

**HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE**  
**16 NOVEMBER 2016**

**Present:** Councillor James (Chair);  
Councillors David Absolom, Debs Absolom, Davies (items 16 to 23 only), Kelly Edwards, Gittings, McDonald, McGonigle, Steele, Tickner and Terry.

**Apologies:** Councillors Dennis, Grashoff and Rose Williams.

**14. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of 5 July 2016 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**15. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES**

The Minutes of the following meetings were submitted:

- Community Safety Partnership - 22 September 2016.

**Resolved - That the Minutes be received.**

**16. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS**

A Question on the following matter was submitted, and answered by the Lead Councillor:

<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Subject</b>
Councillor McGonigle	Homelessness of Children and Teenagers

(The full text of the question and reply was made available on the Reading Borough Council website.)

**17. RIVERMEAD: SERVICE AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

Paul Shearman, GLL Reading Partnership Manager, and Jamie Coleshill, GLL Regional Director, gave a presentation on the performance on Rivermead Leisure Complex in 2016. Paul explained that GLL was a charitable social enterprise, which operated over 250 leisure centres, libraries, children's centres and adventure playgrounds. The contract for Rivermead started in 2006 and would run until 2022.

The presentation gave details of the improvements made over the past year. The new gym and changing rooms had opened in March, and refurbishments to the Thames Suite and reception area had been completed in April. The relocation of the maples day care centre to Rivermead would be completed in the next few days. Paul reported that in the annual user survey 100% of responses had rated the centre overall as good or excellent.

Paul talked about the projects and development opportunities in 2017, which included working on the new demountable swimming pool facility, further improvements to the building frontage and additional landscaping work, and

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continued work with Age UK (Berkshire) and the Council's health and exercise referral team.

**Resolved - That GLL be thanked for their presentation.**

**18. CULTURAL HERITAGE UPDATE**

Further to Minute 6 of the meeting held on 5 July 2016, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report updating the Committee on a range of culture and heritage projects and initiatives underway in Reading as Reading's Year of Culture 2016 entered its final two months, culminating in 'Light Up Reading' through December and the Christmas Pantomime - Snow White. The report demonstrated that the Year of Culture was not an end in itself but an initial stage in a sustained programme to raise Reading's profile and reputation and to deliver the aspiration of the Culture and Heritage Strategy that 'By 2030, Reading will be recognised as a centre of creativity with a reputation for cultural and heritage excellence at a regional, national and international level with increased engagement across the town.'

In summary, the report stated that to date, Reading Year of Culture 2016 had: witnessed hundreds of arts and cultural events as part of the programme; new pillar events in every month for the Reading cultural calendar; the engagement of national arts organisations in Reading; developed new relationships between artists, arts groups, Reading businesses and stakeholders; unlocked new funding for the arts in Reading and new platforms and venues for artistic output in the town and had increased the quantity and ambition of artistic output. The report also gave details of some of the funded projects that had delivery timescales over the next few years.

Information regarding the Snow White pantomime which would be performed at the Hexagon Theatre from 10 December 2016 to 8 January 2017 was attached to the report at Appendix 1. Attached to the report at Appendix 2 was a press release regarding the Artangel exhibition at Reading Prison, Appendix 3 was an update on the Reading Abbey Revealed (RAR) project, and Appendix 4 provided details of expanding cultural activities in Reading's libraries.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the wide range of culture and heritage projects and initiatives being delivered and developed as set out in section 4.1, acknowledging that this was only a sub-set of the wide-ranging activities of many organisations in the town, be noted;
- (2) That the on-going direction of travel as set out in section 4.2 of the report, including establishing a legacy programme from the Year of Culture 2016, be welcomed and endorsed.

