

## **POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 30 OCTOBER 2023**

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

Councillors Terry (Vice-Chair, in the Chair for Item 33), Barnett-Ward, Emberson, Ennis, Gittings, Hoskin, Leng, McEwan, Robinson, Rowland, Thompson and White

**Apologies:** Councillor Mitchell

### **31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Brock declared an interest in Item 33 on the grounds that he was a Council-appointed Director of Reading Economic Development Agency which had proposed and would administer the Business Improvement Districts.

### **32. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **33. READING BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT BALLOTS**

The Committee considered a report outlining proposals to renew Reading's two town centre Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) - Reading Central BID established in 2006 and Abbey Quarter BID established in 2019 – for the period 2024-2029. The report also sought approval for the Council to vote in favour of the proposals in respect of its properties within the proposed BID areas. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 Reading Central BID Business Plan 2019 – 2024
- Appendix 2 Abbey Quarter BID Business Plan 2019 – 2024
- Appendix 3 Street Names
- Appendix 4 BID Maps Central and Abbey Quarter
- Appendix 5 Impact Assessment CIA Tool
- Appendix 6 Baseline Statements – Reading 2024 – 2029
- Appendix 7 Formal BID Consultation Results August 2023
- Appendix 8 BID Themes
- Appendix 9 Budgets

The report noted that the BIDs had been managed since their inception by the Council's arm's length economic development company REDA and that the company was leading on proposals for the continued operation of the BIDs. The BIDs had successfully delivered a range of enhanced services that complemented the Council's statutory responsibilities and provided commercial, retail and hospitality businesses with a safer, cleaner, more attractive, more vibrant, and better-connected town centre. This was funded by the business levy in the designated area that amounted to nearly £1million per year during 2019-2024 and would be nearly £1.5million in the proposed BIDs for 2024-2029. The BIDs and their Committees also acted as a collective voice for businesses on issues of concern and an effective partner to the statutory bodies in bringing about improvements and positive

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change. The report set out a summary of the projects and initiatives delivered as part of the 2019-2024 Business Plans which included Business Wardens, CCTV staff, floral installations, Christmas lighting and events, Seasonal and cultural events, recycling initiatives and deep cleaning.

The report explained that the experience of running two BIDs, one with a retail focus and the other an office focus, had shown that although some common themes existed the two areas had different needs. It had therefore been agreed to keep the two BID areas separate and to allow the resulting business plans to reflect the differences. It was proposed to extend the boundary of the Reading Central BID to include Greyfriars Road and Station Hill, as well as Cheapside and Minster Street. This would be a cohesive approach to the whole town centre and encompass the new commercial areas currently under construction. No changes were proposed to the geographical area of the Abbey Quarter BID. Appendix 3 listed the Streets included in the Central and Abbey Quarter BID areas and Appendix 4 maps of the Central and Abbey Quarter BID areas.

The report explained that the Day Time Levy Percentage had remained at 1% since 2007 but taking account inflation on goods and services to the BID and the level and breadth of services demanded by the businesses it had been agreed by the BID Committees to propose a rise to 1.4%. This levy was still well below most other BIDs in the country. It was also proposed to align the Night Time levy with that of the daytime (1.4%) instead of charging an additional 2% as in previous BID terms, due to Reading's hospitality and night-time economy having suffered disproportionately during Covid compared to the retail and office sectors.

The report summarised consultation carried out in developing the BID proposals and explained that the common themes identified would be featured in the Business Plans and prioritised according to the needs and demands of the two separate BID areas. These themes were:

- Social & Healthy (offering businesses and their staff opportunities to engage in activities that promoted their health and wellbeing as well as the opportunity to give back to our local communities)
- Enhancing & Exciting (animating our town centre to increase experiential activities attracting residents, employees and visitors to enjoy and use the town centre to live, work and play)
- Safe & Secure (ensuring that the town centre was safe day and night for all who used it)
- Environmental & Sustainable (involving BID levy payers in working towards our Reading 2050 vision, the Council's climate emergency and the Reading Climate Change Strategy)
- Informed & Represented (being a collective voice on matters in the town centre; supporting businesses to grow through the provision of information, recruitment, and retention of staff)

Footfall data for the town centre showed that weekend visitor numbers were nearing pre-Covid levels, but that Monday to Friday footfall sat at around 50% of pre-Covid levels. The BID services would reflect this change and aim to increase the number of experiential

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events (trails, food markets, theatre, music) to drive footfall and ensure the town centre was seen as an exciting and vibrant place to work in, visit, shop and spend leisure time.

The report also noted that the Council was eligible to vote in the required ballots on both BID proposals in respect of its properties within the BID 'areas of benefit' and sought approval for the Council to vote in favour of the proposals.

### **Resolved –**

- (1) That the proposals for the Reading Central BID and Abbey Quarter BID ballots be endorsed;**
- (2) That, in respect of its properties within the proposed BID areas, the Council vote in favour of both the Reading Central BID and Abbey Quarter BID ballots for the period 2024 – 2029 in the forthcoming ballots;**
- (3) That the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services be authorised to vote on behalf of the Council.**

(Councillor Brock declared an interest in the above item on the grounds that he was a Director of REDA who had developed the proposals and would administer the BIDs. He left the meeting and took no part in the debate or decision. Councillor Terry took the Chair for this item.)

