

COUNCIL MEETING – 21 MARCH 2000

Present: Councillor Waite (Mayor);
Councillors Bello, Borgars, Canning, Corti, Day, Durkin, Edwards, Fenwick, Ferriday, Goodall, Green, Hanley, Hartley, Hingley, Hughes, P Jones, T Jones, Lockey, Lovelock, Morris, J Orton, M Orton, Page, Peak, Pugh, Putt, Ruhemann, Scaife, Silverman, Sheibani, Skeats, Sohpal, R Stainthorp, S Stainthorp, Sutton, Thomas, White, Wild, Williams, Winfield-Chislett and Yeo.

Apologies: Councillor Powers.

109. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Mayor reported that former Reading Mayor, Councillor Doris Lawrence had died on 4 March 2000.

He stated that she had been first elected to the Council in 1973 when she represented the Whitley Ward. In 1992 she had retired and in recognition of her distinguished service she had been made a Freeman of the Borough. She had come out of retirement in 1997 and been re-elected to serve the Kentwood Ward.

She had been elected as Mayor for the first time in 1983 and for a second time in 1987.

Right up until her death, Councillor Mrs Lawrence had taken an active part in Reading Borough Council. She had been a member of the Licensing Applications Committee, Vice Chair of the Traffic Management Committee, Chair of the Pensioners' Working Group and a member of the Healthier Reading Forum. She had also been a member of a number of organisations outside of the Council.

The Mayor said that she would be missed as a dedicated public servant and friend.

The Council then stood in silence as a tribute to her memory

110. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2000 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

111. PETITIONS

The following petitions were presented in accordance with Standing Order No 8:

(1) Request for Garages in Wrenswood Close

Mr D Garton presented a petition, containing 39 signatures, in the following terms:-

“This petition is to ask that Reading Borough Council considers providing garages in Wrenswood Close.

The construction of garages would enable the following:

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- A secure place for parking vehicles or for general storage.
- To help ease the congestion of parking on roads and footpaths.
- Remove some of the open space currently used for abandoning cars and dumping rubbish.”

In his response, Councillor M Orton, Lead Member for Housing, stated:

“The Council thanks Mr Garton for his petition and recognises the importance of providing sufficient parking for residents and also improving the quality of the local environment in areas such as Wrenswood Close.

We are currently undertaking a full review of Council garage provision across the whole town looking at demand, condition and impact on local residents. In addition we will be looking at other options for under-used existing garage sites and the opportunities of providing other safe parking areas.

The results of this review will be reported back to both Councillors and residents through the Joint Environment Committee and Joint Consultative Committee to allow local residents’ associations to comment on the findings and feed in their own views and suggestions.

The specific issues raised in this petition will be incorporated into the review and I hope to be able to discuss the findings with the petitioners at the earliest opportunity.”

(2) Traffic – Eldon Road

Mr K Wootten presented a petition, containing 203 signatures, in the following terms:-

“We the undersigned, object to proposals to increase the amount of traffic using Eldon Road and the surrounding areas.”

In his response, Councillor R Stainthorp, Lead Member for Strategic Planning and Transport, stated:

“The proposal to introduce a Kings Road outbound bus lane has been the subject of an extensive public consultation exercise. The scheme proposed in the first round of consultation, held last autumn, was to provide an inbound and outbound bus lane plus two outbound lanes of traffic on Kings Road to direct all inbound traffic onto London Road and to permit two way use of Eldon Road by all traffic.

Although the majority of comments from the consultation supported the principle of an outbound bus lane on Kings Road, concerns were expressed in both the responses to the consultation leaflet and at the public meetings of increased traffic flows on London Road and Eldon Road.

As agreed at the consultation meetings a number of alternative options to the original proposal have been considered. The alternative options we have considered all involve the use of Sidmouth Street as well as or as an alternative to Eldon Road. Of

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the options tested, the proposal to allow two-way traffic to use Eldon Road, with both left and right turning traffic to use the junction of Sidmouth Street and Queens Road, gives the best distribution of traffic. However, local councillors have accepted the concerns of the Eldon Road residents and have asked that the second best option be put forward as the Council's preferred option. This proposal still allows two way use of Eldon Road but only allows a right turn from Eldon Road to Kings Road.

