

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 15 OCTOBER 2024

Present: Councillor Dennis (Mayor);

Councillors Mpofu-Coles (Deputy Mayor), Asare, Ayub, Ballsdon, Barnett-Ward, Cresswell, Cross, Davies, Eden, Edwards, Emberson, Ennis, Gavin, Gittings, Griffith, Goss, Hornsby-Smith, Hoskin, Keane, Keeping, Lanzoni, Leng, Lovelock, McCann, McElroy, McEwan, McGoldrick, McGrother, Mitchell, Moore, Naz, O'Connell, Rowland, R Singh, DP Singh, Tarar, Terry, Thompson, White, Williams, Woodward and Yeo

Apologies: Councillors Hacker, Juthani, Nikulina and Stevens

14. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Changes to Committee Memberships

I can confirm that the Monitoring Officer has exercised his delegation on the recommendation of the Green Group Leader to make the following changes to the membership of Committees:

- Councillor Rob White has been appointed to the Policy Committee replacing Councillor Josh Williams.
- Councillor Josh Williams has been appointed to the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee, replacing Councillor Rob White.

(b) Former Councillor Jonny Morris

I would like to pay tribute to and remember one of our former councillors, Jonny Morris. Jonny was first elected to Reading Borough Council in 1996 and served until 2001. He was appointed as the Lead Councillor for Environmental & Consumer Affairs in 1999 and 2000 in the run-up to the adoption of the Cabinet-style executive arrangements by the Council in 2001. He was also the vice-chair of the Licensing Committee. He moved to Plymouth in 2003 and was also a member of that authority from 2013 until his retirement in 2022. Councillors please will you join me in standing for a minute's silence in Jonny's memory.

15. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

16. PETITIONS

(a) Nick Fudge presented a petition in the following terms:

Reinstate 30-Minute Free Parking in Tilehurst to Support Local Businesses

As residents of Tilehurst, we have seen the detrimental effects of parking charges introduced in Dunstall Close and the Recreation car park in Tilehurst. Our favourite shops and traders in Triangle have suffered a significant drop in business due to these new charges. The once-thriving local businesses will struggle to survive, making it challenging for us as residents to access local amenities that we rely on daily.

The Labour-run Reading Council's decision to remove the 30-minute free parking scheme has not only affected our community but also undermined small businesses - the backbone of our local economy. Small businesses play a vital role in job creation and economic growth. According to Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), small firms accounted for 99.3% of all private sector businesses at the start of 2020 and provided 61% employment (source: FSB). By imposing these parking charges, we are risking this valuable contribution.

We urge the Reading Council to reconsider their decision and restore the 30-minute free parking scheme immediately. This action will provide much-needed relief for our beloved local shops and traders while ensuring that residents can continue accessing essential services conveniently.

RESPONSE by Councillor Ennis, Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

The first 30-minutes free rate in car parks in Tilehurst was removed in March 2024 following a freeze in changes to parking charges during and immediately following the pandemic. This change was agreed as part of a wider fees and charges review.

The cost of providing car park facilities and maintenance of those car parks has increased significantly. In some instances, income from Council car parks has failed to cover the rising costs of running them, such as lighting, pay and display machines, maintaining surfaces, and relining.

The Council recognises the importance of local shops to communities and have carefully considered the fees with a view to keeping them as low as possible, whilst also improving improved public transport, walking and cycling facilities to enable residents to access them by more sustainable means.

Given the financial pressures the Council is facing, all financial options were assessed but the failure to generate sufficient income from the car parks places wider stresses on the Council's finances and the ability to deliver core services.

(b) South Oxfordshire Parishes: Kidmore End, Eye & Dunsden, Binfield Heath, Stoke Row, Highmoor & Sonning Common submitted a petition:

Petition in Relation to Agenda Item 9: 'Reading Transport Strategy 2040 - Final for Adoption'

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The Petitioners seek a decision from Reading Borough Council not to incorporate into its Local Transport Plan those provisions of the Reading Transport Strategy 2040 that include the multi modal scheme defined as The Third Thames Crossing and described as such in the Final version of the RTS.

RESPONSE by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport):

I would like to thank the Parish Councils for submitting this Petition regarding the Reading Transport Strategy 2040.