### **34. SINGLE HOMELESSNESS ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered a report seeking authority to bid for capital funds to the value of £480,000 and revenue funds to the value of £167,789 from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) to purchase and provide support to six additional Housing First units from 1 April 2024 to relieve and prevent rough sleeping in Reading.

The report explained that in September 2022 the Government had published their new cross-government strategy 'Ending rough sleeping for good', setting out how they were investing £2 billion over the next three years to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. The SHAP had been announced as part of this strategy, with the aim to increase the supply of good quality, specialist accommodation and housing-led approaches.

The report noted that Reading had limited existing Housing First provision, currently sourced through a combination of its own stock and registered providers accommodation. The funding under SHAP would allow the Council to increase its provision of longer-term accommodation meeting the needs of vulnerable residents to support in recovery and integration into the wider community. The expansion of Housing First provision would consequently improve throughput in existing supported accommodation widening the reach of these services to other individuals that required them. Expanding Housing First fitted with the Council's approach under the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) 2022-25 grant funding for Housing First and tailored off the streets support, moving from outreach towards

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in reach support once people were accommodated, helping them to sustain their accommodation long term.

The report therefore proposed that the Council purchase and provide support to six additional Housing First units from 1 April 2024 subject to the SHAP grant funds being allocated and awarded by DLUHC. There was an 'evergreen' grant funding condition which required that properties purchased under the SHAP scheme would need to be made available to the single homeless cohort in perpetuity. The revenue funding would provide for one additional FTE Housing First support worker over three years, from April 2024 to March 2027, to complement the existing RSI grant-funded contract delivering Housing First.

### **Resolved –**

- (1) That the application to DLUHC for Single Homeless Accommodation Programme (SHAP) funding in the maximum sum of £647,789, the grant to cover both revenue and capital expenditure to (a) purchase six additional units and (b) acquire one additional Housing First support worker, be authorised;**
- (2) That, subject to the successful outcome of the application outlined in point 2 above, the Assistant Director of Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, be authorised to enter into a grant agreement with DLUHC for it to provide SHAP funding of a maximum sum of £647,789;**
- (3) That a budget of £705,900 to match fund the capital element of the grant, funded through a combination of S106 contributions and Housing Revenue Account borrowing, be approved;**
- (4) That the total capital spend of £1,185,900 to purchase six homes as set out in the report be approved;**
- (5) That the Assistant Director of Housing and Communities be authorised to purchase the relevant properties.**

### **35. DIGITAL & CUSTOMER TECHNOLOGY DELIVERY UPDATE**

The Committee received a report setting out an update on progress of implementing the 'Connected Reading' Digital Transformation Strategy.

The report noted that the Strategy had been approved by the Committee at its meeting on 12 July 2021 (Minute 21 refers) and that an update had been submitted to the meeting of the Committee on 31 October 2022 (Minute 34 refers). The Committee had approved the award of a framework contract for a Digital Transformation Partner, and PwC had been selected as the partner with the contract beginning in April 2023. In parallel with that procurement the Council had submitted a successful bid for digital transformation funding through the Future Councils Pilot competition run by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and received a grant of £750k in March 2023.

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The report provided an update on progress since October 2022 and next steps for each of the following workstreams:

- Case and Customer Management
- Customer Journey Optimisation
- Web Services Development
- Digital Inclusion
- Independent Living
- Adult Social Care
- Microsoft 365 Adoption and Exploitation

**Resolved –**

**That the progress made to date on digital technology delivery be noted.**

### **36. RIPA & IPA POLICY AND PROCESS 2023**

The Committee considered a report seeking approval for the updated RIPA & IPA Policy, governing the Council's lawful use of Covert Surveillance techniques and the lawful acquisition of Communications Data as investigative tools for investigations. The updated RIPA & IPA Policy was attached to the report at Appendix 1 and the confidential appendices to the Policy were attached to the report at Appendix 2.

The report noted that Regulation Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) Part II provided the statutory framework to enable covert surveillance to be lawfully authorised and conducted by public authorities and that the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (IPA) had been introduced as the new statutory framework governing the acquisition of Communications Data, which had previously been encapsulated within RIPA. The Council's previous RIPA Policy therefore required a comprehensive review and amendment to reflect the new statutory framework and mandatory processes for Local Authorities. Both RIPA and IPA were supported by Codes of Practice and the purpose of both statutory regimes was to provide the lawful basis for public authorities to ensure they did not infringe a person's Article 8 rights (Right to Privacy), except as may be permitted, to ensure a public authority acted in a way which was compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights 1950 and Human Rights Act 1998.

The report set out for approval the new RIPA & IPA Policy at Appendix 1. Attached at Appendix 2 were the 32 Appendices to the Policy which were procedural in nature and confidential for operational reasons. The report also set out a summary of recent regulatory activity which included a Directed Surveillance Application for authorisation of a Test Purchase operation for the underage sale of alcohol and nicotine inhaling products (vapes) at Reading Festival.

**Resolved –**

**That the new RIPA & IPA Policy 2023 be adopted.**

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(Appendix 2 contained Exempt Information as defined in Paragraph 7 specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).)

### **37. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

#### **Resolved –**

That pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of item 38 below as it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to that Act.

### **38. RTL SHAREHOLDER REPORT**

The Committee, acting in its capacity as shareholder of Reading Transport Limited (RTL), considered a report setting out a proposal from RTL. It was reported at the meeting that the proposal had been withdrawn.

#### **Resolved –**

**That the report and the withdrawal of the proposal from RTL be noted.**

(Exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3.)

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 6.58 pm)