (dependent on their circumstances), they wanted to have a Deputy's Office available to support them, and so accepted the rationale for the proposed changes.

The consultation feedback was set out in detail in Appendix A to the report, and an Equality Impact assessment on the proposed changes was attached to the report at Appendix B.

Resolved -

That, having considered the findings of a public consultation on proposed changes to the Council's Deputy's Office service, as attached to the report at Appendix A, and also the anticipated impact of the proposed changes to the Deputy's Office service on the discharge of the Council's duties as a public body as set out in the Equality Act 2010 (detailed in the Equality Impact assessment at Appendix B), the revised Deputy's Office Policy (set out at Appendix C) be adopted with immediate effect.

82. BUDGET 2017-18: APPROVAL OF COUNCIL TAX BASE, NNDR1 ESTIMATE & ESTIMATED COLLECTION FUND SURPLUS, LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2017/18 AND REMOVAL OF EMPTY AND SECOND HOME COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS

The Director of Finance submitted a report asking the Committee to recommend to the full Council meeting on 24 January 2017 the approval of the Council Tax Support Scheme, changes to local Council Tax discounts, the Council Tax Base and NNDR1 form.

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The report noted that by 31 January 2017 it would be necessary to have estimated and informed the Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner, Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service (RBFRS) and Environment Agency of the Council Tax base to be used for setting the tax and levy for 2017/18. In order to do this it would be necessary to estimate the anticipated Council Tax collection rate and therefore the allowance to be made for non-collection and changes to the Council Tax Base. Also by the same date it would be necessary to have estimated and informed the RBFRS and DCLG of the estimated collectible business rates to be used for setting the budget and ultimately the Council Tax for 2017/18, by completing the NNDR1 form. On 16 January 2017 there was a requirement to estimate the collection fund surplus or deficit separately for both council tax and business rate transactions as at 31 March 2017, with any surplus or deficit to then be taken into account when calculating the total amount to be collected from Council Tax payers in 2017/18. The report set out forecast council tax collection and the resulting impact on the Collection Fund.

The report also asked the Committee to recommend that Council approve the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017/18. Proposed changes to the local scheme had been reported to the Committee on 31 October 2016 (Minute 51 refers) and a statutory public consultation on the proposed changes had taken place from 4 November to 30 December 2016. The changes proposed to apply from 1 April 2017/18 and 1 April 2018/19 were to increase the minimum contribution from 20% to 25%, to remove earned income disregards from the earnings calculation, and to increase non-dependant deductions. Attached to the report at Appendix B was a summary of the responses to the consultation, with the officer response and advice. Following the consultation it was recommended not to reduce the capital limit allowance from £6000 to £3000. In addition DCLG had completed an annual update of various allowances and those changes had been incorporated.

The report also noted that the various technical changes to Council Tax made in previous years would continue, and that further changes would be introduced in 2017 to reduce discounts for Major Works and for second homes. A consultation had also taken place on these proposed changes and attached to the report at Appendix C were details of the consultation response and a summary of the key points. The proposed changes removed the current 50% for 12 months discount on properties undergoing works, removed the 100% for 1 month discount for properties that were empty and unfurnished, and removed the 5% discount on properties that were classed as second homes. An Equality Impact Assessment in respect of the proposed changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme and Council Tax discounts was attached to the report at Appendix F.

Pursuant to the approval of the Council Tax Support Scheme and other estimates explained, the report then set out the detailed calculations to be made under the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992, as amended, which the Committee were asked to recommend to Council.

Recommended -

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- (1) That the 2017 uprating of the allowances in the council tax support scheme and other amendments to the scheme as set out in paragraph 6.7 of the report be approved;**
- (2) That it be noted that the following had previously been adopted:**
 - (i) the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Default Scheme) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2886(2012)) in 2013;**
 - (ii) the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 (SI 3181 (2013)) in 2014;**
 - (iii) the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2014 in 2015;**
 - (iv) the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 in 2016;**

and that these would remain in place as the basis of the 2017-18 scheme, to the extent that the requirements in each regulation remained prescribed;

- (3) That the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 which had come into force on 15 January 2017 be adopted and applied to local schemes from 1 April 2017 as set out in Appendix A;**
- (4) That the proposed local changes set out in Appendix B for 2017/18 and 2018/19 and the overall Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2017/18 be approved (Appendix B set out the summary of responses to the consultation on the Local Council Tax Support Scheme);**
- (5) That the Council's "plain english" guide to the Council Tax Support Scheme which explained how these regulations as amended locally would work together, and that an update would be published on the website to reflect the 2017/18 scheme, be noted;**
- (6) That, following consultation, the changes to discounts for certain empty property and second homes as set out in Appendix C be approved;**
- (7) That for the purpose of, and in accordance with, the provisions of the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations, 1992 (as amended):**
 - (a) The estimated Council Tax collection rate for the financial year 2017/18 be set at 98.75% overall (unchanged since 2015/16);**
 - (b) Taking account of the Council Tax technical changes made since 2013/14 and set out above, the amount calculated by the**

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Council as its Council Tax base for the financial year 2017/18 shall be 53,650 (figure being reviewed);

- (8) That it be noted that a surplus of £1,045,075 (to be confirmed) had been estimated in respect of Council Tax transactions as at 31 March 2017, and that Reading's share of this was £900,000 (to be confirmed);**
- (9) That the estimated surplus in respect of NNDR transactions as at 31 March 2017, and Reading's share of this, be noted (figures to follow);**
- (10) That the NNDR1 form be noted and approved.**

83. BUDGET MONITORING 2016/17

The Head of Finance submitted a report setting out the result of the detailed budget monitoring exercise undertaken for 2016/17, based on the position to the end of November 2016.

The report summarised the Directorate budget monitoring exercises, which were also set out in more detail at Appendix 1. The overall overspend had decreased by £62k since the report to the previous meeting.

Resolved -

That it be noted that, based on the position at the end of November 2016, budget monitoring forecast an overspend of around £7.6m.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 8.28pm).