

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 27 JUNE 2023

Present: Councillor Page (Mayor);

Councillors Ayub, Ballsdon, Barnett-Ward, Brock, Challenger, Cresswell, Cross, Davies, Eden, Edwards, Emberson, Ennis, Gavin, Gittings, Griffith, Goss, Hacker, Hornsby-Smith, Hoskin, Juthani, Keane, Keeping, Kitchingham, Lanzoni, Leng, Lovelock, Magon, McCann, McElroy, McEwan, Mitchell, Moore, Mpofu-Coles, O'Connell, Robinson, Rowland, R Singh, Tarar, Terry, Thompson, White, Williams, Woodward and Yeo

Apologies: Councillors G Dennis and Asare

14. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Colette Dennis

The Mayor invited the Leader of the Council to pay tribute to Colette Dennis who had sadly died suddenly and unexpectedly on 9 June 2023. Colette had been first elected as a Norcot Ward Councillor in May 2022 and had been re-elected on 24 May 2023 for a further four years. Councillor Brock expressed his appreciation of the contribution that Colette had made during her time on the Council, particularly in representing her constituents. She would be greatly missed by councillors across the chamber, officers of the Council and by her local community. He expressed his sincere condolences on behalf of the Council to Colette's husband, Councillor Glenn Dennis and her family and friends. The Council stood for a minute's silence in Colette's memory and as a mark of respect.

(b) Council Services Awards

The Mayor was proud to announce that the Council had won two awards. Firstly, the LGC had judged the Council the winner of the category of building inclusive access to Learning, Culture & Leisure in Reading at its 2023 award ceremony. Secondly, the Highways Maintenance Team had been the winner of the Best Council's Services Team at the MJ awards 2023. The Mayor congratulated the Council services for their success and said the trophies would be put on display at the Civic Offices.

15. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

16. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

| | Questioner | Subject | Answer |
|--|------------|---------|--------|
|--|------------|---------|--------|

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 27 JUNE 2023

| | | | |
|----|---------------|-----------------------------------|------------|
| 1. | Cllr Robinson | Former Land of Reading Golf Club | Cllr Ennis |
| 2. | Cllr Magon | EV Charging Points at Palmer Park | Cllr Ennis |
| 3. | Cllr McElroy | Telecoms Company Disruption | Cllr Ennis |

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

17. EXTENSION OF THE FRANCHISE - OUR HOME OUR VOTE

Pursuant to Notice, a motion was moved by Councillor Moore and seconded by Councillor Terry and CARRIED.

Resolved -

The Council notes:

The Elections Act received Royal Assent on the 28th of April 2022.

The Act is a major piece of national legislation with local implications for the residents of Reading, including the use of mandatory photographic voter ID at the polling station and changes to overseas voting and voting and candidacy rights of EU citizens.

In 2019, people born outside the UK made up an estimated [14% of the UK's population](#). They live, work, study, and make use of public services in the UK, and call the UK their home. Many of our foreign-born residents from EU and Commonwealth countries can vote in our local elections. However, approximately over [1 million residents](#) across England and Northern Ireland do not have a right to vote. In the Reading Borough Council area, approximately 38,000 people (according to the last census) were not born in the UK and therefore may not have the right to vote.

Scotland and Wales implemented residence-based voting rights where all residents with lawful immigration status have the right to vote in local and devolved national elections.

A poll conducted by Number Cruncher showed that [63% of people agree that all residents with lawful status in the UK should have the right to vote in local elections in England and Northern Ireland.](#)

The Council welcomes:

That all our residents, no matter their nationality, call Reading their home and bring significant value to our area.

That the voting and candidacy rights of EU citizens with pre-settled and settled status who entered the UK before 2021 will be maintained.

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 27 JUNE 2023

That [the London Assembly passed a motion in support of residence-based voting rights on the 11th of November 2021](#) and that various organisations in the democracy and immigration sector [support](#) the Our Home Our Vote campaign for residence-based voting rights.