The Strategy sets out an ambitious vision to create healthier, greener and more equal communities in Reading. The focus is on promoting sustainable transport options, whilst recognising the importance of the private car for many people.

The topic of this Petition is one of the key challenges included in the Strategy; namely how to address the issues caused by the limited crossings over the River Thames. The existing situation leads to significant congestion and air pollution in areas including Reading, Caversham, Sonning and Henley. The Strategy takes a holistic approach to addressing these issues and seeks to work with our partners, including the Petitioners, to jointly develop effective solutions to these issues which impact the everyday lives of residents.

One of the key parts of the Strategy is the delivery of a network of park and ride mobility hubs on the edge of the urban area. This includes three locations to the north of the borough; on the A4074 (Upper Woodcote Road), B481 (Peppard Road) and A4155 (Henley Road) corridors. It is acknowledged within the Strategy that due to the nature of the borough boundary these hubs would be best located in neighbouring authority areas, in the case of the north within South Oxfordshire. The objective of these park and ride hubs is to promote sustainable travel, as is the case with the park and ride network in Oxford which has successfully operated for many years.

The delivery of these park and ride facilities would help to reduce demand for traffic crossing the River Thames; and would therefore help to alleviate some of the issues set out in the Strategy. However, they would not resolve the issues of sometimes slow and unreliable bus journey times which are impacted by congestion over the existing river crossings, nor would they provide an alternative route for through-traffic which is not seeking to stop within Reading.

In order to address these issues, the Cross Thames Travel scheme has been included in the Strategy; with a key element being the provision of a new crossing over the River Thames. The Petition is focused on this and sets out a number of concerns relating to rationale, process, transparency, scheme impact and deliverability.

Taking these concerns in turn, the rationale for including a new river crossing is set out within the Strategy. This includes our commitment to work constructively with partners to undertake a fundamental review of travel options across the River Thames, with the objective of enhancing sustainable choices and helping to reduce the negative impacts of traffic congestion, including from through-traffic. The Strategy supports the inclusion of public transport priority, segregated pedestrian and cycle routes, and mitigation

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measures in the surrounding areas as core elements of a new river crossing scheme. A further element for investigation is an orbital route to link the new crossing with the A4074 (Upper Woodcote Road), which has been included in the Strategy to specifically respond to the concerns raised by partners through the consultation process regarding the impact of a new crossing on existing road traffic in Oxfordshire.

In terms of process, the Strategy has been produced in line with the relevant Government guidance; three separate consultations have been undertaken after which feedback has been reviewed, reported and carefully considered; and approval to proceed has been obtained from a Council Committee at each key stage of its development.

The Strategy and accompanying reports are transparent in recognising the views received against including a new river crossing in the Strategy. In fact, the Strategy goes so far as to specifically include the Motions of Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council regarding a new river crossing, which are included within the main Strategy document itself. In addition, the text in the Strategy regarding opposition to a new river crossing has been further strengthened in response to consultation feedback received during the development of the strategy.

Regarding scheme impact and deliverability, the Strategy is clear that further work will be required to develop options and explore costs to improve cross river travel. This would include a full range of impact assessments and the development of appropriate mitigation measures. It is proposed that this work would update and build upon previous joint work which has been undertaken by the Cross Thames Travel group, with the objective of developing deliverable solutions to the issues as set out within the Strategy.

Finally, it is important to add that further options are included within the Demand Management section of the Strategy. These also seek to help address the issues resulting from traffic congestion in Reading, including from through-traffic. Again, the rationale for this scheme, the issues it is seeking to address, key considerations for further work and the differing views expressed through the consultations on this area are set out within the Strategy documentation. This further demonstrates the Council's commitment to work with our partners to investigate all options which would enable the overall objectives of the Strategy; to create healthier, greener and more equal communities in Reading, to be achieved.

17. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

	Questioner	Subject	Answer
1.	Tony Page	Allocation of Councillors to Committee Places	Cllr Terry
2.	Ann Dally	Pension Credit	Cllr Emberson
3.	Wendy Rooke	Plant Based Treaty	Cllr Ennis

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

18. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

	Questioner	Subject	Answer
1.	Cllr Moore	Local Government Finance Settlement	Cllr Terry
2.	Cllr Moore	Winter Fuel Payment	Cllr Emberson
3.	Cllr White	Labour Cutting Winter Fuel Payments to Pensioners	Cllr Emberson
4.	Cllr White	Reading Council Call Centre Wait Times Too High	Cllr Emberson
5.	Cllr McCann	Can the Council Save Whitley CDA	Cllr Terry

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

19. IRREGULARITIES ON TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDERS

The Monitoring Officer presented a report setting out issues with the making of historic Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs), which had not been properly made and implemented, with the result that their enforcement and the collection of payments in relation to them was unlawful as the Council had no legal basis to issue Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs). The report set out the issues, the known financial and legal implications as well as the proposed next steps to address the matters.

The Chief Executive also addressed the Council and commented on the Action Plan set out in Appendix 4, which had been developed to address the issues that had arisen with the making of TROs. Delivery of the Action Plan would be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee to ensure there was councillor and public scrutiny of the progress being made to rectify the situation.

The Council noted that the report had the internal audit report from the Chief Internal Auditor attached as a confidential appendix. The Monitoring Officer stated the main public report covered the issues raised and Councillors were therefore asked to indicate if they wished to discuss the confidential Appendix, which would require the removal of the press and public from the meeting. The Council decided that it would be able to debate the item fully without going into private session.

The report had the following documents appended:

- Appendix 1 Confidential Audit Report
- Appendix 2 List of TROs incorrectly made
- Appendix 3 Proposed scheme of Restitution
- Appendix 4 Action Plan

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

Resolved -

- (1) That the report be noted, including the Internal Audit Investigation Report at Confidential Appendix 1 and the schedule of errors requiring restitution in Appendix 2;
- (2) That the Scheme of Restitution set out at Appendix 3 to the report be approved;
- (3) That the Audit and Governance Committee be delegated authority to monitor the effectiveness of the Scheme of Restitution and to close it when it was satisfied that it had achieved its objectives;
- (4) That the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection be delegated to keep the Scheme of Restitution at Appendix 3 to the report under review and to make any amendments as may be necessary to it, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport, the Director of Finance and the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services;
- (5) That the Action Plan be approved as set out at Appendix 4 to the report;
- (6) That the Audit and Governance Committee be delegated authority to monitor delivery of the Action Plan as set out at Appendix 4 to the report;
- (7) That the Council's decision not to move a motion to exclude the press and public, pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), to enable a specific debate on the detail of the internal audit report from the Chief Internal Auditor be noted.

20. TRAFFIC REGULATION ORDER RECTIFICATION

The Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services submitted a report summarising the issues that had been discovered with the making of historic Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs), which had not been properly made and implemented and recommending officers undertake the necessary legislative processes to rectify the issues to ensure enforceability of the restrictions. The report outlined details of those TROs which needed to be rectified. The rectification process would involve consultation, consideration of objections and then confirming whether the order would or would not be made. Since the errors had come to light, officers had been working to confirm where they had occurred and had started work on the process to bring forward new TROs.

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The following motion was moved by Councillor Ennis and seconded by Councillor Lanzoni and CARRIED:

Resolved -

- (1) That the content of the report be noted;**
- (2) That the Assistant Director of Environment and Commercial Services be authorised, in consultation with the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services, to undertake a statutory consultation for the proposals contained within paragraph 3.9 and Appendix 1 of the report, in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996 and subject to there being no objections received following the statutory consultation, to arrange for the order to be made and sealed so the restrictions could be implemented;**
- (3) That the Assistant Director of Environment and Commercial Services be authorised to make minor amendments to any of the proposals if required prior to the implementation of any of the traffic regulation orders, in consultation with the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services, the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport and the Chair of the Traffic Management Sub Committee;**
- (4) That, should any of the schemes receive objection(s) during the statutory consultation period, the Acting Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services be given delegated authority, in consultation with the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services, the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport and the Chair of the Traffic Management Sub Committee, to consider and make an officer decision regarding implementation, or otherwise, of each Traffic Regulation Order;**
- (5) That decisions regarding the outcomes for each Traffic Regulation Order be reported to a future meeting of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee.**

21. READING TRANSPORT STRATEGY 2040 - FINAL FOR ADOPTION

Further to Minute 7 of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee held on 27 June 2024, the Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the adoption of the Reading Transport Strategy 2040. The report set out the results of the latest statutory consultation and summarised the changes that had been made to the Strategy taking into account feedback that had been received during the consultation process. The report recommended the adoption of the final version of the Strategy as the new statutory Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the Borough. A summary of the consultation responses was attached to the report at Appendix A and a final version of the Reading Transport Strategy 2040 was attached at Appendix B.