The preferred proposal will stop Eldon Road being used by any traffic wishing to go to the north of the town. This traffic will have to go on and use Sidmouth Street. However, it does allow people within the local area better access to their properties and associated facilities.

Although we have been unable to address all the concerns raised by residents, both through the written consultation and public meetings, we do feel the preferred option that will be part of further public consultation to be held in March, best meets the transport needs of the area and the concerns of residents.

These proposals form part of the Borough's wider package of measures to increase use of public transport and are detailed in the current Local Transport Plan.

Over 5000 consultation leaflets will be distributed to the local area and a further public exhibition and meeting will be held on 31 March at the Methodist Church, Watlington Street. This forms the next stage in the consultation process and will be followed by other procedures subject to the results of this stage of consultation. We look forward to a good level of response to this next round of public consultation."

112. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 9

(1) Ms C Grieve asked the Lead Member for Housing:

Replacement Windows – Mayfair Area, Tilehurst

"Could the Lead Member for Housing please update me on the progress made in securing funding from the capital programme for the replacement windows in the Mayfair area of Tilehurst?"

REPLY by Councillor M Orton (Lead Member for Housing):

"I can confirm that the Council's programme for 2000/2001 includes sufficient funds to carry out window replacements on the 93 properties on 'Park Farm Estate'. This includes Grafton Road, Lansdowne Road, Burlington Road, Portland Gardens, Halls Road and some 1950s houses on Mayfair. The bungalows on Mayfair will be having their windows retained rather than replaced.

The information on the programme has been passed to our surveying team prior to tendering the contract and once there is an estimated date for the works to start we will be advising tenants accordingly."

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(2) Ms C Wilton asked the Lead Member for Social Services and Health:

Services for People with Mental Health

“Could the Lead Member for Social Services tell me what developments in services for people with mental health problems have taken place in the town since Reading became a unitary authority?”

REPLY by Councillor Ruhemann (Lead Member for Social Services and Health):

“Since Reading became a Unitary Authority mental health services have moved forward apace, with good co-operation between the Borough Council, Berkshire Health Authority, the West Berkshire Priority Care Services Trust, the Primary Care Groups and the voluntary sector, developing new initiatives and responding to the National Service Framework for Mental Health, published by the government last year.

Major joint developments since May 1998 include:

- The establishment in April 1999 of a pilot Assertive Community Treatment team, covering south Reading, with five staff, including Community Psychiatric Nurses, Occupational Therapists and Social Workers. The hope is that the more intensive support offered by this team will help people with schizophrenia and so on not to spend their lives in a “revolving door” in and out of mental hospital.
- Reading being the first Berkshire unitary to agree on and establish single management of its Community Mental Health Team, bringing together the social workers and Community Psychiatric Nurses who hitherto worked very separately. Under the dynamic leadership of Stephen Appleton, the integration in Reading of the Care Programme Approach practised by the NHS and Social Services Care Management is well under way, liaison workers have been identified for each GP surgery (or group of surgeries) and for inpatient wards at Fairmile, and joint working is being developed with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), where a new joint service has also been set up by the Borough and the Trust.
- The appointment in October 1999 of a jointly funded (Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham) specialist forensic worker to provide the link between specialist forensic services, the new medium secure unit in Oxford and the three CMHTs. This worker, who is managed in the Reading CMHT, also provides sessions to the court diversion scheme for mentally disordered offenders in Reading.
- The establishment of the Resource mental health day centre, which we have been working hard on for the last two years. The centre, in Kings Road, is now open and provides a wide range of activities for users, including a social café, drop in, advice centre and employment advice and opportunities. It is part funded by RBC, along with the National Lottery

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and Mental Illness Specific Grant monies, and is user-led, aimed at helping people with mental health problems to resume real responsibility for their own lives. It is to be accessible to as many people with mental health problems as possible so it will be open in the evenings and at weekends and there are workers with specific briefs to outreach to minority communities.