**19. WASTE MINIMISATION STRATEGY UPDATE**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that provided an update on the progress achieved in the first half of the second year of the Waste Minimisation Strategy 2015-2020 Action Plan. The Council had adopted the

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Waste Minimisation Strategy 2015 - 2020 in March 2015 demonstrating its commitment to promoting waste minimisation through reuse, recycling and composting, to minimise disposal and to achieving the EU Directive target recycling rate of 50% by 2020. Reading currently sent 22.73% of its municipal waste to landfill with 77.12% being recycled, composted or sent for Energy from Waste. The current recycling rate for Reading was 35.16% compared to the national rate of 44%. The updated Action Plan was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report stated that the re3 Joint Waste Disposal Board had adopted a new strategy in 2016/17 in response to changes in government funding as a result of the central government austerity programme and the requirement of the Revised EU Waste Framework Directive (2008) which set the 50% target for reuse and recycling to be reached by 2020. In future the RBC Waste Minimisation Strategy and the re3 strategy would be more closely aligned, using a common format and reporting on the targets set by the re3 strategy. Both organisations and re3 partners were working towards the same goals, to save money and to reach the 50% recycling target by 2020.

The report stated that the implementation of the strategy action plan delivered the four objectives of the Waste Minimisation Strategy, which were: to increase recycling and re-use rates; to minimise the amount of waste sent to landfill, to increase understanding and engagement in waste and recycling for the local community and key stakeholders; and to ensure effective, efficient, value for money service delivery. The report detailed the progress that had been made against the targets set by the re3 strategy.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the progress to date of the Waste Minimisation Strategy Action Plan be noted;**
- (2) That the re3 and RBC Waste Minimisation Strategies be aligned and the second annual progress report be submitted to the Committee in March 2017;**
- (3) That the Head of Transport and Streetcare, in consultation with the Lead Councillor, be delegated authority to make amendments to the action plan as required.**

**20. PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR CHARTER - UPDATE ON PROGRESS**

Further to Minute 14 of the meeting held on 18 November 2015, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which provided an update on the progress made in delivering the Private Rented Sector (PRS) Charter action points. The PRS Charter aimed to build a common understanding of values, standards and requirements for the private rented sector and it further demonstrated the Council's and partners' commitment to improving the sector. The PRS Charter was developed around 'providing a home for those most in need', as outlined in the Council's Corporate Plan 2015-2018.

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The report set out a table which showed progress against the action points in the Charter. The most significant action related to the work with Letting and Managing Agents, which had resulted in all letting agents registered within the Borough being members of a redress scheme and no fixed penalty fines had been issued. The local list of agents was constantly being reviewed and monitored to ensure continued compliance. Under Chapter 3, Part 3 of the Consumer Rights Act 2015 it was a legal requirement for all letting agents in England and Wales to publicise details of their relevant fees; state whether or not they were a member of a client money protection scheme; and give details of which redress scheme they had joined. The penalty for breaching this legislation was a fine of up to £5,000 for each offence. Officers had conducted 65 initial inspections of letting agents regarding their legal obligations in all aspects of their business but primarily on their obligations under the Consumer Rights Act 2015. 26 of the letting agents visited were fully compliant and 36 brought about compliance within the 28 day period afforded to them following initial inspection. Two letting agents more recently visited had been given the 28 days to bring about compliance and would be re-visited. One agent ignored warnings and was therefore issued a monetary penalty for the maximum £5,000. The agent appealed to the First Tier (Property) Tribunal. The Tribunal decision found in the Council's favour and the £5,000 monetary penalty was upheld.

The report also set out the proposed work for the next 12 months.

**Resolved - That the progress made against the action of the Private Rented Sector Charter and the next steps outlined in the report be noted.**

## **21. HOUSING REGISTER - RE-REGISTRATION**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report setting out the results of the Council's Housing Register re-registration exercise. The Council had conducted a wholesale re-registration exercise for applicants on the Housing Register in preparation for the introduction of a new housing allocations IT system.

