

Summons and Agenda 27 January 2026

**Chief Executive
Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices, Bridge Street,
Reading, RG1 2LU**



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

Jackie Yates
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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To: All Members of the Council

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19 January 2026

Your contact is: Simon Hill - Committee Services

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Reading Borough Council to be held in the **Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Reading** on **Tuesday, 27 January 2026 at 6.30 pm**, when it is proposed to transact the business specified in the Agenda enclosed herewith.

Yours faithfully

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

A G E N D A

1. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

To receive any declarations of interest.

2. **MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

To receive Mayor's Announcements.

3. **MINUTES**

7 - 18

The Mayor to sign the Minutes of the proceedings of the previous Council Meetings.

4. **PETITIONS**

To receive petitions in accordance with Standing Order 8.

5. **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

Questions in accordance with Standing Order 9.

6. **QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

Questions in accordance with Standing Order 10.

Reports and Recommendations from Committees

7. **APPROVAL OF THE LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME AND THE COUNCIL TAX BASE FOR 2026/27**

19 - 24

8. **COUNCILLORS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME 2026/27**

25 - 32

9. **APPOINTMENT OF ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER AND RETURNING OFFICER**

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WEBCASTING NOTICE

Please note that this meeting may be filmed for live and/or subsequent broadcast via the Council's website. At the start of the meeting the Mayor will confirm if all or part of the meeting is being filmed. You should be aware that the Council is a Data Controller under the Data Protection Act. Data collected during a webcast will be retained in accordance with the Council's published policy.

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Present: Councillor Mpofu-Coles (Mayor);

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

Apologies: Councillors Dennis, Mitchell, DP Singh and Woodward

21. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor made the following announcement:

'Before we begin this evening's proceedings, I would like us all to dedicate some time to remember the victims of the attack at Heaton Park synagogue in Manchester on Thursday 2nd October. I am certain I speak for everyone here this evening when I say our thoughts and prayers go out to the families and loved ones of those killed or injured in this senseless act, which of course took place on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. Two people lost their lives, the impact will be felt by many more.

This horrible attack is also a reminder to us as elected representatives of our joint responsibility of taking a stand against reckless words and actions. The importance was brought home just 48 hours later, on Saturday 4th October, with the cowardly and appalling arson attempt at Peacehaven mosque.

Reading has a long history of welcoming different communities, of embracing inclusivity, of tolerance and of solidarity across all communities. Indeed, it is one of the reasons I chose to make it my home.

Recent events have emphasised to us once again the value of us all standing together against hatred in all its forms.

I invite everyone to stand with me now for a minute's silence to remember the victims of those recent events.'

The meeting stood for a minute's silence.

22. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 24 June 2025 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Mayor.

23. PETITIONS

Chloe Kidd presented a petition as follows:

Refurbish the Meadway Recreation Ground Play Area

A lone swing, an empty space where the zip line used to be, and an ageing slide – this is the children’s playground at the Meadway Rec in Tilehurst. The play area desperately needs some attention. It serves five local schools – two of them for children with special needs from across our town – and is easy to reach by bus or car. Playgrounds all over Reading have had a revamp, but this part of Tilehurst has been left behind.

We call upon Reading Borough Council to refurbish the dilapidated play area at the Meadway Recreation Ground in Tilehurst. Our children deserve better.

RESPONSE by Councillor Barnett-Ward Lead Councillor for Leisure and Culture:

Thank you for your petition, and the interest it demonstrates in Reading’s play facilities.

Reading Borough Council maintains over eighty parks and open spaces, most of which have play and/or sport facilities. Reading’s Labour council believes that every child deserves a place to play and we value every one of our play areas, from flagship facilities like the recently replaced playground at Prospect Park, to small but perfectly formed local play spaces where neighbours can meet and chat while their children blow off some steam.

Outdoor play is essential for children’s health and wellbeing, so we believe that money invested in play areas is money well spent. Four years ago we reviewed the condition and accessibility of all our playgrounds, prioritising them in order of need and launching an ambitious programme of replacement and refurbishment. This programme has delivered fantastic fun, free and accessible play across the borough. Just this year we have opened improved play and/or sports facilities at Victoria Recreation Ground, Emmer Green Recreation Ground, Westfield Recreation Ground, Oxford Road Recreation Ground, and Albert Road park, with many more delivered in the previous years. All our new play facilities are designed to be used by every child in Reading, so they are not only exciting and inviting, but also accessible to children and carers with mobility support needs, and they include sensory play areas. We consult the local community on playground proposals to ensure that each facility is tailored to the children and community who will use it.

This Council has invested over £1.7m in playground equipment since April 2024, with a number of schemes already delivered and the remainder underway and expected to complete this financial year. These projects are not paid by council tax: they are typically funded using developers’ contributions obtained via Community Infrastructure Levies (often referred to as CIL). The availability of this funding therefore depends not only on whether eligible developments are being built, but also where in the Borough they are being built. Areas of Reading with more large-scale development attract more CIL funding than areas with no big building projects.

With the first wave of new playgrounds successfully delivered we are currently finalising the priorities for the next refurbishment programme, so this petition is timely. Facilities will be prioritised on condition, use and accessibility of the current equipment, but availability of funding will also be a factor. I am pleased to be able to confirm that we have already identified

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Meadway Play Area as a high priority for refurbishment, but I am not currently able to give any guarantees on timescale as Council officers need to identify and secure £350,000 of eligible funding before the project can go ahead.

24. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

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

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	David Milne-Buckley	Armed Forces Act 2021	Cllr Emberson
2.	Caroline Basden	Junk Food Advertising	Cllr Eden
3.	Oliver White	Primary Schools in Emmer Green	Cllr Eden
4.	Shuet Han Tsui and Breege Brennan	Deterioration of No 10 Bus Service	Cllr Ennis

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

25. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by Councillors:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Cllr Williams	Vision Zero	Cllr Ennis
2.	Cllr Williams	Reading Cemetery Arch	Cllr Leng
3.	Cllr White	Genocide in Gaza and Berkshire Pension Fund	Cllr Terry
4.	Cllr Raj Singh	Reading Festival	Cllr Rowland
5.	Cllr Moore	QR Stickers on Bins	Cllr Rowland
6.	Cllr Raj Singh	Alleyways in Kentwood and Tilehurst	Cllr Rowland

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

26. READING YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2025/26

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report setting out for approval the Reading Youth Justice Plan 2025-26, which was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 placed a duty on the Local Authority to produce an annual Youth Justice Plan and that production of a plan was also a condition of the Youth Justice Board Grant. The production and sign-off of the Plan was overseen by the multi-agency Youth Justice Partnership through the independently-chaired Youth Justice Management Board. The 2025/26 Youth Justice plan had been signed off by the Youth Justice Management board and submitted to the Youth Justice board for England

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and Wales by the required deadline of 30 June 2025, and an update report on the Plan had also been submitted to the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee on 2 July 2025 (minute 10 refers).

The report noted that the Youth Justice Plan, as attached at Appendix 1, included a review of performance for 2024/25 and it summarised some of the notable performance updates. The priorities agreed by the Youth Justice Management Board for 2025/26 were:

- Reducing First Time Entrants
- Reducing Reoffending
- Reducing the use of custody
- Reducing ethnic disproportionality
- Reducing Serious Youth Violence
- Embedding Child First and Identity Development Practice as the practice model across the partnership
- Improving outcomes for victims of youth crime

Seeking to improve educational outcomes for children in the YJS cohort would also continue to cut across all seven priorities. It had been agreed to merge these targets with the HMIP inspection action plan, to form a single delivery plan for continuous improvement.

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

Resolved –

That the 2025/26 Youth Justice plan be approved.

27. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2025/26

The Executive Director of Resources submitted a report setting out the Council's policy on pay for 2025/26 and information about changes to pay scales for the Council's workforce. The Pay Policy Statement was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report explained that the Pay Policy Statement met the statutory duty to provide the Council with a description of the policy on staff remuneration for annual approval. It provided information on remuneration arrangements for staff directly employed by the Council, excluding staff in schools. The Statement was broadly unchanged from 2024/25 other than it had been updated with the recent nationally agreed pay settlements.

The following Motion was moved by Councillor Emberson and seconded by Councillor Terry and CARRIED:

Resolved –

That the Council note the Pay Policy statement for 2025/2026.

28. AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

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The Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee submitted a report setting out at Appendix 1 the Audit & Governance Committee annual report. A summary of feedback from Committee and key Officer surveys was attached to the report at Appendix 2.

The report noted that the Audit & Governance Committee annual report set out the Committee's remit and membership, areas covered and work of the Committee during 2024/25, training undertaken by members during the year, and a summary of an assessment of the Committee's effectiveness carried out by committee members and key Officers (a detailed analysis was attached at Appendix 2). The annual report also considered how the Committee had complied with the 2022 CIPFA Position Statement on Audit Committees and an update on the progress since the last assessment against the CIPFA guidance had been carried out. Possible areas identified for improvement and forthcoming plans were also outlined.

The report noted that generally the Audit and Governance Committee complied with the 2022 CIPFA Position Statement, although it did not have any independent members on the Committee and did not review the Annual Governance Statement during the year.

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

Resolved –

That the Audit & Governance Committee annual report be noted.

29. AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION - BUDGET & POLICY FRAMEWORK PROCEDURE RULES / FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The Director of Finance submitted a report setting out updated Budget & Policy Framework Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations for adoption. The revised Budget & Policy Framework Procedure Rules were attached to the report at Appendix 1 and the revised Financial Regulations at Appendix 2.

The report noted that Council was responsible for the adoption of the authority's budget framework, and for adopting the policy framework, comprised of the policies, plans and strategies set out in Part 3 of the Constitution. Other policies, plans and strategies, and any successor documents, could be adopted, approved, amended, modified, varied or revoked by the Committee to which the subject function had been delegated, or by the Policy Committee. The Financial Regulations set out the financial policies and procedures and the framework for managing the Council's financial affairs. The Budget & Policy Framework Procedure Rules and the Financial Regulations had been reviewed and updated in order to bring them up to date and to simplify where possible.

At the meeting an amendment was moved and agreed to delete the words 'must be certified' and replace with 'must be submitted for certification' in paragraph 2.3 of the Budget & Policy Framework Procedure Rules (Appendix 1), relating to amendments to the proposed budget.

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The following motion was proposed by Councillor Emberson and seconded by Councillor Terry and CARRIED:

Resolved –

- (1) That the revised Budget & Policy Framework Procedure Rules, as attached to the report at Appendix 1, with the amendment to paragraph 2.3 as agreed at the meeting, be adopted;**
- (2) That the revised Financial Regulations, as attached to the report at Appendix 2, be adopted.**

30. RECOGNITION OF THE STATE OF PALESTINE AND STEPS TOWARDS PEACE IN GAZA

In accordance with Standing Order 14(10)(a), Councillor Terry received the consent of the Council to alter her motion.

The altered motion was moved by Councillor Terry and seconded by Councillor Eden and CARRIED as set out in the resolution below.