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The following motion was moved by Councillor Ennis and seconded by Councillor Cross and CARRIED:

Resolved -

- (1) That the feedback that had been received through the statutory consultation on the Reading Transport Strategy 2040, and the subsequent amendments that had been made to the Strategy to incorporate that feedback as included at Appendix A to the report; be noted;
- (2) That the Strategic Environment, Transport and Planning Committee's recommendation to approve adoption of the Reading Transport Strategy 2040, as included at Appendix B, as the new statutory Local Transport Plan for the borough for the period 2024-40, be agreed.

22. PRE-SUBMISSION DRAFT LOCAL PLAN PARTIAL UPDATE

The Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the statutory requirement to undertake a review of a local plan within five years of adoption. The Reading Borough Local Plan had been adopted in 2019 and a partial update was being carried out in accordance with this requirement. The Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on 23rd March 2023 (Minute 36 refers) considered the Local Development Scheme which set out the timetable for production of planning policy including the partial update of the Local Plan. The first consultation stage, Consultation on Scope and Content, was agreed by Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport on 15th November 2023 (Minute 20 refers), and consultation was carried out between 27th November 2023 and 31st January 2024. On 27th June 2024, Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee had agreed an amended Local Development Scheme, which included the timetable for producing planning policy documents, including the Local Plan Partial Update (Minute 5 refers). This identified that the next consultation stage, known as Regulation 19 or Pre-Submission stage, would begin in November 2024.

The report therefore recommended undertaking consultation on the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan Partial Update, which was included as Appendix 1 and the proposed Policies Map, showing the spatial extent of relevant policies in the plan, which was included as Appendix 2. The report further recommended agreeing the responses to representations received on the Consultation on Scope and Content, which were attached at Appendix 3. Council's agreement was also being sought confirming that the adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI, adopted 2014) remained up-to-date for the purposes of local plan making and should be used as the basis for carrying out consultation. A review of the degree to which the SCI was up-to-date was set out in Appendix 4.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Leng and seconded by Councillor Gavin and CARRIED:

Resolved -

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- (1) That the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan Partial Update (Appendix 1) and accompanying Policies Map (Appendix 2) be approved for consultation;
- (2) That the responses to representations on the Local Plan Partial Update Consultation on Scope and Content (Appendix 3) be agreed;
- (3) That the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection be authorised to make any minor amendments necessary to the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan Partial Update and accompanying Policies Map in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets, prior to consultation;
- (4) That Council agree that the Statement of Community Involvement (adopted 2014) remains an up-to-date basis for carrying out consultation on the Local Plan Partial Update as informed by the Review of the SCI in Appendix 4 to the report;
- (5) That the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan Partial Update and accompanying Policies Map be authorised for submission to the Secretary of State should no significant issues arise during community involvement that would necessitate a substantive change to the document;
- (6) That the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport and Public Protection be authorised to make any non-substantive amendments necessary to the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan Partial Update and accompanying Policies Map in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Planning and Assets, prior to their submission to the Secretary of State and prior to the consequent Public Examination of the Plan;
- (7) That the Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan Partial Update and accompanying Policies Map be brought back to a future meeting of Council should significant issues arise during community involvement that would necessitate a substantive change to the document.

23. AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

Further to Minute 5 of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 17 July 2024, the Chief Auditor submitted a report on the first Annual Report of the Audit & Governance Committee assessing how it had: complied with the 2022 CIPFA Position Statement; and discharged its responsibilities. The Annual Report also included a self-assessment of the Committee's performance. The Annual Report was appended to the report and set out:

- The Committee's remit and membership;
- Areas covered and work of the committee during 2022/23;
- Training undertaken by members during the year;

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- A summary of an assessment of committee effectiveness carried out by Committee members and key officers with more detailed analysis provided in Appendix 2 to the report;
- An update on progress since the initial assessment against the CIPFA guidance was carried out; and
- Possible areas identified for improvement.

