

**HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 14  
NOVEMBER 2018**

**Present:** Councillor Davies (Chair);

Councillors Emberson (Vice-Chair), Eden, Ennis, Gavin, Grashoff, Hacker, Hoskin, James, McDonald, McGonigle, Rowland, Stanford-Beale and R Williams

**Apologies:** Councillors Manghnani

**8. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE HELD ON 4 JULY 2018**

The Minutes of the meeting of 4 July 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**9. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES**

The Minutes of the following meetings were submitted:

- Community Safety Partnership - 26 April 2018

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

Questions on the following matters were submitted:

| <u>Questioner</u> | <u>Subject</u>         | <u>Reply</u>     |
|-------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| Charlotte Davey   | Neighbourhood Concerns | Councillor James |

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

**11. FOOD SERVICE PLAN 2018/19**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that provided the Committee with an opportunity to review the Council's Food Service Plan 2018/19. The plan set out how the Council undertook the statutory duties to delivery safe food for Reading's residents. The report also set out progress against an action plan agreed with the Food Standards Agency following their audit.

As part of the Framework Agreement, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) carried out an audit of the Council's Food and Safety team in November 2017. As part of the audit, the Council was required to produce an action plan to address areas where improvements could be made. The action plan was an appendix to the Food Service Plan. The Food Service Plan was appended to the report. The report stated that one of the

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recommendations published on the FSA's website arising from their report was that the Food Service Plan should be submitted to the Committee and published on the Council's website.

The Food Service Plan operated on an annual review. This was due to the significant in year variations associated with the churn of food businesses which meant that the risk based inspection program cannot be forecast accurately more than a year in advance. Trends indicated that there was an increasing demand on the Food and Safety Team resulting from: consumer complaints; requests from businesses for advice; and increased food poisoning notifications. Despite this increasing demand and staff shortages in 2017/18 the team delivered 100% of Category A-E food hygiene inspections (916 inspections). The team had also been able to deliver an inspection rate of 89% of all unrated premises (177 inspections) and 100% of those premises failing outside the standard rating scheme (126 inspections).

### **Resolved -**

- (1) That the content of the Food Service Plan and action plan following the FSA Audit be agreed;**
- (2) That the Food Service Plan be reviewed and agreed on an annual basis prior to the start of the subsequent financial year and published on the Council's website.**

## **12. FIRE SAFETY IN TALL BUILDINGS**

Further to Minute 28 of the meeting held on 14 March 2018, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report setting out the Council's response following the Grenfell Tower fire in Kensington on 14 June 2017. This included action taken in relation to the Authority's own housing stock, other corporate buildings and schools, as well as wider work in partnership with the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service in respect of privately owned high rise residential blocks within the Borough boundaries.

The report stated that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) and the six Berkshire councils had been signed, to enable a partnership approach to inspections and enforcement of all high rise residential buildings. As a result of the MOU, a building safety programme had been implemented and joint work commenced in March 2018 between RBFRS and the Council. This work involved joint fire safety inspections of 32 of the most high risk residential buildings over 18 metres. Inspections had been completed by 1 August 2018 and work to meet fire safety standards would be required as necessary. Three high rise residential buildings had been identified with ACM cladding which had failed the required fire safety standards. These buildings had had interim measures installed and were being monitored in accordance with the current Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) guidance. The Council and RBFRS were working with stakeholders of the

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buildings to support plans to remove, and in some cases replace, the cladding. There was regular communication and sharing of information between the Council and RBFRS, plus joint meetings with relevant stakeholders where required.

**Resolved - That the action taken and planned in respect of fire safety in tall buildings, as detailed in the report, be noted.**

### **13. 'READING, PLACE OF CULTURE' (GREAT PLACE SCHEME)**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report updating the Committee on the progress in delivering year 1 activities as part of 'Reading, place of culture' funded through the 'Great Place Scheme'. The Council learned in April 2017 that the bid had been successful (one of only 16 grants awarded across England and the only urban area to receive a grant in the South-east region). The amount of grant awarded had been £558,400 to deliver a range of programmes over three years linked to the objectives of the Great Place Scheme and complementing cultural activities and initiatives already underway in the Borough. The Council received formal 'permission to start' from the funders on the 12 December 2017 and the report summarised progress in delivering the programme against the 'approved purposes' agreed by the funders, these were:

- Strategic partnership building;
- Research and evaluation;
- Cultural outreach and creating a platform for cultural commissioning;
- Reading-on-Thames Festival;
- Economic Development and business engagement.

These strands of the programme were intertwined with many connections between different elements but the above provided a useful framework for tracking and evidencing activities and impacts. A narrative of the successful Great Place Bid was attached to the report at Appendix A and a summary presentation given to funders at a progress meeting in October 2018, which summarised significant progress made in year 1 of the programme, was attached to the report at Appendix B.