The Council expresses concern that:

EU citizens who enter the UK from the 1st of January 2021 and are not covered by bilateral voting rights treaties (currently only active with Poland, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Spain) will not have voting and candidacy rights in local elections when the Elections Act is fully implemented by May 2024. This will create an unequal situation where some EU citizens will have the right to vote where others will not.

The complexity in voting eligibility will cause confusion and will reduce voter turnout in local elections amongst migrant voters, a group already seen as having disproportionately a lower voter registration rate compared to British voters.

Local Authorities will be under-resourced to manage the removal of a significant number of EU citizens from the electoral register and this may result in some being wrongfully removed from the electoral register.

The Council commits to:

- A. Ask the Leader of the Council to write to the Minister of State at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities requesting that the franchise for local elections be extended in England and Northern Ireland to all qualifying foreign nationals in line with eligibility criteria in Scotland and Wales. This would ensure a UK-wide and fair approach so that all our residents who are also our council tax payers are enfranchised.
- B. Work collaboratively with other local authorities and voluntary sector organisations in our local authority to develop a strategy of communications about voter eligibility following the Elections Act.
- C. Ensure council officers have a strategy in place to ensure that the implementation of the Elections Act, including the removal of some EU citizens from the register, does not wrongfully remove eligible voters from the register.

18. THAMES WATER SEWERAGE NETWORK

Pursuant to Notice, a motion was moved by Councillor Cross and seconded by Councillor Hornsby-Smith and CARRIED:

Resolved -

That this Council notes that:

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 27 JUNE 2023

- There has been national attention on the environmental consequences of the dumping of sewage into rivers and watercourses across the country.
- The discharge of sewage into water courses is a consequence of a sewerage network that is easily overwhelmed, owing to a lack of investment in the network by the privatised water utility companies.
- In Reading and in neighbouring areas, the same underinvestment in infrastructure has resulted in the collapse of sewers - most recently on Church Street, Caversham - and that the consequent unplanned major disruption is often detrimental to the lives of residents and the vitality of local businesses.

This Council believes that proactive investment in Thames Water's infrastructure is essential to avoid the environmental harm of sewage overflows into water courses and to mitigate the risk of infrastructure failures, and that the cost of such necessary investment should be borne by the utility providers following a public duty principle. This Council further believes that the dividends paid out by Thames Water and other water utility companies evidence that profit motive has been placed before this necessary principle.

Consequently, this Council resolves to invite Thames Water to a meeting of the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee and, at such meeting, scrutinise Thames Water's investment plans for Reading, encouraging Thames Water to positively and proactively work with this Council to ensure best that the delivery of necessary upgrades is as effective and efficient as possible, for the benefit of both residents and businesses.

19. DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROVISION ON NEW BUILD DEVELOPMENTS

Pursuant to Notice, a motion was moved by Councillor Keeping and seconded by Councillor Leng and CARRIED:

Resolved -

That this Council notes that:

- Some housing developers have exclusivity arrangements with telecommunications providers which restrict the installation of digital infrastructure on new built developments, creating a monopoly of provision and curtailing resident choice of internet access providers.
- For developments on unadopted roads, this can have a long-term consequences as the developer can restrict the installation of alternative provision.
- For developments on public highways, such arrangements will have a shorter-term impact - measured in years - but still has an inequitable effect.

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 27 JUNE 2023

This Council believes that access to affordable and reliable internet access is an ever-increasing necessity in the modern world, and that this is best ensured by allowing residents a full choice of possible providers. Moreover, this Council believes that access to such connections, and new technologies as they become available, is an economic imperative for our town.

Consequently, this Council resolves to instruct officers to explore the implementation of an 'open access' principle for digital infrastructure providers on all new build developments in Reading as part of the forthcoming update of the Local Plan. Furthermore, this Council resolves to write to the Secretary of State to call for the application of such a principle nationally in the planning policy framework and guidance.

(The meeting closed at 7.33 pm)