

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 13 NOVEMBER 2024

Present: Councillor Eden (Chair);

Councillors Hoskin (Vice-Chair), Asare, Ayub, Barnett-Ward, Cross, Dennis, Gavin, Hacker, McCann, Naz, Rowland, Thompson, Williams and Yeo

Apologies: Councillors

7. MINUTES OF THE HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS & LEISURE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 10 JULY 2024

The Minutes of the meeting of 10 July 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.

8. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meetings were submitted:

Community Safety Partnership – 18 April and 18 July 2024.

Resolved - That the Minutes be received.

9. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
Jonathan Moore	Fly Tipping at Kensington Park Bottle Bank	Cllr Rowland

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

10. READING FESTIVAL UPDATE

The Committee received a pre-recorded presentation from Festival Republic, who were unable to attend in person, which gave an update on the 2024 Reading Festival.

The presentation set out some of the successful initiatives which included the Assistance, Information and Response (AIR) Hubs, a ban on campfires, the various safeguarding schemes, and signage around the site. Festival Republic also reported on issues that had been experienced this year, including an increase in noise complaints, which had mostly been due to the sound system for the Chevron stage and been made worse by the windy conditions. Festival Republic had worked with Decathlon this year to encourage festival goers to return unwanted tents in exchange for a store voucher. Festival Republic reported on the headline figures for the event, including initiatives such as safety, zero waste and the Green Events Code of Practice.

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The Committee discussed the presentation and raised further questions for Festival Republic to respond to when they attended the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 11 March 2025, including:

- How noise disturbance would be dealt with, given the increase in complaints this year;
- Encouraging festival goers to not abandon tents (although the Committee did acknowledge that there had been a significant number of tents that had been damaged due to the high winds at this year's event);
- Noise clashes within the arena due to the location of the Chevron Stage;
- Provision of an exit to Oxford Road to allow access to local facilities;
- Front of House drugs testing was useful not only to check that any drugs were safe but also as a way to discourage drugs use in general;
- Key Performance Indicators could be used for measuring the effectiveness of welfare provision on site.

Resolved - That the presentation be noted and that Festival Republic attend the next meeting of the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee to be held on 11 March 2025.

11. READING MUSEUM UPDATE

The Committee considered a report that provided an update on progress made by the Museum Service in several areas that were part of the Museum's Forward Plan that had been approved by the Committee on 6 July 2021 (Minute 14 refers). The progress included successfully widening access through in person and digital engagement, work with schools, outreach into community spaces and the award of Museum of Sanctuary status. The report sought approval of the Reading Museum Access Policy 2025-2030, (attached at Appendix 1) which was a requirement of the Accreditation Standard for UK Museums and would allow the policy to be included in the Museum's Forward Plan which would be submitted to the Committee in March 2025.

The report set out details of the key access activities and achievements across the nine Access Policy themes: Consultation and audiences, Community links and outreach, Premises, Collections, Information (including online access), Learning and programming, Customer care, Staff and training and Financial access.

The report explained that a review of the current Access Policy had been undertaken and only minor factual changes had been required to ensure that the Policy conformed to requirements and was fit for purpose going forward. These changes included an updated section 3 to reflect changes to the local and national policy context, the removal of references to actions required after Covid lockdowns in section 4, revision of 5.5 to reflect revised provision in basic English and adding reference to RBC's new Inclusion & Diversity Strategy in 5.8. The Reading Museum Access Policy 2025-2030 would ensure that the Museum continued to meet the Accreditation standard for UK Museums and could use the embedded principles to support future gallery developments, ensuring that access to the nationally significant collections at the Museum were broadened as much as possible and in line with updated priorities and thinking.