- The commissioning by Reading Abbey Primary Care Group, which covers the south-east quadrant of the Borough, of the CMHT to provide an assessment service to its' GP's for those clients who may be experiencing a life crisis, where mental health may be an issue. The new service starts next month and workers will provide an assessment within 30 hours and may offer short-term support and onward referral to other agencies, or the CMHT, as necessary.
- The appointment of a specialist dual diagnosis mental health worker to Reading CMHT to work with people who have both mental health and substance misuse problems and who are likely to be rough sleepers or in insecure accommodation. The post-holder will work alongside the two other specialist workers with a similar brief (one in the voluntary sector based at CIRDIC and one based with Neutral Zone) and the drug and alcohol services.
- The establishment, at the behest of Reading Borough Council's Planning Committee, of a joint steering group, on which the Council is represented and which is chaired by Martin Salter MP, to liaise with local residents about the development of the new mental hospital at Prospect Park. It is important that the new hospital respects and works with the local community, and also that it is not a replacement for Fairmile in modern materials but operates alongside the community initiatives I have mentioned and within the Government's new National Service Framework, which aims at a service which is safe, sound and supportive.

The pace of change and modernisation of mental health services in Reading over the past couple of years has been greater, to my personal knowledge, than at any time over the previous twenty."

(3) Mr K Uden asked the Lead Member for Social Services and Health:

Adoption Figures 1999-2000

"Could the Lead Member for Social Services tell me how many Reading children, looked after by Social Services, have been placed for adoption in 1999-2000 and how this is believed to compare with the national average?"

REPLY by Councillor Ruhemann (Lead Member for Social Services and Health):

"In 1999-2000 Reading Borough Council Social Services has placed 14 children for adoption out of 146 looked after, which is just under 10% of the

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total looked after compared with the national average last year of 4%. This represents a fourteen-fold increase in adoptions over 1998-9, our first year as a unitary authority, which is unlikely to be repeated but is the result of major efforts by our officers to give proper priority, in line with Government guidance, to an area quite seriously neglected by the former County Council. Our adoption services were inspected by the Social Services Inspectorate earlier this year and their report, which will come to the Social Services Committee later this year, acknowledges the major steps taken by this Council since it became responsible for them.”

113. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 10

- (1) Councillor Borgars asked the Lead Member for Environment and Consumer Affairs:

Reading Cemetery – Grass Cutting and Other Maintenance

“Following the excellent growing weather during 1999, what plans are there for grass cutting and other maintenance in Reading Cemetery, between London Road and Wokingham Road, in 2000?”

REPLY by Councillor Morris (Lead Member for Environment and Consumer Affairs):

“A new maintenance regime has now been put in place for the old cemetery. Following a very thorough recent litter pick, the cemetery will now be litter-picked once a fortnight. Six new town-centre style bins are on order, and these will also be emptied fortnightly. One of these bins will be in the old chapel area which will itself be cleared of unsightly and environmentally low-grade undergrowth.

Three new benches have been ordered for people visiting the cemetery, and these will be positioned on new hard standing areas.

There will be four main grass cuts this year, between March and November, and seventeen cuts of paths and verges. This follows recent work on some undergrowth clearing and tree surgery across the cemetery.

Most encouragingly the Newtown Globe Group and local historian Liz Tait have both indicated their willingness to get involved in the management of the cemetery, so that its environmental value can be sustained and its rich heritage communicated more widely. My hope is that these changes in management, prompted by the extraordinary level of response to last years debate on the cemetery, will create a proper balance between the needs of bereaved families and the people of Reading’s wishes to maintain this green island.”

- (2) Councillor Pugh asked one of the Council’s representatives on the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority:

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Fire Authority Meetings

“Who are the Council’s representatives on the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority?”

What has been their attendance record over the past twelve months?”

REPLY by Councillor Morris (one of the Council’s representatives on the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority):

“The Council makes four appointments to the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority on an annual basis. From May 1999 to present the Councillor representatives are Councillors Day, Morris, J Orton and Peak. Councillor Morris is leader of the Labour Group on the Authority.