The following amendment was moved by Councillor McElroy and seconded by Councillor Thompson and LOST:

Add the following bullet points to the list at the end of the motion that starts “This Council”:

- Recognises the genocide committed by Israel against the Palestinian people, as per the findings of the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory.
- Recognises that in supplying arms and military and intelligence support to the Israeli government the UK government is complicit in this genocide.
- Recognises that all terrorists and irregular militants should be disarmed and play no part in any future governance arrangements in Israel or Palestine.
- Demands that the UK government immediately implement a full arms embargo on the Israeli government.
- Demands that the UK government immediately withdraw all military and intelligence support for the Israeli government until there is significant progress towards a lasting peace.
- Demands that the UK government support and resource all international cases of genocide and war crime against those responsible for the atrocities committed in Palestine and Israel at the International Criminal Court.
- Will use all means at their disposal to require that the Berkshire Pension Fund divests from companies that supply arms or military technology to the Israeli government.

A recorded vote having been demanded, the voting was as follows:

For the amendment: 12

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Councillors Cresswell, Hacker, Keane, Magon, McCann, McElroy, Moore, Nikulina, O'Connell, Thompson, White, Williams.

Against the amendment: 32

Councillors Asare, Ayub, Ballsdon, Barnett-Ward, Cross, Davies, Eden, Edwards, Emberson, Ennis, Gavin, Gittings, Goss, Griffith, Hornsby-Smith, Hoskin, Juthani, Keeping, Lanzoni, Leng, Lovelock, McEwan, McGoldrick, McGrother, Mpofu-Coles, Naz, Rowland, Singh, Stevens, Tarar, Terry, Yeo.

Resolved –

We welcome the Labour Government's decision to recognise Palestine as an Independent State delivering its manifesto commitment and taking a vital step to protect the viability of a two-state solution, which must be part of a wider plan for peace.

We also welcome the release of hostages and the resumption of much needed aid being delivered in Gaza, as part of a developing plan for peace in Israel and Palestine.

Furthermore, we are proud that Reading is home to a diverse community, with many of our residents celebrating different faiths. Every resident in Reading deserves to feel safe, celebrated and valued as part of our town no matter their faith or background and we will continue to champion Reading as a diverse and tolerant town.

This Council:

- Welcomes the safe return of hostages held by the terrorist group Hamas, as well as those held by the Israeli Government.**
- Welcomes the developing steps towards a permanent peace plan and calls on all parties to bring an end to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and work to secure a permanent peace and a two-state solution in Israel and Palestine.**
- Agrees that the Leader of the Council write to the Foreign Secretary to welcome the Government's decision to recognise the state of Palestine as part of progress towards a two-state solution.**

(The meeting closed at 8.29 pm)

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COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 25 NOVEMBER 2025

Present: Councillor Mpofu-Coles (Mayor);

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

Apologies: Councillors Ayub, Edwards, Goss, Hacker, Lovelock and Magon

31. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor noted that this would be the last full Council meeting attended by the Monitoring Officer and Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services Mike Graham. Mike's first Council meeting had been in February 2020 just before the Covid pandemic and he had played a key role in supporting the Council's decision-making through the time of online meetings and many challenges since then. The Council thanked Mike for his service to Reading over the last six years.

32. PROPOSED MODIFICATION TO THE 'RIDGEWAY' LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION PROPOSAL FOR OXFORDSHIRE AND WEST BERKSHIRE

Further to Minute 15 of the meeting of Policy Committee held on 21 July 2025, the Chief Executive submitted a report setting out the work undertaken to inform a proposed modification of the boundary between Reading and West Berkshire and seeking approval for a formal request for the modification to be submitted to the Secretary of State. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1: Proposed modification to the 'Ridgeway' Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposal for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire submission
- Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment
- Appendix 3: Full LGR criteria and guidance
- Appendix 4: Full options appraisal for original Ridgeway proposal and the amended version

The report explained that significant work had been undertaken to evidence and develop the proposal, including a wide-ranging engagement programme, service modelling, budget modelling, and wider research. A comprehensive data request had been sent to West Berkshire Council to inform the modelling but their response had largely pointed to publicly available data which did not provide sufficient granularity. Subsequent FOI requests did provide some data for demand led services, but officers still had questions outstanding. Consequently, the margin for error, particularly in relation to financial costs was greater than desired.

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The report noted that the initial proposal submitted to Policy Committee had covered five West Berkshire wards: Pangbourne; Theale; Tilehurst Birch Copse; Tilehurst & Purley; and Tilehurst South & Holybrook. The data demonstrated a good case for including Pangbourne and Theale in the modification, however the strongest case was for the three Tilehurst Wards, and that was therefore the recommended final proposal.

The report further noted that Reading, like the other Berkshire local authorities, had not been invited to submit proposals and was therefore limited to proposing an amendment to proposals from Oxfordshire. This made it difficult to demonstrate the benefits of a comprehensive Greater Reading area.