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Resolved -

- (1) That the successes of making the Museum and its collections inclusive and accessible to Reading's communities, including over 18,500 school students annually participating in its learning programmes, its acclaimed Windrush partnership exhibitions and the Museums Partnership Reading (MPR) Museum on Wheels outreach programme be noted;**
- (2) That the recent success in becoming a Museum of Sanctuary, recognising its commitment to the City of Sanctuary UK vision to ensure that it was a welcoming place of safety for all, be noted;**
- (3) That the Reading Museum Access Policy 2025-2030 be approved, to ensure that it continued to meet the Accreditation standard for UK Museums;**
- (4) That the Museum's commitment to maximising inclusive public access and identified how this would be achieved across the Service be noted.**

12. READING LIBRARIES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Committee received a report which reviewed the progress made by the Library Service since the strategic priorities had been approved by the Committee on 10 November 2021 (Minute 23 refers). Substantial progress had been made to develop the Service, alongside two large grant funding awards, and record levels of income. New services had been introduced, the budget had been maintained and increasing numbers of residents were using our services. The report also provided an update on the Central Library project and recommended the relocation of the Toy Library to Palmer Park Leisure Centre & Stadium.

The report set out achievements against the five strategic priorities: supporting our communities as we recovered from the pandemic, helping children and young people, improving access to online services, supporting improvements in health, wellbeing and literacy and bringing arts, culture and heritage into library spaces.

The report explained that the Central Library project aimed to provide an updated facility, with provision of books, ICT and work study space, much better provision for children and improved toilets and security compared to the existing library. The design for the library had now been agreed following feedback received during consultation and would be shared soon.

The report also explained that, following feedback on the Central Library consultation, the Library Service had investigated the future of the provision of the Toy Library. The report proposed that the Toy Library be relocated to space at Palmer Park Leisure Centre and Stadium. This would provide:

- More space for items and customers;

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- A better service with better access and collection for customers, particularly when borrowing larger items;
- A further opportunity for students within the Reading College Lifeskills Faculty, in addition to the successful Palmer Park Library Partnership.

The report added that there would be no additional cost to the Service and that the aim was for the Toy Library to open in the new location in September 2025.

Resolved:

- (1) That the progress made by the Library Service in line with the strategic priorities set in 2021, including the recovery in borrowing to pre Covid levels, linking of libraries into the Speech and Language Pathway, the new Service branding, new library app for customers, and improved digital device lending offer be noted;**
- (2) That the progress made to date with the new Central Library project be noted;**
- (3) That the Toy Library provision be moved to Palmer Park Leisure Centre & Stadium and the Assistant Director Culture in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Leisure and Culture be authorised to finalise arrangements for the move.**

13. DISCRETIONARY LICENSING IN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

Further to Minute 24 of the meeting held on 21 February 2024, the Committee received a report on improving housing conditions and management in the private rented sector by implementing a discretionary licensing scheme. The report examined the available evidence and presented options for future service delivery for private sector housing regulation, including the implementation of discretionary licensing schemes. The aim of the schemes would be to drive change and provide better homes for residents, which national evidence showed had positive impacts on physical and mental health and for families, better educational outcomes. The Council currently operated a licensing scheme for larger houses in multiple occupation with five or more occupants, this was the national mandatory licensing scheme. Discretionary licensing under the Housing Act 2004 contained provisions for the Council to designate discretionary licensing schemes, of which the larger ones would require Secretary of State approval.

The report stated that a statutory consultation exercise with residents, private landlords, businesses and other key stakeholders had taken place on proposals for Boroughwide additional licensing and a phased introduction of selective licensing. The areas to be included in a potential scheme were based on the evidence provided by a Stock Condition Report. The evidence gathered from Stock Condition Survey, and from the consultation exercise found:

- That nearly 40% of the housing stock was in the private rented sector.

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- That there were over 3,000 houses in multiple occupation (HMO).
- 37% of HMOs were likely to have serious hazards (under the Housing, Health & Safety Rating System).

