

**READING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**POLICY COMMITTEE**

**11 JUNE 2018**

**QUESTION NO. 1**

John Hoggett to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

**Public Health Grants**

The budget lines in the public health report presented to this committee on 9th April show a list of third sector organisations whose grants are being cut. However it is not clear in the report who will receive the re-allocated money. For example:

3.2 - social prescribing including Making Every Contact Count	£1,667
14.1 - social isolation (Mental Health)	£63,333
Volunteer recruitment for suicide prevention	£2,025

(all in the Non-Mandated Public Health category, Reading contract arrangement)

Will the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport provide the names of any third party organisations who are due to receive the funds?

If he is unable to do so, will he provide details of the bidding process to ensure that the money is spent in order to maximise positive outcomes for the people of Reading?

**REPLY** by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

The services listed as 3.2 and 14.1 in the report cited are references to services included in the Council's Narrowing the Gap II commissioning framework. This framework and the bidding process used to allocate funds under the framework were described in a report brought to this Committee on 30 October 2017.

Narrowing the Gap II was developed following consultation with voluntary and community organisations from August to October last year, with the aim of prioritising the Council's community investment on services likely to make the greatest contribution to achievement of the Council's strategic aims from 2018 onwards. The consultation included the development of questions to be put to bidders, and how to score responses in a fair and transparent way.

New Narrowing the Gap II contracts commenced on 1 June 2018, and the details of those contracts were still under discussion when papers were published for the April Policy Committee. It was not appropriate to name the successful bidders at that stage. However, I can now confirm that Service 3.2 (social prescribing including Making Every Contact Count) will be delivered by Age UK Berkshire and

Reading Voluntary Action. £1,667 is the 2018-19 contribution to this contract from Public Health Grant and the contract is worth £66,000 p.a. in full. Service 14.1 (peer support and reducing social isolation for adults who have suffered mental ill health) will be delivered by Together for Mental Wellbeing (Berkshire West Your Way). £63,333 is the 2018-19 contribution to this contract from Public Health Grant and the contract is worth £161,000 p.a. in full.

Funding of £2,025 for volunteer recruitment for suicide prevention in 2018-19 has been awarded outside of the Narrowing the Gap process as this is a service provided uniquely by the Samaritans (Reading branch). An identical contract was awarded to the same organisation in 2017-18.

It should be noted that the 15 lines in Appendix 1 to the April Public Health Budget report which begin with the prefix 'NTG' are references to contracts awarded under the Council's first Narrowing the Gap framework. All of those contracts came to an end on 31 May 2018 and so every NTG budget line is lower in 2018-19 than in the previous financial year when expenditure was made against these contracts for a full 12 months. The third sector organisations which held Narrowing the Gap contracts have in many cases secured Narrowing the Gap II contracts which replace their funding, at least in part.

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### QUESTION NO. 2

Roger Lightfoot to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

#### Termination of GLL contract

What termination agreements, financial or otherwise, have been come to as a consequence of the early termination of RBC's contract with GLL for running Rivermead Leisure Centre, and with whom?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you for your question Mr. Lightfoot. Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) have voluntarily and helpfully agreed to an early termination of their existing contract in order to help expedite the delivery of new facilities following the Council's procurement of a new leisure operator, as well as to enable unified and seamless management across all of the Council's leisure centres. The details of the agreement between the Council and GLL are confidential but are based on the well-established principle that GLL are left no worse (or better) off than if they had seen their existing contract through to its end date of December 2022.

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### QUESTION NO. 3

Anne Green Jessel to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

#### Consultation on Leisure Provider contract

In order to ensure that Reading Borough Council's planned new contract for management of sports and leisure centres meets the needs of centre users, will the Council take steps to consult sports and swimming clubs and other user groups about the terms of the tender before it is issued?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you for your question. The procurement process for a new operator will involve a number of stages including outline solutions, detailed solutions and then competitive dialogue with short-listed bidders to secure the best possible affordable outcome. The specification therefore sets minimum requirements and standards (in line with Sport England's best practice procurement toolkit) but affords bidders some flexibility to develop bespoke proposals. It is absolutely the intention to consult with our local clubs and user groups in order to ensure that bidders are aware of and can consider their aspirations in developing their detailed bids. Obviously in evaluating proposals the Council will be looking for the highest quality facilities and services at an affordable cost.

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### QUESTION NO. 4

Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

#### Leisure Facilities

What are the currently expected end-of-life dates for the Meadway Sports Centre, South Reading Leisure Centre, and the Palmer Park Sports Centre? What long-term plans does the Council have to refurbish these facilities or build replacements for them? Will the Council give a pledge not to close any of these facilities before adequate new facilities have been opened?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you for your question Mr Burt. There is no current 'end of life date' for the facilities you mention. The Council continues to invest in these facilities and regularly carries out condition surveys to prioritise this investment. As you are aware the Council has commenced a procurement process to secure a new leisure operator to develop new and manage existing leisure facilities, including Meadway, South Reading and Palmer Park. Proposals to invest in retained facilities are an explicit requirement in the procurement process and bidders will need to set out their plans for doing so. To quote from a previous report to this Committee:

'Specific proposals include: a new competition standard pool and related indoor leisure provision, including sports hall, to replace Central Pool; a new 'neighbourhood' pool at Palmer Park to replace Arthur Hill Pool; and investment in other retained facilities (Meadway Leisure Centre and Palmer Park Stadium).'