Attendance at meetings in the last year is as follows:

Meeting Date	Cllr Day	Cllr Morris	Cllr J Orton	Cllr Peak
July 1999	Present	Present	Not present	Present
Sept 1999	Not present	Not present	Not present	Not present
Dec 1999	Not present	Present	Not present	Not present
Mar 2000	Present	Present	Present	Present

The July meeting coincided with a scrutiny panel meeting that Councillor Orton was chairing; the September meeting coincided with a Planning Committee meeting which required the attendance of Councillors Peak and Orton; Councillor Peak was ill and Councillor Orton was at a meeting of scrutiny panel chairs for the December meeting.

In addition to the full meetings of the Authority, Reading Councillors have attended 14 other meetings on Fire Authority business over the municipal year so far.”

- (3) Councillor Pugh asked the Chairman of Reading Buses:

Reading Buses Board Meetings

“Can you give me details of the attendance record of Mr Andrew Tattersall at meetings of the Board of Reading Buses over the last twelve months?”

REPLY by Councillor Page (Chairman of Reading Buses):

“There have been eight Reading Buses board meetings in the last twelve months (19 March, 13 April, 17 June, 9 September, 4 November and 16 December 1999, and 1 February and 9 March 2000). Andrew Tattersall has attended four of these (on 19 March, 17 June and 4 November 1999, and 9 March 2000).”

- (4) Councillor Green asked the Lead Member for Social Services and Health:

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Social Services Billing Arrangements

“Is the Lead Member satisfied that the present arrangements for billing both clients and suppliers are of an acceptable standard?”

REPLY by Councillor Ruhemann (Lead Member for Social Services and Health):

“Reading Social Services currently have 1963 clients who receive a service for which they are charged. It is of great importance from the point of view of each individual client, that billing arrangements are as smooth, clear, accurate and timely as possible. From the Council’s point of view it is equally important that this process is well managed and effective, as client income is a significant part of the directorate’s gross budget. From time to time there are concerns from clients or their relatives about bills that are inaccurate but these are relatively few in number. These are taken very seriously, as we are very well aware of the distress and upset that can be caused by any mistakes in the billing process. Obviously if Councillor Green or any other member becomes aware of such a concern they should raise it immediately with officers or with myself.

In respect of billing for suppliers of service we currently have in the order of 300 suppliers, primarily of residential or home care. There were some early inadequacies in the procedure that have been tightened up, particularly in regard to ensuring that payments are authorised by a Manager of appropriate seniority. A consequence of this has been that for a period there was some delay in turning payments around. This has now been addressed and I am confident that improvements to the authorisation and administrative processes will bring about continuing improvement in payment time as well as better control of public monies.”

- (5) Councillor Fenwick asked the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee:

Peer Review of Council Services - IDeA

“Would the Chair please indicate what plans he has to involve the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) in carrying out a peer review of any of the Council’s services?”

REPLY by Councillor Sutton (Chair of Policy and Resources Committee):

“There are no immediate plans to invite a peer review team to RBC. Two senior managers are members of review teams and part of their remit in taking part in reviews at other authorities is fact finding about the benefits of this process in order that this can be considered in the future.”

- (6) Councillor Hartley asked the Leader of the Council:

“Reading Borough Council has this year worked hard to hold down its Council Tax increase to the government’s planning guideline of four and a half per

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cent. Could the Leader of the Council tell me how this compares with the Council Tax increases in Reading's neighbouring authorities?"

REPLY by Councillor Sutton (Leader of the Council):

"Councillor Hartley is right to draw attention to the hard work (and hard decisions) which enabled Reading Borough Council to keep its Council Tax level down to four and a half per cent next year. The figures he asks for are as follows: average increase in West Berkshire 6.7%; average increase in Wokingham 8.25%. Within these two figures there are, however, considerable variations on account of the different parish Council precepts. Councillor Hartley will be aware, for example, of the 27% increase in the precept levied by Woodley Town Council, which means that Band D Council Tax payers in Woodley will next year be paying £13.90 a year more than Band D payers in Reading. (The overall increase in Woodley is 9.5%.) It seems to me pretty clear which of the local authorities around here is offering Best Value."

(NB Prior to consideration of the following item the motion set out below was moved by Councillor Sutton and seconded by Councillor Lovelock and CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY:

"That, pursuant to Standing Order 26, Standing Orders be suspended to enable the Council to receive a presentation by the Head of Corporate Policy on this matter.")