Following the consultation and evaluation of a range of evidence, the report recommended that the Council should implement a Boroughwide Additional Licensing Scheme alongside the phased implementation of a Selective Licensing Scheme. This would drive up conditions and improve the management of the private rented sector. The recommendation for the phasing of the schemes would take into account:

- The size of any scheme as this would determine whether Secretary of State permission was required;
- The significant limitations in the labour market around qualified Environmental Health staff to undertake the work;
- whether it would enable a focussed and targeted approach to achieving the outcomes.

Consideration had been given to the consultation responses, including the practicalities of setting up additional and selective licensing schemes, which had resulted in the following proposals:

- implement selective licensing of all rented properties in Battle ward with the date for designation postponed to 2027 to reduce the officer resource required before that date.
- deferring the decision to include Park and Redlands wards to allow the implementation and evaluation of earlier phases.
- to retain a Boroughwide Additional Licensing Scheme, though the date of implementation was likely to be later in 2025 to allow for recruitment and other preparations (see timetable in Appendix 3).
- to agree the licence fees as set out in paragraph 1.9 and Appendix 2 of the draft report for the Additional (HMO) Licensing Scheme and apply a discount for properties which were part of the Council's Rent Guarantee Scheme.

The report had appended the financial implications; proposed fees; indicative timetable; fees comparison; consultation responses; and an evaluation of the options for an additional licensing scheme designating a HMO licensing scheme only and a selective licensing scheme designating a selective licensing scheme only; and a summary of the Renters Reform Bill.

Resolved:

- (1) That the consultation outcome on the implementation of additional and selective licensing schemes in Reading be reviewed and acknowledged;**
- (2) That a phased implementation of discretionary licensing schemes consisting of a Boroughwide Additional Licensing Scheme alongside the**

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phased implementation of a Selective Licensing Scheme commencing with Battle ward be approved;

- (3) That the proposed timescales set out in Appendix 3 to the report be noted and the Assistant Director, Planning, Transport & Public Protection, in consultation with the Lead Councillor and the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services be authorised to make such designations;**
- (4) That the resource required to implement the schemes, particularly staffing as set out in section 13 and Appendix 1 to the report be noted.**
- (5) That the Additional HMO Licence fee set out in Appendix 2 to the report be approved.**

14. WINTER SERVICE PLAN 2024-25

The Committee received a report which set out details of the outputs that had been delivered by the Winter Service Plan 2023-24, of the Winter Service Plan review that had been carried out to ensure compliance with the Highway Act 1980 and 'Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice' and sought approval for the Winter Service Plan 2024-2025. A copy of the Winter Service Plan 2024-2025 was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the 2023-2024 winter season had been relatively mild overall although interspersed with colder spells. However, there had been numerous occasions when the temperature reached the trigger point for precautionary salting action, (below 1°C and predicted to go below freezing), resulting in 34 primary runs and three secondary runs. The colder spells had not been severe or prolonged enough for activation of the Snow Plan. There had been no issues with salt supply/delivery which had enabled the contractor to maintain stock levels throughout the winter season. There had been no issues with the contractor replenishing the grit bins as and when required. The winter decision making process to determine when to salt had worked well during the last winter season and the Vaisala weather stations had provided the correct data for informed decisions to be made.

The report added that the joint arrangement/agreement with Wokingham Borough Council, through their Consultants, Volker Highways, for providing the decision-making service, had worked well and delivered against the set key performance indicators during the 2023-2024 winter season. The Winter Service Plan 2023-2024 had provided a robust service for the duration of the winter period with no disruption to the primary and secondary road network during the season. With the changing climate leading to milder, wetter winters, the Highways and Drainage Team were reviewing the gully emptying regimes to ensure that they were clear and running to avoid localised flooding issues.

A review of the Winter Service Plan 2023-2024 had been carried out and the main points, including updates for the Winter Service Plan 2024-2025 were summarised in the report.