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

Resolved –

- (1) That the report, the significant activity undertaken to inform the boundary modification request, and the data which underpins the case presented be noted;**
- (2) That the challenges in obtaining the data required to fully inform the service and financial modelling and the inherent risks associated with that be noted;**
- (3) That to protect Reading's future interests, it be agreed to submit to the Secretary of State, a modification to the Oxfordshire Local Government Reorganisation 'Ridgeway' proposal, such that the following Wards: Tilehurst Birch Copse, Tilehurst & Purley and Tilehurst South and Holybrook be transferred to Reading Borough Council, as set out in Appendix 1;**
- (4) That, subject to the Secretary of State's decision, the Chief Executive be authorised to establish the necessary project team and resources to implement the proposal;**
- (5) That Council reserve its right to make subsequent representations to the Secretary of State regarding the Borough boundary or Local Government Reorganisation in the future.**

33. DEVOLUTION

The Chief Executive submitted a report seeking approval to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) to government in response to the Government's devolution policy and proposals set out in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, to position the Thames Valley region in the next round of devolution for the purpose of creating a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA). The EOI was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 25 NOVEMBER 2025

The report noted that Leaders from across the region had been meeting to explore the opportunity for devolution arising from the government's policy for all parts of England to be part of regional Strategic Authorities led by a regional Mayor. These authorities would drive growth, shape public services, and deliver strategic leadership in areas such as economic growth and sustainability, strategic planning, skills, employment, and strategic transport infrastructure.

The report explained that an EOI for a Thames Valley MSA had been developed which emphasised the region's strengths in innovation and productivity and its readiness to enter discussions with Government regarding the possible creation of an MSA. Devolution via a MSA would drive inclusive growth and unlock significant opportunities for local communities and the UK more broadly. The EOI highlighted the economic rationale, collaborative governance, strategic powers and funding, and place-based leadership.

If approved by participating authorities the EOI would be submitted to government by 19 December 2025, followed by further engagement and refinement based on feedback from Council Leaders, Chief Executives, and stakeholders. Oversight of discussions with government and the development of future proposals was proposed to be through an informal 'Devolution Board' made up of elected representatives from each participating Council, with regular updates to Council and Policy Committee and public consultation as the process evolved. It was intended that Terms of Reference for the Board be reported to a future meeting of the Council.

The following Motion was proposed by Councillor Terry and seconded by Councillor Leng and CARRIED:

Resolved –

- (1) That the benefits from the proposed devolution of powers and functions set out in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill be endorsed;**
- (2) That the joint Expression of Interest (EOI) attached at Appendix 1 be approved and submitted to the Secretary of State, noting that the EOI was designed to proactively position the region for early consideration in the next wave of the Devolution Programme;**
- (3) That the EOI be acknowledged as an invitation to Government to open dialogue and engagement with the region regarding the potential form and operation of a Strategic Mayoral Authority, and not a decision to establish a Strategic Authority;**
- (4) That further update reports be brought back to Council as necessary and prior to any final decision to create a Strategic Authority;**
- (5) That it be noted that the informal Devolution Board would oversee discussions with Government, ensuring robust governance and stakeholder engagement by elected members throughout this process.**

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 25 NOVEMBER 2025

(The meeting closed at 7.29 pm)

Council

27 January 2026



Reading
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Title	Approval of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme and the Council Tax Base for 2026/27
Purpose of the report	To make a key decision
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Darren Carter, Director of Finance
Report author	Chloe Hennessy, Financial Planning Lead
Lead Councillor	Councillor Terry, Leader of the Council and Councillor Emberson, Lead Councillor for Corporate Services & Resources
Corporate priority	Not applicable, but still requires a decision
Recommendations	<p>That Council approve:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme is retained for 2026/27; 2. The Tax Base calculation for 2026/27 of 60,353.38 band D equivalent properties. <p>That Council notes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. The assumed Council Tax collection rate of 98.50% for 2026/27; 4. That the 2026/27 Council Tax Reduction Scheme will be updated in line with the Scheme's regulations; 5. That the estimated balance of the Council Tax Collection Fund as at 31st March 2026 is an overall net deficit of £2.092m. The Council's overall share of this deficit is £1.781m.

1. Summary

- 1.1. The Council is required to calculate a Council Tax Base for its area annually in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base (England)) Regulations 2012.
- 1.2. The Council Tax Base 2026/2027 must be calculated and notified to Major Precepting Authorities (the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service) by 31st January 2026.
- 1.3. The Tax Base for 2026/27 is calculated for the above purposes as being 60,353.38 (band D equivalent) properties – an increase of 1.32% on the 2025/26 Tax Base of 59,566.99.
- 1.4. The declared surplus/deficit on the Council Tax Collection Fund balance is paid out/recoverable by the Collection Fund in full in the following financial year. The estimated balance as at 31st March 2026 on the Council Tax Collection Fund is a projected net deficit of £2.092m. The Council's overall share of this deficit is £1.781m. The component parts are set out in Table 4 below.
- 1.5. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 and Local Government Finance Act 2012 replaced the Council Tax Benefit scheme with a locally determined Council Tax Reduction Scheme

(also known as a local Council Tax Support Scheme), which is effectively a type of Council Tax discount. The legislation requires the Council to approve a Scheme, including amendments to an existing scheme, by the end of January preceding the start of the financial year. The recommended Scheme for 2026/27 is unchanged from the Scheme agreed by Council for 2025/26.

- 1.6. Each year, the Government amends the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2012 to ensure that pension-age Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) schemes are updated in line with changes in the wider benefits system. The annual update also provides an opportunity to ensure that the residency requirements for accessing both pension-age and working-age LCTS remain consistent with the UK's immigration policy. These updates will be incorporated into the Council's 2026/27 Scheme in accordance with the principles of the Council's original Local Scheme agreed following consultation in the Summer/Autumn of 2012.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. Under Government regulations it is necessary for the Council to review its Collection Fund and decide the following:
 - The Council Tax Collection Rate for 2026/27;
 - The Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2026/27;
 - The Council Tax Base to be used for setting its 2026/27 Council Tax; and
 - The estimated Council Tax surplus or deficit as at 31st March 2026.