114. BEST VALUE PRESENTATION

Further to Minute 105(2) of the meeting of Council held on 22 February 2000, the Head of Corporate Policy gave a presentation outlining the background to the introduction of Best Value at Reading Borough Council. She outlined the legislative background to Best Value and set out the preparatory work which had been undertaken to set the corporate framework for its introduction. Particular reference was made to the five year rolling programme of reviews and the Best Value Performance Plan. (The Best Value Performance Plan also appeared on the Council agenda – see Minute 115 below.)

Council was informed of the work that would be undertaken during 2000/01 when there would be 26 Best Value reviews. The reviews would be conducted following guidelines set out in the Best Value Toolkit, the components of each review being the 4 Cs - Challenge, Consult, Compare and Compete. Reference was made to the external checks which would be carried out on Best Value reviews by the Best Value Inspectorate and on the Best Value Performance Plan by the External Auditors.

The role of Members relating to Best Value reviews was explained. The distinction between this programme of reviews which, it was planned, would be seen as part of the performance management responsibilities of service managers and Lead Members, and the developing work programmes of the Scrutiny Panels was made.

A briefing pack on Best Value would be produced and sent to Members in the near future.

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115. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN

Further to Minute 105 of the meeting of Council held on 22 February 2000 the Head of Corporate Policy submitted a report on the final draft of the Council's Best Value Performance Plan for 2000/01. The Plan had been printed as a separate document and had been circulated with the Council agenda.

The Plan was set out in two parts: Part One explained the Council's vision for Reading, the Council's main achievements in the past year and its plans for improving public services in the years to come. It also explained changes that were happening within the organisation of the Council. In Part Two of the Plan there was a detailed range of information that showed how every Council service had performed over the previous year and explained the Council's future priorities and targets.

The Plan would be published by 31 March 2000 and would be available for viewing on the Council's website and distributed to key organisations, and at public libraries.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Sutton and seconded by Councillor Lovelock and CARRIED:

Resolved –

(1)	That the final draft of the Best Value Performance Plan for 2000/01 be approved.
(2)	That the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader be authorised to approve any final minor amendments to the Performance Plan prior to publication on 31 March 2000.

116. READING CULTURAL STRATEGY

The Director of Arts and Leisure submitted a report which explained the need and proposed process for creating a Cultural Strategy for Reading.

The paper 'Towards a Reading Cultural Strategy' was attached at Appendix A to the report. It stressed the key roles that culture could and should play in meeting fundamental strategic aims such as improving economic sustainability, life-long learning, social inclusion, improved health, and a high quality of life for local people.

The paper suggested a number of aims and proposed the following definitions and approaches for the Strategy, as follows:

- 'Culture' would have a wide definition, including the Arts, Sports, Libraries, Museums, Childrens Play, Parks, Tourism, Recreation etc.
- It would be a corporate strategy for the Authority, not a departmental plan for Arts & Leisure.

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- The Strategy would deal with Reading in terms of its wider ‘travel to work and visit’ boundary rather than as a Borough – in other words addressing the needs of people who look to and use Reading as a regional as well as local centre.
- It would be a Strategy which aimed to inform all cultural development in Reading, not just that run by Reading Borough Council.
- The Strategy would be thematic rather than service led, dealing with cultural activity in the context of key ‘cross cutting’ issues.
- The Strategy would aim to establish the agenda in the next 5 years for cultural activity in Reading, defining aims, priorities, and responsibilities.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Hartley and seconded by Councillor Lockey and CARRIED:

Resolved –

That the Reading Cultural Strategy set out in Appendix A to the report be approved and that it be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders, for adoption in Spring 2001.

117. LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL – TOWN CLEANLINESS SCRUTINY – FINAL REPORT

Further to Minute 78 of the Council meeting held on 21 December 2000, Councillor Fenwick, Chair of the Leisure and Environmental Services Scrutiny Panel, introduced the final report of the Panel on its first scrutiny review, into town cleansing, which was attached at Appendix A to the covering report. The recommendations of the Panel were set out in paragraph 4 of the covering report and paragraph 7 of the attached report.