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Resolved -

- (1) That the outputs delivered by the Winter Service Plan 2023-2024 be noted;**
- (2) That the Winter Service Plan review carried out to ensure compliance with the Highways Act 1980 and 'Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice' be noted;**
- (3) That the Winter Service Plan 2024-2025 be approved.**

15. STREETLIGHTING MAINTENANCE CONTRACT 2-YEAR EXTENSION

The Committee received a report which gave an update on the progress of the Council's Streetlighting Maintenance programme using the Peterborough Council Framework Contract, as approved at Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee on 7 July 2022 (Minute 12 refers). The report also sought delegated authority to extend the contract with Peterborough Council's term maintenance contractor.

Section 3 of the report explained that the Council aimed to provide a streetlighting maintenance service to illuminate the public highway to provide a well-lit environment, reduce the fear of crime and support a sustainable highway network all year round. The Council was permitted to access the Peterborough Council Framework contract which ran to the end of March 2028. This framework enabled Reading to access their term maintenance contractor currently being provided by Milestone Infrastructure Limited who had supported the Council with updating our streetlighting asset inventory and responded to lighting maintenance requirements which met our statutory obligation to maintain our existing lighting assets on the public highway. The current contract rates would apply to the extended contract and remain in place until the annual inflation indexation on 1st April each year. The report proposed that the Council should continue to use the Peterborough Framework Contract for a further two-year period, providing time to prepare a full open tender for the maintenance of the Council's streetlighting assets.

Resolved:

- (1) That the existing Framework Contract with Peterborough Council be extended for a further two-year period for the Maintenance of Reading's Streetlighting assets effective 1 January 2025 until 31 December 2026;**
- (2) That the existing short-term (up to two-years) contract with Peterborough Council's term maintenance contractor be extended, in accordance with the Council's Procurement Rules & Public Contracts Regulations 2015;**
- (3) That the Executive Director for Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety, the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services and the Director of Finance be authorised to enter**

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into relevant contracts required to extend the Streetlighting Maintenance Service contract, as per section 3 of the report.

16. PROGRAMME OF WORK TO COUNCIL HOUSING STOCK 2024-25

The Committee received a report which set out the maintenance work programme for Council homes for the current financial year. The Council's programme continued to have a key focus on low carbon initiatives. The planned work programme for council homes had been impacted by market conditions in securing capacity to complete works. Financial assumptions had been updated as a result, as outlined in Appendix 1, which provided details of the updated programmes of work and associated budgets for the Council's HRA Housing Stock 2024/2025. Appendix 2 to the report provided details of the works to the General Fund Housing Stock 2024/2025 and Appendix 3 gave a breakdown of the programmes of work by ward.

Resolved:

- (1) That the planned maintenance work programme for Council homes for 2024/25 be noted;**
- (2) That the Assistant Director of Housing Landlord Services in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing be authorised to: (a) tender; and (b) enter into all necessary contracts for individual schemes that begin within the 2024/25 work programme as set out in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report subject to sufficient funding being available in the approved Budget to meet the cost of the schemes.**

17. RBC LANDLORD SERVICE UPDATE 2024-25

The Committee received a report which provided an update on Housing Landlord Service performance and key achievements delivered within the 2023-2024 financial year. The report provided assurance that Reading's Housing Landlord Services was delivering the strategic objective of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 to deliver improved outcomes for current and future tenants of social housing against the following five consumer standards:

- Neighbourhood and Community Standard
- Safety and Quality Standard
- Tenancy Standard
- Transparency, Influence and Accountability (including Tenant Satisfaction Measures)
- Consumer standards code of practice

The report also set out details of key achievements during 2023-24, tenant complaints, the tenant satisfaction survey and tenant satisfaction measures, and the Service Improvement Plan.

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Resolved:

That the Housing Landlord Service Performance and key achievements delivered within the 2023/24 financial year be noted, and the proposed outcomes of the service improvement plan against the consumer standards be acknowledged.

(The meeting closed at 8.43 pm)