The report stated that the Audit and Governance Committee's terms of reference had been amended to ensure they reflected best practice, as detailed in CIPFA's Position Statement and associated guidance. This included the removal of the Committee's delegated authority to approve the Council's annual Statement of Accounts and that the Committee would report to Council on its findings, conclusions, and recommendations on the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk and internal control frameworks, financial reporting arrangements, and internal and external audit functions, and on the committee's performance. Some areas for improvement had been identified and these were outlined in section 7 of Appendix 1 to the report.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Emberson and seconded by Councillor Williams and CARRIED:

Resolved -

That the Audit and Governance Committee's Annual Report, as attached as an Appendix to the report, be endorsed as a fair reflection of its performance over the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

24. CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS REGARDING FEES AND CHARGES

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report on changing the existing yearly cycle of setting Fees and Charges, which was coordinated as part of the annual budget setting process. The report stated that Services may find it appropriate to recommend changes to Fees and Charges at different points in the year to enable them to be responsive to events as they occurred. For the sake of efficiency, it was suggested that the Constitution should be clarified to confirm that whilst Fees and Charges would remain as an annual item at Budget Council, the Standing Committees would be able to make in-year changes to Fees and Charges within their terms of reference. Policy Committee would also have a default power to be able to make in-year changes to Fees and Charges on behalf of the Standing Committees, for any charges across the Council.

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

Resolved -

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- (1) That the proposed amendments to the Constitution to allow Policy Committee, or the other Standing Committees, to make in-year changes to Fees and Charges be agreed;
- (2) That the wording of paragraph 2.1.3 (A) (4) in the Budget and Policy Framework be changed, from:
“Changes to Fees and Charges” to:
“A review of Fees and Charges in the context of the Council’s overall Medium Term Financial Strategy, including any changes required”;
- (3) That the Terms of Reference for Policy Committee be amended at paragraph (5) (p.61 of the Constitution), the list of Key Decision areas, to add: “Changes to Fees and Charges”;
- (4) That the Terms of Reference for each of the other Standing Committees (the Adult Social Care, Children’s Services and Education Committee, the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee and the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee) be amended, to add, before the Delegation to Officers: “Changes to Fees and Charges”;
- (5) That the Proper Officer Appointments section of Part 3 of the Constitution under the section of “Registration Services Act 1953” be amended as follows:
 - In the third box to remove the words, “(the Proper Officer is called the Superintendent Registrar)”, and
 - In the fourth box to delete the words, “Superintendent Registrar appointed by the Head of Community Services” and replace with the words, “Registration and Bereavement Services Manager”.

25. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT AMENDMENT

Further to Minute 17 of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 25 September 2024, the Director of Finance submitted a report on the activity of the Treasury Management function during the first quarter of the year for the period 1st April 2024 to 30th June 2024. The report stated that the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management 2021 recommended that the Committee should be updated on treasury management activities at least quarterly. The Committee was advised that there had been full compliance during this period with the Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS), as agreed by Council on 27 February 2024. The report stated that the approved Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024/25 included an upper limit of 20% on the maturity structure of fixed rate borrowing for 2024/25. In order to give a greater degree of flexibility and to align with the approved Borrowing Strategy of currently utilising temporary and short-term borrowing in lieu of taking out longer term fixed borrowing whilst interest rates remained high, it was recommended to raise this upper limit to 100%.

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

Resolved -

That the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024/25 (Amended) be approved as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

26. 2021/22 AND 2022/23 DRAFT STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

Further to Minute 19 of the Audit & Governance Committee held on 25 September 2024, the Director of Finance submitted a report seeking delegated authority to finalise and approve the 2021/22 and 2022/23 Statement of Accounts. In doing so it should be noted that the accounts for these years would not be audited as they would have been in the past, and that this was part of the Government's agreed approach to enable the local government audit sector to recover from a significant national backlog in audit opinions. The auditor's responsibilities to produce Value for Money (VFM) assessments for each year was still retained, and there was a level of independent assurance that could be obtained from that process. The report also provided an update on the process for concluding the Council's 2020/21 and 2021/22 Statements of Accounts.

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

Resolved -

That the Director of Finance be given delegated authority to finalise and approve the 2021/22 and 2022/23 Statement of Accounts.