Councillor Morris, Lead Member for Environment and Consumer Affairs, responded to Councillor Fenwick in accordance with Standing Order 25. He explained that the recommendations of the Panel would be considered by a future meeting of the Executive Board with a report back to Council, possibly in April or June 2000. He would advise Councillor Fenwick, in advance, when the final report would be submitted to Council.

Resolved –

That the final report of the Leisure and Environmental Services Scrutiny Panel on its scrutiny review into town cleanliness be considered in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 25.

118. AGENDA 21 AND SUSTAINABILITY SCRUTINY PANEL – REVIEW OF SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING – FINAL REPORT

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Councillor White, Chair of the Agenda 21 and Sustainability Scrutiny Panel, introduced the final report of the Panel on its scrutiny review of sustainable purchasing. It contained recommendations for both immediate and longer-term action to help make the Council's purchasing more sustainable, which were set out in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.6 of the report

Councillor Morris, Lead Member for Environment and Consumer Affairs, responded to Councillor White in accordance with Standing Order 25. He explained that the recommendations of the Panel, which were mostly internal matters, would be considered by a future meeting of the Executive Board and then by the Policy and Implementation Committee and/or Council. He would work with Councillor Page (Lead Member for Corporate Services) and Councillor Sohpal (Chair of the Personnel Panel) as some of the recommendations of the Panel fell within their areas of responsibility.

Resolved –

That the final report of the Agenda 21 and Sustainability Scrutiny Panel on its scrutiny review of sustainable purchasing be considered in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 25.

119. HOUSING, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES PANEL – EARLY YEARS EDUCATION – FINAL REPORT

Councillor J Orton, Chair of the Housing, Education and Social Services Panel, introduced the final report of the Panel on its scrutiny review of early years education. The recommendations of the Panel were set out in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.8, and again in paragraphs 9.1 to 9.8 of the report.

Councillor Lovelock, Lead Member for Education, responded to Councillor J Orton in accordance with Standing Order 25. She explained that the recommendations contained in the final report would need to be discussed in depth with members of the Early Years Partnership, and this would determine the timescale for reporting back to Council.

Resolved –

That the final report of the Housing, Education and Social Services Panel on its scrutiny review of early years education be considered in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 25.

120. EDUCATION ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Director of Education and Community Services submitted a report recommending that the Council approve the Education Asset Management Plan (AMP), which was attached at Appendix A to the report.

The report explained that all Local Education Authorities (LEAs) must submit their AMP to the DfEE by 31 March 2000. The report detailed the consultation process that had been followed in preparation of the AMP.

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The report explained that the AMP consisted of five main parts, namely:

- Part 1 A general introduction, explaining the background and approach which the authority had taken to developing the Plan.
- Part 2 Summarised the data which was currently held on school assets, notably in terms of building capacity, pupil numbers, condition, suitability and sufficiency of provision.
- Part 3 Sets out the authority's approach to target setting in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of use of building stock.
- Part 4 A revised version of the local policy statement, setting out the timescales for development, roles and responsibilities for the authority.
- Part 5 Is particular to each school, setting out details of the condition, suitability and security surveys, the accommodation schedule and a proposed 5 year maintenance plan.

The key element in the Plan was the individual school action plan, set out in Schedules 2.2 and 2.3 of the AMP. The report explained that under the scheme, individual Governing Bodies would be asked to set down their priorities derived from the data presented, and in particular the proposed 5 year maintenance plan. The document would also form the basis for bidding directly for central capital funding held by the Council or prioritising Council bids for funding from other sources.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Lovelock and seconded by Councillor P Jones and CARRIED:

Resolved –

(1)	That the Education Asset Management Plan attached at Appendix A to the report be approved;
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(2)	That the Director of Education & Community Services be authorised to submit Reading's Education Asset Management Plan to the Department for Education and Employment by 31 March 2000.
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121. FUNDING SCHEME FOR DELEGATION TO SCHOOLS 2000/2001

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The Director of Education and Community Services submitted a report which outlined changes to the Scheme for Delegation to Schools for 2000/2001.