This was prior to South Reading Leisure Centre coming back under the Council's management and subsequently being incorporated in the leisure procurement but I can confirm that the requirement to invest in retained facilities also applies.

The Council's position on this could not be clearer.

QUESTION NO. 5

Colin Lee to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation:

Support for Local Artists And Musicians

Can the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation kindly detail her endeavours to provide support for local artists and musicians in the current fiscal year; particularly detailing the objectives she has set for this vibrant sector of the community within Council policy and the budgets she has allocated to meet these goals?

REPLY by Councillor Hacker (Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation):

Thank you for your question Mr Lee. And whilst I find your focus on 'the current fiscal year' somewhat limiting in the context of a significant local cultural renaissance over the last few years, I would fully endorse your description of the sector as vibrant. Fortunately, and healthily, this vibrancy is not dependent on the Council financially or otherwise, although I would argue that the Council has a key facilitation and support role. In this regard my personal endeavours include chairing the Cultural Partnership, the Cultural Education Partnership and the Arts & Heritage Forum.

All of these epitomise the importance of networks and collaboration as a platform to support and develop local cultural organisations - evidence of success includes:

- Significantly increased funding from Arts Council England into local organisations;
- From April this year this includes three National Portfolio Organisations funded for 4 years (Reading and MERL museums, Readipop and CultureMix) - previously Reading had none;
- Partnership investment from Artsworld to fund local organisations to deliver cultural engagement and activities for young people;
- 'Reading, a Place of Culture' our successful 'Great Place Scheme' that will see over half a million invested in Reading's cultural sector over the next 3 years.

All of this on top of the continued 'Reading Arts' offer at the Hexagon and South Street Arts Centre (directly funded and provided by the Council) and a host of independent organisations and programmes such as Reading Fringe Festival and the internationally renowned Reading Festival.

I could go on but with limited time I would finally just like to mention that the Abbey Ruins will be re-opening this week on Saturday 16th June following a major conservation project funded by the Council and Heritage Lottery Fund to the tune of over £3m. Not only will this enable the public to once again access an iconic heritage site, it will also provide a venue and platform for a range of cultural organisations to respond to and perform in.

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### QUESTION NO. 6

Colin Lee to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport:

#### Sporting and Leisure Facilities

Can the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport kindly detail his vision for sustainable and inclusive sporting and leisure facilities within Reading and the short-term objectives he has established as Council policy alongside the funding streams agreed to ensure that there is a realistic prospect of success?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing & Sport):

Thank you for your question Mr. Lee. Firstly, I am delighted that we have aligned sport with health and well-being in my portfolio as Lead Councillor. As you may be aware, in addition to the more obvious link between sport and tackling obesity, Public Health England have identified that regular physical activity can help prevent and manage over 20 chronic conditions and diseases - in fact, it's often said that if physical activity was a drug it would be classed as a 'wonder drug'. In this respect my vision is for a Reading with high quality indoor and outdoor leisure facilities which help to drive up participation in sports and physical activity across all of the town's communities, significantly improving well-being and reducing health inequalities.

Fortunately, with thanks to Councillors Sarah Hacker and Paul Gittings, Reading has very ambitious and exciting plans for our sports and leisure facilities. As previously reported to this Committee, the Council has committed to significantly upgrade the quality of its leisure facilities, including replacement facilities for Central and Arthur Hill Pools which were in very poor condition. To achieve this we have already commenced a procurement process for a leisure operator who will invest in delivering and then managing new and upgraded facilities through a design, build, operate and maintain (DBOM) contract. Unsurprisingly, my key initial objective is therefore to ensure that this complex but fully resourced procurement process is seen through to a successful conclusion.

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### QUESTION NO. 7

Colin Lee to ask the Leader of the Council:

#### Accounts

Can the Leader of the Council kindly explain why it is not Council's practice to account for internal time spent on the accounts (I presume this applies to all major projects and not just the accounts); particularly when you could not sign off the 2016/17 accounts in a timely matter and that this fiasco required the appointment of additional staff including an interim Director of Finance - surely it should be a matter of policy that the public are given the full facts?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

The internal Finance Function is required to undertake a number of specific functions to enable the Council to meet its democratic and legislative responsibilities; e.g. closing the accounts, developing its Medium Term Financial Plan and setting the budget. Additionally, they facilitate service delivery through, for example, the completion of statistical and grant returns, providing financial advice and support to budget managers as well as monitoring budgets etc. The bulk of these tasks, or significant aspects of them, are undertaken by the same staff.

In accordance with accounting convention and the Local Authorities Accounting Code of Practice the costs of undertaking these activities are recharged over prescribed headings at year end. The cost recharged in respect of the closure of accounts, budget setting and servicing the democratic process are charged to the 'Corporate and Democratic Core'. To be clear, this is in line with guidance to all local authorities.

Specific time recording is not undertaken.

Any Agency staff employed during the last year have also been engaged in a range of activities, not just the closure of accounts. Consequently, their costs have been dealt with as part of the Council's overall recharge process.