The report, in paragraph 4.1, provided an overview against key strands of the programme and highlighted, in particular, how the programme was beginning to address the needs of Reading's more vulnerable communities. The report also, in paragraph 4.2, set out the proposals to further develop the programme of work. The work over the next two years would be increasingly informed by evaluation feedback, strengthened partnership working and a better understanding of local needs and community aspirations.

**Resolved - That the progress made to date on delivering 'Reading, Place of Culture' as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the report be noted and the proposals to**

further develop the programme of work as set out in paragraph 4.2 of the report be endorsed.

#### 14. WINTER PROVISION FOR ROUGH SLEEPERS

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report outlining the ongoing provisions and new interventions under the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) Rough Sleeping Initiative for those sleeping rough in the Reading borough over the cold weather/winter period.

The report stated that Reading Borough Council implemented a humanitarian response under best practice guidance from Homeless Link during times of cold and severe weather nationally recognised as Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) provision. SWEP operated alongside newly commissioned Homelessness Support Services which operated all year round and new Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) interventions which had been commissioned following an award of £316,500 for 2018/19 from the MHCLG and a provisional award of £335,000 for 2019/20 under the same initiative.

The report stated that the Council had recommissioned its Homelessness Support Services from 1 September 2018 with a focus on innovative and emergency responses including: continuation of the rough sleeper outreach service; 10 all-year round emergency fold-out beds for those with or without a local connection for up to 14 days; 8 emergency and assessment bed spaces for up to 28 days; and continued funding of five Housing First placements which provided an unconditional offer of secure tenure and intensive support for complex rough sleepers for whom traditional interventions had been unsuccessful in enabling them to move from the streets. The report also detailed the services that FAITH Christian Group and St Mungo's Rough Sleeping Outreach Service provided.

The report stated that additional interventions to support rough sleepers this winter were as follows:

- A Rough Sleeping Interventions Co-ordinator to facilitate the initiative/interventions and develop a Rough Sleeping Strategy for the borough that would be closely linked to Reading's Homelessness Strategy;
- Additional posts within the Rough Sleeper Outreach Service team that would double the team's capacity and enable more flexible and assertive work patterns and a focus on reconnecting rough sleepers;
- 10 immediately available bed spaces, regardless of local connection, under a Housing Led model; these would be offered to people who were rough sleeping for up to six months (where required) whilst suitable housing options were explored and facilitated. Intensive support would be offered alongside these placements to enable throughput and consistency of availability;
- Extension of FAITH Christian Group's Bed for the Night emergency bed spaces provision;

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- A funding pot dedicated to reconnecting rough sleepers to their area or country of origin including costs of travel for existing and new rough sleepers and being able to offer deposits and rent in advance for up to 10 individuals;
- Additional move-on worker roles, managed by Launchpad Reading, to work intensively with a small group of individuals who were finding their move-on options particularly limited or difficult to increase throughput across all Homelessness Support Services.

**Resolved - That the winter provisions for those people sleeping rough in the Reading Borough be noted.**

### **15. REDUCTION IN BED AND BREAKFAST USE**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report setting out the measures the Housing Service had taken to bring about a reduction in the use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) as emergency accommodation for homeless households.

The report stated that the number of households in emergency B&B accommodation in Reading stood at 136 on 31 March 2017 but had fallen to 29 by 1 April 2018. There had been 104 families in B&B in March 2017 mostly in shared accommodation but as at the end of October 2018 there were just 5 families in shared B& B accommodation.

The report stated that the Housing Service had developed a proactive approach to prevention and early intervention, crucially doing as much upstream prevention work as possible and taking a holistic approach to solving homelessness issues. This included linking households with services that may address other problems they faced and which made it more difficult for them to find accommodation.

As well as working across teams and agencies the service has utilised a number of prevention tools including:

- A restructure of the service to provide a triage function to capture cases at risk of homelessness at the earliest point. Putting in place two teams of officers - one focused on single homeless people and one focused on families with both teams developing relevant specialisms that match the profile of clients coming into the service;
- Negotiating with landlords to retain/not to evict tenants and rectifying areas of contention;
- Building positive relationships with private sector landlords encouraging them to rehouse homeless households;
- Continuing to successfully procure properties for the Council's well-regarded Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS);

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- Attendance at viewings of properties with clients to support them and persuade landlords to agree a letting;
- Payment of rent deposits, rent in advance and top ups to secure accommodation where required;
- Utilising Homes for Reading Ltd (the Council's Housing Company) properties where rent levels were affordable for homeless households;
- Working with Homefinder to accommodate households out of borough where households were happy to move out of area;
- Working with B&B landlords to move away from nightly paid accommodation and converting units into private sector accommodation through the RGS;
- Working across relevant Council teams to ensure a collaborative and targeted approach was taken to support families affected by welfare reforms;
- Making best use of partner accommodation supply and ensuring move-on e.g. refuge, safe houses, commissioned homelessness services, voluntary sector accommodation;
- Supporting clients to access supported accommodation or support packages which enabled them to sustain their tenancies;
- Offering money advice and pre-tenancy information sessions to better equip clients to manage their tenancies effectively.

