

## COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 19 MARCH 2024

**Present:** Councillor Page (Mayor);

Councillors Asare, Ayub, Ballsdon, Barnett-Ward, Brock, Challenger, Cross, Davies, Dennis, Eden, Edwards, Gavin, Gittings, Griffith, Goss, Hacker, Hornsby-Smith, Hoskin, Juthani, Keane, Keeping, Kitchingham, Lanzoni, Leng, Lovelock, McCann, McEwan, Mitchell, Moore, Mpofu-Coles, Robinson, Rowland, R Singh, Tarar, Terry, Thompson, Williams, Woodward, Yeo and McGoldrick

**Apologies:** Councillors Cresswell, Emberson, Ennis, Magon, McElroy, O'Connell and White

### **48. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

#### **(a) Tributes to Retiring Councillors**

As this was the last meeting prior to the Council elections on 2nd May 2024, the Mayor invited the Group Leaders to pay tribute to Councillors who would not be standing for re-election. Councillor Brock spoke about Councillors Kitchingham and Challenger; Councillors Brock, Mitchell and Moore paid homage to Councillor Page's unparalleled fifty years of public service as a member of the Council; and Councillors Page, Mitchell and Moore expressed their appreciation of Councillor Brock, following his announcement that he would be standing down as both Leader and a member of the Council.

#### **(b) Mayor's Visit to Clonmel**

The Mayor reported on his recent trip to Clonmel, which had included St Patrick's Day, and passed on the greetings of its Mayor and Town Council to Reading's elected members who would be welcome to visit Clonmel at any time.

#### **(c) Reading Half Marathon - 14 April 2024**

The Mayor reported that he and his Mayoralty Team would be taking part in the Reading Half Marathon on Sunday 14 April 2024. He promised there would be an invitation to sponsor the Mayor and his Team issued shortly.

#### **(d) Suspension of Standing Order 7**

The Mayor explained that a motion to suspend Standing Order 7 would be moved later in the meeting (see Minute 54 below). The purpose of the suspension would be to disapply the requirement for a motion to be received by the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services six clear working days in advance of the meeting, to enable an emergency motion to be considered at shorter notice entitled 'Solidarity with Black Women Councillors' (see Minute 55 below). If the motion to suspend Standing Order 7 was passed, the Council would move to debate the 'Solidarity with Black Women Councillors' motion in accordance with the normal rules of debate set out in Standing Orders 14-22.

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### 49. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

### 50. PETITIONS

Mamuna Naz presented a petition in the following terms:

#### **Increase Community Activities at Dee Space Community Centre**

We, the residents of Norcot ward and Dee Park, express our concern about the lack of activities at the new Dee Space Community Centre. This centre was built with a vision to serve as a hub for community engagement and development.

We urge Reading Borough Council to hold urgent discussions with Peabody Housing Association at the highest level. When the Dee Park regeneration was first developed, funding was agreed to support and build necessary community activities. Please sign this petition if you agree that more needs to happen in our community centre!

**RESPONSE** by Councillor Brock, Leader of the Council, on behalf of Councillor Emberson (Lead Councillor for Housing):

Thank you for your views and for your engagement.

As indicated in the petition, the delivery and running of the Dee Space Community Centre is the responsibility of Peabody Housing Association as part of the regeneration of Dee Park. The Council is the freeholder of the land but a 999-year lease is being finalised which transfers the land and assets, including the Community Centre, to Peabody.

The Centre was opened in August 2023 and now includes the Ranikhet Children's Centre. In one part of the building. In the other parts of the building set aside for Peabody to deliver community engagement there are only limited activities at present.

Monthly housing advice surgeries are held for Peabody's tenants across the estate. The local youth club Grassrootz has also recently opened every Thursday night for 11 to 16 year olds.

It is disappointing that since the completion of this fantastic facility Peabody have failed to deliver more fully on their obligations to provide a range of activities for all members of the local community. The regeneration of Dee Park has always been about more than just the delivery of new homes, and Peabody's lack of progress towards delivering activities is of concern.

In light of this officers have instructed the Regeneration lawyer to write to Peabody. The letter was sent on 20 February 2024 asking them to set out how they intend to fulfil their obligations to the community, and to confirm the following:

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- What progress has been made on developing a policy framework in connection with the use of the Centre for the benefit of all residents
- How the £250,000 allocated to them to deliver activities at the Community Centre is being spent

The Housing Regeneration team is also working closely with Peabody to hold a Community Day in the summer which will showcase the Centre as a vital community hub.