3. The Proposal

Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS)

- 3.1. The Local Government Finance Act 2012 replaced the Council Tax Benefit scheme with a new locally determined Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (also known as a Local Council Tax Support Scheme) from April 2013. This is effectively now a Council Tax discount that reduces the Council Tax Base.
- 3.2. Each local authority is required to annually set a Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for working age claimants. The Government continues to operate a statutory national scheme for pensioners, which provides them with broadly the same level of Council Tax Support as they received under the previous Council Tax Benefit scheme but has been adjusted by the Government since its introduction to incorporate a number of welfare reform initiatives.
- 3.3. The Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme was initially funded through a specific central government grant set at 90% of each local authority's Council Tax Benefit expenditure. Government funding since 2014/15 has been rolled into the Council's overall finance settlement and is no longer specifically identifiable.
- 3.4. Pension age customers continue to be protected by the Government's default scheme of 100% support based on a financial means test.
- 3.5. It is recommended that the Council retains the [Council Tax Reduction Scheme](#) in 2026/27 as applied in 2025/26. In light of recent benefit changes, this will be reviewed in 2027/28.

Council Tax Base Calculation

- 3.6. The Council Tax Base is an estimate of the number of band D equivalent properties within the Billing Authority's (Reading Borough Council's) area and is used by the Council and Major Precepting Authorities (the Police and Fire authorities) to determine how much Council Tax income is anticipated to be received and budgeted for in the associated financial year.

- 3.7. The Tax Base is calculated by taking the list of properties by tax band as supplied by the Valuation Office, (an executive agency of HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)) as at 30th November 2025, then adjusting it for various factors to calculate a chargeable number of properties per tax band.
- 3.8. The factors adjusted for include:
- Properties which will be entirely exempt, so no tax is payable e.g. those occupied entirely by students;
 - Properties which will attract a 25% reduction e.g. those with a single adult occupier;
 - Properties which will attract a 50% reduction e.g. those where all the adult residents qualify for a reduction (certain Care Homes for example);
 - Properties which attract a 100% levy because they have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than 12 months and up to 5 years;
 - Properties which attract a 200% levy because they have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than 5 years and up to 10 years;
 - Properties which attract a 300% levy because they have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 10 years or more;
 - Properties which attract a 100% levy because they are no one's sole or main residence and which are substantially unfurnished (from April 2025);
 - Properties which will be treated as being in a lower band because they have been adapted for a severely disabled person;
 - Properties which will be on the valuation list, but which attract discounts or disablement relief or are exempt, for only part of the year;
 - Properties which are in receipt of Local Council Tax Support;
 - Properties which are in receipt of a local discount.
- 3.9. The calculated chargeable number of properties per tax band is then converted into "band D equivalents" by applying the factors laid down by legislation. These are set out in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Council Tax Band Ratios

Band	AA	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Ratio	5/9	6/9	7/9	8/9	9/9	11/9	13/9	15/9	18/9

- 3.10. For example, a band A property is multiplied by 6 and divided by 9 to arrive at the "band D equivalent" figure, whilst a band H property is multiplied by 18 and divided by 9 (equal to multiplying by 2). All these are then added together to give a total of "band D equivalent" for the billing area.
- 3.11. Additions are then made to the tax base for estimates of newly built and occupied properties in 2026/2027 and the final quarter of 2025/2026. This estimate is based on past trends, properties that haven't yet appeared on the valuation list, and planning estimates of housing growth. For 2026/27 we have assumed 0.58% average growth for the year. This is a prudent estimate, which has been calculated using actual growth realised in 2025/26 alongside planned projections of new build that are expected to be realised between December 2025 and March 2027.
- 3.12. The Council is then required to decide what its collection rate is likely to be and multiply its Tax Base by this percentage to give its Council Tax Base. A collection rate of 100% would assume 100% collection and thus a zero adjustment, whereas a collection rate of less than 100% allows for an element of non-collection and results in a reduction to the Council Tax Base.
- 3.13. The overall collection rate for 2026/27 is estimated at 98.50%. This is based on revised forecasting and represents a slight reduction from the rate of 98.75% used in 2025/26.

- 3.14. The total number of properties per Council Tax band as at 30th November 2025 is summarised in the following table:

Table 2. Properties per Council Tax Band as at 30th November 2025

Band	% of Properties	Number of Properties	Ajustements (Discounts, Exemptions, LCTRS etc.)	Net Properties	Ratio	Band D Equivalents (rounded to 1dp)
AA*	0.0%	0	2.3	2.3	5/9	1.3
A	9.4%	7,239	(2,265.1)	4,973.9	6/9	3,315.9
B	19.4%	15,009	(3,520.8)	11,488.2	7/9	8,935.3
C	40.7%	31,526	(5,003.9)	26,522.1	8/9	23,575.2
D	15.8%	12,258	(1,566.2)	10,691.8	9/9	10,691.8
E	7.7%	5,941	(484.7)	5,456.3	11/9	6,668.9
F	4.4%	3,398	(240.8)	3,157.2	13/9	4,560.3
G	2.5%	1,908	(101.3)	1,806.7	15/9	3,011.1
H	0.1%	100	(19.0)	81.0	18/9	162.0
Total	100.0%	77,379	(13,199.5)	64,179.5		60,921.8

*Band A entitled to disabled relief reduction. As at 30th November, 3 properties in band A are entitled to disabled relief reduction (2.3 net properties after adjustments), which are converted to 1.3 band D equivalents on a ratio of 5/9.