27. WINTER FUEL PAYMENT

Pursuant to Notice, a motion was moved by Councillor Ballsdon and seconded by Councillor Goss.

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Gittings and seconded by Councillor Lanzoni and CARRIED:

'Delete all after "This Council notes" and insert:

"That the winter fuel allowance was first introduced by the last Labour Government in 1997 as part of a range of measures that lifted over a million pensioners out of poverty.

The Labour Government findings that the previous Conservative Government had hidden £22 billion of net pressures on Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL), with Richard Hughes, Chair, Office for Budget Responsibility, stating in his letter 29 July 2024 his 'concerns about transparency and credibility of the existing arrangements within government for forecasting and controlling the 40% of public expenditure with DEL'.

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The decision to means test the Winter Fuel Allowance came as a direct result of the discovery by the new government of this £22 billion black hole or overspend for the current financial year.

The new Labour Government has confirmed it is committed to maintaining the Triple Lock which will mean the basic state pension will rise by £460 next year and an estimated £1700 over the course of the next Parliament.

The government has announced it is extending its Household Support Fund to a total of £421 million with Reading receiving over £1,130 million.

This Council believes:

That after 14 years of disastrous Tory government, which has left the nation's finances and public services in a sorry state, that economic stability is the urgent priority for the new government.

Consequently, finite government resources are better directed by targeting the most vulnerable, including pensioners, who will also benefit from Labour's commitment to cut waiting lists in the NHS and the establishment of Great British Energy to help cut the costs of heating bills and ensure energy security.

This Council:

Has already written to 175 households who it believes are entitled to pension credits, encouraging them to apply, teaming up with Age UK to ensure they are supported to do so.

Will be utilising the Household Support Fund to financially assist those in most urgent need of help with energy bills, including for low income residents above the state pension age. This will see 1,100 pensioners receiving £200 this winter.

Continue to Promote our Energy Support Scheme that offers practical advice and support to older people most at risk of being in a cold home such as available grants for home insulation and minor repairs to prevent draughts and other heat loss.

Has already started, and will continue, its social media and other campaigns to raise awareness of the support available to claim pension credits and household support grant, and other support that is available via the Council's 'Money Matter' page on the website and through local community and voluntary organisations."

Resolved -

This Council notes:

- **That the winter fuel allowance was first introduced by the last Labour Government in 1997 as part of a range of measures that lifted over a million pensioners out of poverty.**
- **The Labour Government findings that the previous Conservative Government had hidden £22 billion of net pressures on Departmental**

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Expenditure Limits (DEL), with Richard Hughes, Chair, Office for Budget Responsibility, stating in his letter 29 July 2024 his 'concerns about transparency and credibility of the existing arrangements within government for forecasting and controlling the 40% of public expenditure with DEL'.

- The decision to means test the Winter Fuel Allowance came as a direct result of the discovery by the new government of this £22 billion black hole or overspend for the current financial year.
- The new Labour Government has confirmed it is committed to maintaining the Triple Lock which will mean the basic state pension will rise by £460 next year and an estimated £1700 over the course of the next Parliament.
- The Government has announced it is extending its Household Support Fund to a total of £421 million with Reading receiving over £1,130 million.

This Council believes:

- That after 14 years of disastrous Tory government, which has left the nation's finances and public services in a sorry state, that economic stability is the urgent priority for the new government.
- Consequently, finite government resources are better directed by targeting the most vulnerable, including pensioners, who will also benefit from Labour's commitment to cut waiting lists in the NHS and the establishment of Great British Energy to help cut the costs of heating bills and ensure energy security.

This Council:

- Has already written to 175 households who it believes are entitled to pension credits, encouraging them to apply, teaming up with Age UK to ensure they are supported to do so.
- Will be utilising the Household Support Fund to financially assist those in most urgent need of help with energy bills, including for low income residents above the state pension age. This will see 1,100 pensioners receiving £200 this winter.
- Continue to Promote our Energy Support Scheme that offers practical advice and support to older people most at risk of being in a cold home such as available grants for home insulation and minor repairs to prevent draughts and other heat loss.
- Has already started, and will continue, its social media and other campaigns to raise awareness of the support available to claim pension credits and household support grant, and other support that is available

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via the Council's 'Money Matter' page on the website and through local community and voluntary organisations.

(The meeting closed at 9.30 pm)