We will also be ensuring that as the plans for the Centre move forward there will be opportunities for residents to make their views known, and to get involved in shaping the programme for the future'.

(Councillor Cross declared an interest in this item and left the meeting while the petition was presented. Nature of interest: Cllr Cross was employed by Peabody Housing Association).

### 51. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

	<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Answer</b>
1.	Cllr Moore	Landline Switchover	Cllr Gittings
2.	Cllr Keane	Preventative Measures to Tackle Graffiti	Cllr Rowland
3.	Cllr Williams	Council Support During Landline Switch Off	Cllr Gittings

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

### 52. ESTABLISHMENT OF A JOINT COMMITTEE - BERKSHIRE PROSPERITY BOARD

Further to Minute 51 of the Policy Committee meeting held on 19 February 2024, the Chief Executive submitted a report seeking to establish a Joint Committee, to be known as the Berkshire Prosperity Board, to enable Berkshire's local authorities to collaborate to take advantage of opportunities to deliver economic development improvements across the region. A Joint Committee would provide more flexibility and influence than a single council and would enable local authorities to speak with one voice to Government and other agencies/ organisations to secure funding for key projects and initiatives. Through collaborative working the Berkshire local authorities would benefit from:

- Creating a shared vision of inclusive and sustainable economic prosperity to address challenges and meet opportunities whilst retaining the sovereignty of each local authority.
- Having a strengthened case to Government and private investors for funding and greater investment for strategic projects across Berkshire.

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- Acting as a vehicle to commission the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and others in response to the Government's review of Local Economic Partnerships.
- Having a stronger, collective voice in lobbying Government and other agencies.
- Taking a collaborative mindset in targeting external bodies effectively for the benefit of Berkshire.
- Positioning Berkshire advantageously in readiness for potential devolution proposals to benefit from additional responsibilities and funding opportunities.
- Setting up a Berkshire that is better able to efficiently, seize future opportunities and adapt to challenges.
- Working on six shared themes: health and inequalities, education and skills, affordable housing, sector development, strategic infrastructure and net zero.
- Transforming Berkshire's productivity through, responsive, agile collaboration.

The report explained that the core members of the Committee would include Bracknell Forest Council, Reading Borough Council, Slough Borough Council, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough Council. The draft Constitution and structure; functions and procedure rules and responsibilities of the accountable body; and the draft governance structure were appended to the report for adoption.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Brock and seconded by Councillor Terry and CARRIED:

### **Resolved -**

- (1) That the establishment of a fully constituted Joint Committee (to be known as the Berkshire Prosperity Board) from May 2024 to deliver a Berkshire-wide vision for inclusive green and sustainable economic prosperity be agreed;
- (2) That the proposed Constitution for the Joint Committee, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be agreed;
- (3) That the responsibilities of the accountable body, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be agreed;
- (4) That the draft Governance structure, as set out in Appendix C to the report, be noted;
- (5) That the delegated authority given to the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Director of Finance, the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council, by Policy Committee on 19 February 2024 (Minute 51 refers) to reach a legally binding Agreement

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between the member Authorities setting out the supporting arrangements and responsibilities between the Authorities, particularly that between the Lead Authority, known as the Accountable Body and the other member Authorities be noted.

### 53. REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2023-25

Further to Minute 52 of the Policy Committee meeting held on 19 February 2024, the Returning Officer submitted a report on the results of the 2023-24 review of Polling Districts and Polling Places in Reading and to consider changes to some Polling Places for future local and Parliamentary elections. The report explained that the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (the 2013 Act) introduced a change to the timing of compulsory reviews of UK Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places. The last review had taken place in 2018/19 (the 2019 review) and the results had been reported to Council on 26 March 2019 (Minute 56 refers). The compulsory review had been published for consultation on 1 November 2023 with responses required to be received by 1 December 2023. The comments were set out in the schedule at Appendix A to the report. The Returning Officer's written submission to the review process, which commented on the existing Polling Stations, any new Polling Stations and new Polling Districts that may be used based on proposals made in the review, was attached to the report at Appendix B. A plan of the new (2023) Polling Districts was also provided at Appendix C to the report.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Brock and seconded by Councillor Terry and CARRIED:

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the results of the consultation on the 2023-24 Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places (Appendix A), and the Returning Officer's written submission (Appendix B), be received and noted;**
- (2) That the changes to Polling Places made since the 2019 review, to accommodate the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's (LGBCE's) 2019-20 review of ward boundaries in Reading, implemented in 2022 and set out in para. 3.22 of the report, be noted;**
- (3) That the impact of the Boundary Commission for England (BCE) review of Parliamentary Constituency boundaries, and the changes to Parliamentary Constituencies covering Reading made in the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 2020, be noted, in particular those arising from the Act basing the new Parliamentary Constituencies on the pre-2019-20 review ward boundaries; and that the necessarily consequent creation of the additional Polling Districts listed below to deal with the anomalies arising be approved:**