The report stated that there were a total of 5,207 households on the Housing Register as at the end of September 2016 and 2,878 of those remained in housing need. 1,213 of these were in Bands A to D and 385 of these were homeless applicants. Table 1 in the report showed a breakdown of the Housing Register by priority band. The re-registration process had resulted in a significant reduction in the number of households on the Council's Housing Register. Despite the drop in numbers, there remained a shortage of affordable housing in Reading. Table 2 in the report showed the change in registered applicants by band following the re-registration exercise. The reduction in numbers registered by priority banding was mostly (4,601 or 91%) from the lowest band E and the 'no priority' category.

The report stated that following the implementation of the new IT system the Housing Service planned to carry out a full re-registration of the Housing Register on an annual basis.

**Resolved - That the results of the housing re-registration exercise be noted.**

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**22. HOMELESSNESS: UPDATE ON DEMAND PRESSURES AND ACTIONS TO MITIGATE**

Further to Minute 13 of the meeting held on 15 November 2015, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report updating the Committee on the pressures facing the local housing authority and approaches being taken to help those with housing needs.

The report set out the Council's current approach to managing the pressure of increasing homelessness and managing the use of bed and breakfast use. The report detailed some of the work that had taken place, which included: the development of an implementation plan to ensure the delivery of the Council's Homeless Strategy; the Council's Housing Advice Team had taken an active approach to preventing homelessness; increasing the supply of temporary accommodation; providing additional advice and support to landlords; the launch of the Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS); a private sector offer to homeless households; a reduction in the average nightly cost of bed and breakfast accommodation; and housing register prioritisation.

The report also set out the future planned action, which included: a mobility scheme, to support those who wished to move out of the area; building new Council homes; developing new temporary accommodation; the establishment of Homes for Reading Ltd, which would increase the supply of quality rented accommodation in Reading; undertaking research to better understand the motivation and requirements of landlords; the promotion of the PGS offer; and making the best use of the Council's housing stock.

**Resolved - That the progress to date to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation and increase access to affordable accommodation and the further action planned, be noted.**

**23. MEETING HOUSING NEED FOR HOUSEHOLDS AFFECTED BY THE BENEFIT CAP**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which informed the Committee of the impact of the further reduction of the benefit cap on households in Reading and the options for responding to the changes and helping those households that would be affected.

The report stated that in 2013 the Government had introduced a cap to the amount of benefits paid to non-working households. The Government had subsequently announced a further cut in the overall benefits for non-working households in the 2015 summer budget, introduced by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. This was due to come into effect in Reading in November 2016.

The report stated that the added reduction to benefits would increase significantly the number of non-working families who would be affected by the cap. In Reading current estimates placed the number at 515 households, approximately 140 of which were likely to be Council tenants; 100 tenants of Registered Providers; and 250 were living in the private sector.

The report explained that the Council's housing teams had undertaken a targeted approach to supporting households affected by the cap who were living in both social and private tenancies, in order to prevent homelessness. Households had been

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supported to: understand whether any exemptions applied to their circumstances (for example by claiming disability benefits); enter into more than 16 hours employment per week; or move to alternative cheaper accommodation. Whilst in the main, households had been prevented from becoming homeless, unfortunately there were a small number of households affected by the original cap who were unable to resolve their situation and in some circumstances had to be provided with emergency accommodation by the Local Authority. In the future a case management approach would be taken to support affected households. Two Benefit Cap Coordinators and a Senior Welfare Reform Officer had been employed in the housing department through funding from the DWP to ensure that the impact of the cap was assessed and that relevant appropriate support was accessed for these households. The housing department was working across all relevant Council teams to ensure a collaborative approach was taken by officers in Children's and Adult Services and that there was a joint understanding of the options available to households. Benefit Cap Coordinators would be co-located between Housing and the Job Centre Reading to ensure that the most effective approach was taken.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the impact of the further reduction of the benefit cap on the affordability of accommodation for Reading residents, be noted;**
- (2) That the proposed approach and options for supporting households impacted by the benefit cap, be noted.**

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 8.10pm).