In addition the Council had a programme of building new affordable housing. A new development of 57 Council homes at Conwy Close (including a mix of 1, 2, 3 and 4 bed homes) was on site and the first units should be available to let by the end of 2018. 28 innovative new modular temporary accommodation units at Lowfield Rd had been developed and had already been let to homeless families. 14 small sites were being progressed to deliver a further 100 units with plans for phase 3 of the programme in development.

The report also set out two case studies, which demonstrated the range of work officers were carrying out to prevent homelessness and to reduce the use of B&B accommodation.

**Resolved - That the reduction in the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation in line with the Council's Homelessness Strategy objectives be noted.**

### **16. UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS UPDATE**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that outlined the action taken and planned to protect Reading Borough Council's land from

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unauthorised encampments. The report also set out the latest position in respect of the provision of transit or permanent pitches for travellers.

The report stated that the Council continued to review land that had or might be camped upon to identify how it could be protected. Between April 2017 and March 2018 the Council spent £104,000 on defending its most vulnerable sites. Managers from across Council services had carried out a review of land and agreed with the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhood Services a process for prioritising work. Defensive works were implemented at 13 locations across Reading by the end of March 2018. Since April 2018, protection works had been completed at a number of other Council owned sites that had been repeatedly encamped including Portman Road, Walnut Way, Pottery Road, Bran Close, Landsdowne Rd/Portman Gardens, Coronation Square and Burford Court. The report detailed the current status of the works.

The report stated that Reading had an above average number of unauthorised encampments when compared to other areas across the Thames Valley. A Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) in 2017 had identified accommodation needs for 10-17 permanent pitches and for a transit site to house 10 caravans for gypsies and travellers in Reading. In 2017/18 there had been 87 unauthorised encampments in Reading, most of which had been on Council land. Having a transit caravan site could meet this element of need and reduce the number of unauthorised encampments. However, identifying a site had been challenging. Further to this independent study, the Council had undertaken a thorough assessment of 80 possible sites across the borough. These had been considered against a range of planning policy criteria. One potential transit site had been identified on land at the junction of Cow Lane and Richfield Avenue but this option had been dropped following strong objections from residents and Reading Festival organisers and the proposal to locate a new school on the site. The Council had committed to undertake a further review of its land holdings and other opportunities in order to review potential sites and continued to raise the unmet need with adjoining Councils.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the action taken to protect local authority land from unauthorised encampments be noted;**
- (2) That the ongoing programme of works to protect those areas of Council land at risk of unauthorised encampments with physical measures, or other such measures as appropriate, be approved.**

### **17. INSTALLATION OF FIRE SPRINKLER SYSTEMS TO COUNCIL HOUSING PROPERTIES**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report seeking authority for the award of a contract for the installation of fire sprinkler systems to circa 280 Council properties in flatted blocks. The expected contract value will be approximately £700,000.

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The report stated that despite the Council's high rise blocks differing in design to Grenfell Tower, the Council had appointed an external qualified Fire Engineer to carry out a review of the fire safety practice and systems. The company, Fireskills, had also been asked for a professional view on whether additional fire precautions were advised in any of the building types surveyed, to improve the fire safety standard in the context of recent incidents nationally and the learning from those.

Overall FireSkills noted that the Council's Housing Service has a 'forward facing and proactive fire safety strategy'. Whilst the Council was fully compliant with current legislation, FireSkills recommended that the Council could consider implementing a number of additional fire protection measures. This included the installation of sprinklers in some circumstances.

The value of expenditure was currently estimated on previous quotations obtained for similar sprinkler system works. The budget for the fire sprinkler systems was estimated at £700,000 and provision had been made in the Housing Revenue Account capital budgets to fund this work. Ongoing maintenance and service costs would have to be provided each year, the estimated budget allowance was £50,000 and provision has been made in the Housing Revenue Account Budget and Business Plan.

**Resolved - That the Head of Housing and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, be delegated authority to award a contract for the installation of fire sprinkler systems in specified Council flatted blocks.**

(The meeting closed at 8.03 pm)