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- (a) Polling District BC in Battle ward to serve the even numbered properties on the west side of Wantage Road which would vote in Battle Library Polling Station;
  - (b) Polling District JC in Norcot ward to serve houses (even numbers) to the south of Cockney Hill and Cheddington Close which would vote in St Michael's Primary School;
  - (c) Polling District BB in Battle ward to serve Stone Street, Tidmarsh Street, Pangbourne Street, Ivydene Road, Ledbury Close which would vote in the Emmanuel Methodist Church;
- (4) That the following changes be made to the number of Polling Stations at the Polling Places listed below:
- (a) Battle Polling District B - Battle Library - establish a second Polling Station;
  - (b) Battle Polling District BA - Emmanuel Methodist Church - establish a fourth Polling Station;
  - (c) Norcot Polling District JA - St Michael's Primary School - establish a second Polling Station;
- (5) That with regard to the responses to the public consultation on the 2023-24 Polling Districts and Polling Places Review, set out in Appendices A and B:
- (a) on Caversham ward District CA, the Returning Officer consulted with the Caversham ward Councillors about the proposal to utilise Our Lady and St Annes Caversham Church as a Polling Place to replace New Bridge Nursery School which presently hosts two Polling Stations [The Caversham ward Councillors wish the Polling Place to remain at New Bridge Nursery School];
  - (b) the position and response concerning Abbey Polling District AB in light of the proposed closure of Reading Central Library be noted; and in this regard, having received the views and preference of the Abbey ward Councillors, and their preferred location as an alternative Polling Place being Abbey Baptist Church be implemented by the Returning Officer after 2024 elections;
  - (c) it be noted that the anomaly to locate all the properties in the range 37-91 Lowfield Road in Emmer Green ward Polling District GB was corrected in 2022;

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- (d) no change be made to the location of the Polling Place for Whitley Polling District PC, where the Whitley ward Councillors had been consulted and wish to retain the Polling Station at 100 Longwater Avenue;
  - (e) the Returning Officer having consulted with the Church ward Councillors, regarding the use of Tyndale Baptist Church as an alternative Polling Place for Church Polling District E in anticipation of the temporary closure for refurbishment works at the Guide and Scout HQ making the building unavailable for elections in 2024 implement their decision to utilise the Tyndale Baptist Church as the Temporary Polling Place;
- (6) That the following changes to Polling Districts be agreed:
- (a) Wantage Hall and St Georges Hall be moved from Redlands ward district LD into Redlands ward district LA;
  - (b) Numbers 1,3,5,7,9 Whitley Park Lane be moved from Redlands ward LC into Redlands ward district LD;
  - (c) Katesgrove HC Polling District be abolished and all properties in it be moved into Katesgrove ward H Polling District (Katesgrove School);
- (7) That the Returning Officer, be authorised to implement all appropriate actions arising from the review and discussed in this report, in consultation where appropriate with affected ward Councillors.

### 54. SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 7 - MOTIONS WHICH NEED TO BE SUBMITTED IN WRITING BEFORE THE MEETING

Pursuant to Standing Order 26, the following motion was moved by Councillor Brock and seconded by Councillor Terry and CARRIED:

Resolved -

That pursuant to Standing Order 26, Standing Order 7 be suspended to remove the requirement for a councillor to submit a motion to the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services at least six clear working days before the Council meeting in order to allow an emergency motion to be moved entitled 'Solidarity with Black Women Councillors'.

### 55. SOLIDARITY WITH BLACK WOMEN COUNCILLORS

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The following motion was moved by Councillor Terry and seconded by Councillor Griffith and CARRIED:

**Resolved -**

**This Council supports the widespread condemnation of the racist and misogynistic statements made about Diane Abbott and all Black women.**

**The reference to shooting an MP has left all women in public life vulnerable to both verbal and physical attack. Given the murders of two MPs in recent years this is an abhorrent attack on all people in public life but particularly Black Women.**

**Racism, discrimination, and misogyny should not be tolerated in our society. We need more Black women and people from Black, Asian, and other minority communities in public life.**

**This council stands in solidarity with all Black women in public service, particularly the 3 Black women Reading Borough Councillors and will continue to speak out against racism and discrimination as it impacts our communities, people, and society.**

(The meeting closed at 7.50 pm)