The report explained that under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 Local Education Authorities were obliged to consult with schools on an annual basis with regard to the overall scheme of delegation of funding, and the formulae which were used as part of the Scheme. No changes were proposed to the Reading Scheme for 2000/2001, but a number of changes had been made to the delegations and funding formulae. A schedule setting out the new areas proposed for delegation, and the delegation formula to be used, was attached as an Appendix to the report.

The report gave details of the consultation process that had been followed, as reported via the Council's Decision Book on 19 October 1999. It was noted that discussions about the formula had also taken place at four meetings of the Fair Funding Working Party.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Lovelock and seconded by Councillor P Jones and CARRIED:

Resolved –

That the changes to the funding formula within the Scheme of Delegation to Schools, as attached as an Appendix to the report, be approved.

122. HIGHDOWN SWIMMING POOL

The Director of Education and Community Services submitted a report that recommended a programme of improvements to Highdown Swimming Pool.

The report explained that on 14 March 2000 the Council's Executive Board had considered the outcome of a structural survey of the swimming pool and associated building at Highdown School. This had identified a range of possible options, as follows:

Option	Total cost £000	Available Revenue Budgets £000	Total Shortfall £000
(1) Demolish Pool Hall	35		35
(2) Essential Repairs	149	18	131
(3) Essential and Desirable Repairs	215.8	23	192.8
(4) Essential and Desirable Repairs, plus Redecoration	223.3	29.5	193.8

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The Executive Board had supported Option 4, to carry out essential and desirable work to Highdown pool to ensure its longer term viability. A detailed schedule of the work involved in each option was set out in an Appendix to the report.

The report stated that although some funding had already been identified for Highdown Swimming Pool from both Education and Arts and Leisure budgets for 1999/2000, there remained a significant shortfall that would need to be met. Therefore the net costs of either Option 2 or Option 4 would have to be set as an approved scheme within the uncommitted Capital programme, which was due to be considered in April 2000.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Lovelock and seconded by Councillor S Stainthorp and CARRIED:

Resolved –

- (1) That Option 4 (Essential and Desirable Repairs, plus Redecoration) be implemented as outlined in paragraph 3.2 of the report;
- (2) The net cost be funded as a priority Capital Scheme when the uncommitted Capital Schemes were considered later in the year.

123. NEW COUNCIL STRUCTURES

Pursuant to Notice, it was moved by Councillor Fenwick and seconded by Councillor Canning:

“Council expresses its concern at the way in which the new Council structures are operating. In particular, it is not satisfied that important matters of public concern are sufficiently subject to debate in an open forum. It believes, therefore, that, far from bringing local government closer to the people, the new structures have placed a barrier between the Executive, the rest of the Council and the public.

Council therefore requests the Chief Executive to bring forward proposals to provide opportunities for regular questioning of the Leader and Lead Members by other members of the Council, in public, in a more detailed and less formal way than is at present available at Council or in the formal scrutiny process.”

The following amendment to the motion, moved by Councillor Sutton and seconded by Councillor Lovelock was CARRIED:

“Delete all words after ‘structures’ and insert the following:

“and the opportunities which they present are being neglected by the opposition parties on the Council. Both opposition parties have signally failed to use the more frequent Council and Policy & Implementation Committee meetings (with more and wider opportunities to ask questions); questioning opportunities at other meetings; the Decision Book process; and the public consultation process, to present real challenges or tests to the Administration. The absence of any proper opposition during the budget-setting process was especially lamentable. Council believes that this failure

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by the Opposition is bad for local democracy and calls upon the opposition parties to work harder to provide real alternatives and real criticism of the work of the Administration.”

The substantive motion was then put to the vote and CARRIED, as follows:

Resolved -

Council expresses its concern at the way in which the new Council structures and the opportunities which they present are being neglected by the opposition parties on the Council. Both opposition parties have signally failed to use the more frequent Council and Policy & Implementation Committee meetings (with more and wider opportunities to ask questions); questioning opportunities at other meetings; the Decision Book process; and the public consultation process, to present real challenges or tests to the Administration. The absence of any proper opposition during the budget-setting process was especially lamentable. Council believes that this failure by the Opposition is bad for local democracy and calls upon the opposition parties to work harder to provide real alternatives and real criticism of the work of the Administration.

(The meeting closed at 9.30pm).