- 3.15. The Council Tax Base calculation is summarised in the following table:

Table 3. Council Tax Base 2026/27 Calculation

	Adjustments	Total
Total Number of Properties on the Valuation List as at 30/11/2025		77,379.00
Reductions for Discounts & Exemptions as at 30/11/2025	(8,609.65)	
Reductions for Council Tax Reduction Scheme as at 30/11/2025	(4,589.88)	
Total Number of Net Chargeable Properties as at 30/11/2025		64,179.47
Band D Equivalent Properties as at 30/11/2025		60,921.80
Estimated New Build (band D equivalents) 2026/27	350.67	
Reduction for non-collection of 1.50%	(919.10)	
2026/27 Council Tax Base (band D equivalents)		60,353.38

Council Tax Collection Fund Surplus/Deficit

- 3.16. Any difference between the level of Council Tax budgeted for (based on the estimated Council Tax Base) and the level of Council Tax income actually realised in year has no impact on the in-year General Fund revenue position but is retained within the Collection Fund.
- 3.17. An estimate of the surplus or deficit on the Council Tax Collection Fund must be made, by law, on or before 15th January 2026. Council Tax surplus or deficits must be credited or charged to Reading Borough Council, the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service in proportion to their precepts and will be taken into account in setting the 2026/27 Revenue Budget and Council Tax levels.
- 3.18. The estimated balance on the Council Tax Collection Fund as at 31st March 2026, in January 2026, is a net deficit of £2.092m, comprising:
- A residual deficit balance brought forward from 2024/25 totalling £0.765m which is primarily due to the 2024/25 adjustment to the Allowance for Impairments for Doubtful Debts (Bad Debt Provision) that was required at the end of the financial year being higher than was forecast in January 2025 when the 2024/25 Council Tax Collection Fund Balance estimate was made;

- An in-year net deficit balance totalling £1.327m which primarily relates to the forecast 2025/26 increase to the Allowance for Impairments for Doubtful Debts.

- 3.19. Any declared surplus/deficit is paid out/recoverable by the Collection Fund in full in the following financial year based on the January estimate. The shares of this balance are set out in the following table:

Table 4. Council Tax Collection Fund Estimated Balance as at 31st March 2026

	Share of Overall Estimated Net (Surplus)/Deficit (£m)
Reading Borough Council	1.781
Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley	0.238
Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service	0.073
Total	2.092

- 3.20. Reading's share of the estimated net deficit has been included in the MTFS Update as above in 2026/27.

Risk

- 3.21. There are several key variables in setting the Council Tax Base which have the potential to change; these are set out below.
- 3.22. Eligibility for discounts and exemptions is factored into the calculated Tax Base. These include student discounts, single person discount and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme – the latter being particularly prone to change dependent upon employment status of working age benefit claimants. Although numbers have now returned near to pre-pandemic levels, there remains uncertainty as to the potential impact of the cost of living crisis on the economy. Therefore, future fluctuations in caseload/claimant levels cannot be ruled out.
- 3.23. The Tax Base includes forecast growth in the number of properties subject to a Council Tax liability. Whilst this is based on historic growth levels achieved and known planned development, it remains an estimate and is sensitive to changes in the economy and house building market. The growth factor is also subject to assumptions regarding the band of property completed and also the status of the occupier(s) and their eligibility for discounts (e.g. single person), exemptions and Local Council Tax Support.
- 3.24. Any significant variation regarding collection rates has the potential to impact on the level of bad debt provision required and would impact on overall collection levels and any projected surplus or deficit.
- 3.25. In setting the Council Tax Base for 2026/27, statutory regulations prevent the net amount credited to the Council's General Fund from being different in 2026/27 to that originally estimated (and applies to precepting bodies in the same way). Any variance would however impact on future years.
- 3.26. The Collection Fund balance as at 31st March 2026 is required to be estimated by 15th January 2026. The assumptions made within this calculation are therefore subject to change by 31st March 2026. This risk of non-collection remains high, due to the ongoing cost of living crisis. This impacts on Council Tax collection rates and therefore there is increased uncertainty on future projections.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. Full details of the Council Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the [Council's website](#). These priorities and the Council Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective, and economical.

- 4.2. Delivery of the Council's budget is essential to ensuring the Council meets its strategic aims and remains financially sustainable going forward.
- 5. Environmental and Climate Implications**
- 5.1. There are no specific environmental and climate implications to report in relation to the recommendations set out in this report.
- 6. Community Engagement**
- 6.1. No amendments have been proposed for 2026/27 therefore consultation is not required.
- 7. Equality Implications**
- 7.1. No implications have been identified as arising directly from this report.
- 8. Other Relevant Considerations**
- 8.1. There are none.
- 9. Legal Implications**
- 9.1. The Council, as a Billing Authority, is required to determine the Council Tax Base for the next financial year by 31st January 2026 and to notify other precepting authorities of the determination.
- 9.2. The Council, as the Billing Authority, is required to formally estimate the balance of the Council Tax Collection Fund as at 31st March 2026 and to notify other precepting authorities of this estimate by 15th January 2026.
- 10. Financial Implications**
- 10.1. The increase in the Council Tax Base of 786.39 average band D properties equates to an increase in Council Tax income of £1.665m based on the 2025/26 Council Tax charge of £2,117.52 for a band D property.
- 10.2. The Tax Base of 60,353.38 band D equivalents has been updated from the Tax Base of 60,354.06 used in the Medium Term Financial Strategy Update Report considered by Policy Committee and issued for consultation in December 2025 in order to reflect updated figures in respect of the number of chargeable dwellings, discounts, exemptions, eligible Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme claimants and revised estimates of new build and collection performance.
- 10.3. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2025/26-2027/28 Update assumed that the Council's share of the provisional Council Tax Collection Fund balance would be £0.810m. The Council's share of the net surplus declared in this report is £1.781m for 2026/27 which has been reflected in the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy projections.
- 11. Timetable for Implementation**
- 11.1. Not applicable.
- 12. Background Papers**
- 12.1. There are none.

