

POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 7 APRIL 2025

Present: Councillor Terry (Chair);
Councillors Leng (Vice-Chair), Barnett-Ward, Emberson, Ennis, Griffith, McEwan, Thompson, White and Yeo

Apologies: Councillors Gittings, Rowland and R Singh

74. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

75. DELEGATED DECISIONS

It was requested that the expected timescale for the delegated decision to be made be added to all the decisions.

76. PETITIONS AND QUESTIONS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by members of the public:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Sue Sibany-King	Local Government Pension Scheme	Cllr Terry
2.	Sue Sibany-King	Local Government Pension Scheme	Cllr Terry

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

77. THAMES VALLEY POLICE

Matthew Barber, Thames Valley Police (TVP) Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC), Jason Hogg, TVP Chief Constable and Chief Superintendent Felicity Parker attended the meeting to give presentations and answer questions from members of the Committee.

The PCC summarised his areas of focus for 2025 which included information on funding, policing numbers, the increase in neighbourhood police officers, performance relating to the retail crime strategy and shoplifting, funding to the community safety partnership and tackling antisocial behaviour. The Chief Constable provided information on subjects including policing and staff numbers, improvements in recruitment and retention of staff, Force Review update and savings, development of the Neighbourhood Policing App and improvements in contact management performance. The presentation by the Chief Superintendent covered statistics for the Reading area for the 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 period, this included a 16% solved crime rate, work to tackle shoplifting, residential burglary, domestic abuse, and community work at Hexham Road Estate, Reading town centre and Coronation Square.

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The Committee asked a number of questions on subjects which included on police resourcing and restructure, dealing with drug abusers and drug dealers, anti-social behaviour, illegal mooring, supporting Reading Water Festival, domestic abuse, vehicle crime, bicycle theft, diversity in the workplace, drug treatment services, Community Protection Notices, partnership working and attendance to meetings.

Resolved –

That the Thames Valley Police PCC, Chief Constable and Chief Superintendent thanked for their presentations.

78. FLEXIBLE RESPONSE SERVICE FOR ROUGH SLEEPING / HOUSING FIRST AND COUPLES MOVE-ON ACCOMMODATION 2025/26

The Committee received a report seeking approval for the Rough Sleeping Initiatives Team to award a 12-month extension to St Mungo's to deliver a Flexible Response Service for Rough Sleeping support contract and a Housing First and Couples Move-on Accommodation support contract.

The report explained that contracts continued to be grant funded by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) via the Rough Sleeping Prevention and Recovery Grant (formerly named Rough Sleeping Initiative) and the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP). The change in Government and delays in funding announcements created uncertainty around grant award and application process for 2025/26. An announcement had been made on the 18 December 2024 that no bidding process was required, and 2025/26 amounts were being awarded based on 2024/25 calculations.

The report noted that without prejudice scoping and costings negotiations for 2025/26 had been undertaken with existing provider St Mungo's and Value for Money regarding each contract value had been ensured. Extending contracts whilst awaiting future political and funding announcements, rather than undertaking a procurement exercise which would require extensive Officer resource across Council departments, provided value for money and was appropriate for these circumstances.

Revenue funding to continue these contracts beyond 4 June 2026 was uncertain. Central Government were expected to publish their new homelessness and rough sleeping strategy in Spring 2025. Overall grant funding amounts, guidance on how local authorities could bid and timelines for confirmation of award should follow. Once made clear, Officers would undertake an open tender exercise to procure support and accommodation contracts.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Interim Assistant Director for Strategic Housing, Housing Needs and Communities, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services and the Director of Finance, be delegated to:**

- a) **Award a 12-month contract extension with St Mungo's for the provision of a Flexible Response Service for Rough Sleeping up to the value of £0.673m.**
- b) **Award a 12-month contract extension with St Mungo's for the provision of Housing First and Couples Move-on Accommodation contract up to the value of £0.337m.**

79. DISPOSAL OF YEOMANRY HOUSE

The Committee considered a report on the outcome of a marketing exercise to dispose of the Yeomanry House and to dispose of the freehold interest on the terms set out in the associated report. The site was shown on a plan attached to the report at Appendix 1.

Yeomanry House had been declared surplus in accordance with the Council's Asset Strategy and was identified in the Capital Programme as a capital receipt targeted for 2025/26 and required to support the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The report explained that the property was a Grade 2 listed building and was previously used as the registry office. The property had been advertised as a suitable property for a variety of uses and, conditional and unconditional offers were sought. The site had been advertised on the open market through a local agent and with Reading Voluntary Action for a period of eight weeks. Five offers were received in total and the details of these, including tabulated summaries, were set out in the Confidential Appendices.

Following a comprehensive assessment it was proposed that the land be sold to Bidder A which was the highest offer and Best Consideration. The report noted that the other offers were either lower or carrying planning risk.

Resolved –

- (1) **That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director of Property and Asset management to sell the property to Bidder A on the terms set out in confidential appendix;**
- (2) **That if the purchaser did not perform to an acceptable timescale the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services be given delegated authority, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Lead Councillor for Planning & Assets, to:**
 - a) **Agree a revised offer price and terms where appropriate which secure Best Consideration;**
 - b) **Re-engage with other bidders as appropriate or remarket the property for disposal at Best Consideration.**

80. 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 items 81 and 82 below as it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to that Act.

81. DISPOSAL OF YEOMANRY HOUSE

The Committee received a confidential report and appendices on the proposed disposal of Yeomanry House (Minute 79 above refers). The report and appendices contained exempt information and were therefore submitted separately from the main report which had been considered in the public session.

82. DISPOSAL OF 16 BENNET ROAD

The Committee received a report on the proposed disposal of 16 Bennet Road and to seek authority to dispose of the freehold interest on the terms set out in the associated exempt report.

Resolved –

- (1) That the freehold interest in 16 Bennet Road be sold as set out in the associated exempt report;**
- (2) That, in the unlikely event that the proposed purchaser did not complete the transaction to an acceptable timescale, the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services be authorised, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Lead Councillor for Planning & Assets, to agree an alternative disposal to secure Best Consideration.**

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.02 pm)