Council

27 January 2026



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Title	Councillors' Allowances Scheme 2026/27
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Executive Director / Statutory Officer commissioning report	Louise Duffield, Executive Director of Resources
Report author	Simon Hill, Acting Democratic Services Manager
Lead Councillor	Councillor Liz Terry
Corporate priority	Not applicable, but still requires a decision
Recommendations	1. A motion will be moved at the meeting to recommend the Councillors' Allowances scheme as set out in Appendix B.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report sets out a scheme of Councillors Allowances for 2026/27 as recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel (the Panel).
- 1.2. The Panel met on 19 November 2025 for their annual review of the scheme. No significant changes are recommended for the final year of the current four-year scheme which is in place until April 2027.
- 1.3. Appendix A sets out a report on the Panel's consideration of the Allowances Scheme and Appendix B sets out their recommendations.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The Panel reviews the Council's scheme for Councillors' Allowances and makes recommendations for a scheme to include:
 - The amount of Basic Allowance (BA) to be paid to all Councillors
 - The duties in respect of which Councillors should receive a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA), and the amount of such an allowance
 - Allowances for the care of children or dependents
- 2.2. The Panel was established to include at least three and no more than five independent members appointed to represent stakeholders of the Council. Its current membership is:
 - Mick Pollek – member with experience of the local trade union movement
 - Sally Swift - member with experience of the local media
 - Jeanette Skeats – member with experience of local politics

3. The Proposal

- 3.1. The recommendations of the Panel, set out in Appendix A, are reflected in the updated scheme at Appendix B.

- 3.2. The Panel considered that the Councillors' Allowances Scheme was still 'fit-for-purpose' and should continue for the final year of the current scheme. This would mean that the BA and SRAs continue to increase in line with the local government pay agreement.
- 3.3. The Panel noted that the 2025/26 Councillor allowances had been uplifted by the Local Government Services pay agreement and backdated to April 2025 in accordance with their previous recommendations.
- 3.4. Lady Audrey Durant, a member with experience of the local voluntary sector, stood down from the Panel during the year. It is planned to advertise for and recruit up to two new Remuneration Panel members to ensure a good range of stakeholder representation.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. The provision for the payment of allowances to Councillors gives local authorities the scope to set allowances schemes to suit local needs and to help ensure that Councillors are not financially disadvantaged in serving as elected Members.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. There are no environmental or climate implications as a result of this report.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. Reading participates in the South East Employers annual survey of members' allowances which provides benchmarking data. The Panel was provided with the South-East Employers Members' Allowances Survey to allow a comparison of the level of allowances in Reading with other comparable authorities.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. Officers do not consider there to be any adverse implications.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1. There are none.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. The Local Government Act 2000 requires local authorities to set up and maintain an independent Remuneration Panel to make recommendations to the authority concerning the allowances to be paid to councillors.
- 9.2. Any decision to amend, revoke or replace an allowances scheme will have to be taken by the Authority having regard to the recommendations of the Panel.
- 9.3. The Council may not delegate this function to a Committee or to an officer. The Council has to take all decisions relating to the adoption of its Scheme of Councillors' Allowances.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1. The 2025/26 budget for Members' Allowances is £709,400.
- 10.2. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy includes a provision for the base budget to be increased in line with the Local Government Services Pay Agreement. The budget will be adjusted accordingly based on any pay award agreed in 2026/27, subject to the number of councillors eligible for SRAs remaining similar to the current year.
- 10.3. The costs are reviewed annually as part of the Council's budget setting process.

11. Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1. Any changes to the Councillors' Allowances scheme would be effective from April 2026.

12. Background Papers

12.1. Council Report, 31/01/2023, [Councillors' Allowances Scheme 2023/24 – 2026/27](#).

12.2. Council Report, 28/01/2025, [Councillors' Allowances Scheme 2025/26](#).

Appendices

1. Appendix A – Report and Recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel
2. Appendix B – Councillors' Allowances Scheme 2026/27

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REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL APPOINTED TO REVIEW THE ALLOWANCES PAID TO COUNCILLORS OF READING BOROUGH COUNCIL FOR 2026/27

FOR SUBMISSION TO COUNCIL ON 27
JANUARY 2026

Background

The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 provide for the payment of Allowances to Members of the Council in connection with their work as Councillors. Before the Council can make or amend a scheme of allowances, it should consider the recommendations made in relation to it by an Independent Remuneration Panel (the Panel).

The Council, on 13 November 2001, set up an Independent Remuneration Panel to review annually the Council's scheme for Councillor's Allowances. The Local Government (Local Authority Members in England) Regulation 2003, stated that Independent Remuneration Panels established by local authorities should make recommendations for a scheme of allowances to include:

- The amount of basic allowance (BA) to be paid to all Councillors;
- The duties in respect of which Councillors should receive a special responsibility allowance (SRA), and the amount of such an allowance.
- Allowances for the care of children or dependants.

The Independent Remuneration Panel

The Remuneration Panel's current membership is as follows:

- Sally Swift - member with experience of the local media
- Jeanette Skeats – member with experience of local politics
- Mick Pollek – member with experience of the local trade union movement

The Panel is supported by the following council officers:

- Simon Hill (Acting Democratic Services Manager)
- Jemma Durkan (Committee Services)

Background

As part of its review of the Councillors Allowances Scheme for 2019/20, the Panel recommended that the BA and the SRAs should be increased each new financial year in accordance with the Local Government Services pay agreement. It also recommended that the carers allowance,

which is available to councillors to cover the cost of looking after dependants, whilst they are undertaking approved duties on behalf of the Council, should be increased in line with the 'Real Living Wage'. The review was reported to Council on 25 June 2019 when it accepted that recommendation. The new scheme came into effect on 1 October 2019 and was reviewed in November 2022 after the expiry of its initial four-year term. The scheme was renewed for a further four years from April 2023.

Since 2019, the BA and SRAs have continued to be increased in line with the local government pay agreement and allowances to cover the cost of looking after dependants have risen in line with the 'Real Living Wage' as recommended by the Panel.

Meeting of the Panel

The Panel met via Microsoft Teams on 19 November 2025.

The Panel was provided with the following information in advance of the meeting:

- The previous Councillors' Allowances Scheme report, which had been considered by Council on 28 January 2025 and extract from the Minutes of that meeting (Minute 37 refers).
- Results of the South-East Employers Members' Allowances Survey.

The Panel noted that the Council had increased Councillors' Allowances by 3.2% in 2025/26, in line with the Local Government pay agreement for 2025/26 and the Panel's previous recommendations. The Panel discussed the current scheme and considered that the existing scheme, covering the period April 2023 - March 2027, was still fit for purpose with no changes required. They noted that a fuller review would be required ahead of the 2027/28 financial year.

Recommendations

The Panel recommended that the scheme of Councillors Allowances continue in its current form for 2026/27, with the Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowances to be increased in line with the Local Government Services pay agreement.



READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECOMMENDATIONS OF REMUNERATION PANEL

The Panel recommends that the Councillors' Allowances Scheme adopted from 1 April 2026 be as follows:

- (1) That, for 2026/27, the total sum for the payment of Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances to councillors remain at the same level as set for 2025/26 at £709,400 (subject to confirmation of the Local Government Services Pay Agreement for 2026/27).
- (2) That the Basic Allowance paid to individual councillors be set at £9,825.99 a year (subject to being increased in line with the Local Government Services Pay Agreement for 2026/27).
- (3) That the Special Responsibility Allowances payments be as follows (subject to being increased in line with the Local Government Services Pay Agreement for 2026/27):
 - (a) the amount paid to the Leader to be £22,111.80;
 - (b) the amount paid to the Deputy Leader to be £13,506.12;
 - (c) the amount paid to SRA Tier 1 to be £11,354.76;
 - (d) the amount paid to SRA Tier 2 to be £7,262.28;
 - (e) the amount paid to SRA Tier 3 to be £3,632.28;
 - (f) the amount paid to SRA Tier 4 to be £1,283.64.

No councillor shall receive more than one Special Responsibility Allowance.

- (4) That the existing categorisation of tiers should remain unchanged, as follows:
 - Tier 1 to be paid to the Lead Councillors;
 - Tier 2 to be paid to the Leader of the main opposition group and the Chairs of Licensing Applications Committee and Planning Applications Committee;
 - Tier 3 to be paid to the Chairs of Committees (except the Chair of the Appeals Committee), and Group Leaders of the other political groups;
 - Tier 4 to be paid to the Vice-Chairs of Committees and the Independent Person appointed in accordance with Section 28 of the Localism Act 2011 to carry out the functions specified in that Act in relation to the Members' Code of Conduct and Local Standards Committee.
- (5) That in addition to the categories set out in tier 4 above, tier 4 SRA be paid to the Council's representative(s) on the Fostering Panel.

- (6) That the 2026-2027 arrangements for the payment of Dependant Carers' Allowance be in line with the real living wage, as follows:
- (a) Up to £13.45 per hour for childcare for up to 15 hours a week;
 - (b) Up to £13.45 per hour towards the cost of a care attendant for an elderly or disabled relative (including a disabled child) for up to 15 hours a week.
- The person providing the care may not be a close relative defined as spouse, partner (opposite or same sex cohabitantes), parents, children, brothers, sisters, grandparents and grandchildren. The paid care attendant must sign a receipt to show that they have cared for the dependant during the hours claimed for.
- (7) That, subject to (9) below, the level of subsistence allowances, with the exception of overnight subsistence, remain the same as officers receive. The allowances are currently:
- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Subsistence | |
| • Breakfast allowance | £9.15 |
| • Lunch allowance | £12.64 |
| • Tea allowance | £5.01 |
| • Evening meal allowance | £15.65 |
| • Overnight subsistence | £82.21 a day outside London
£93.77 a day in London or at LGA Annual Conferences |
- (8) That the level of travel allowances be set at the same level as officers receive, as follows:
- Travel by councillor's own motor vehicle – 45 pence per mile
 - Travel by councillor's own bicycle – 37 pence per mile
 - Travel by councillor's own motorcycle – 40.9 pence per mile
 - Public Transport – cost of the ordinary fare, cheap fare or portion of any weekly ticket.
- (9) That the subsistence limits referred to in (7) above be exceeded in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the Monitoring Officer, e.g. to enable a Councillor and an officer attending a conference to stay at the same accommodation, subject to there being sufficient budget provision.
- (10) That provision for Co-optees' Allowances is payable solely to non-councillor members of the Standards Committee attending meetings of the Committee or any Sub-Committee set up by the Committee as part of its process of assessing, investigating and hearing complaints about Councillors; the allowances to be paid at the daily rate equivalent of the Councillors' Basic Allowance; the Monitoring Officer to be authorised to settle the rate to be paid on each occasion.
- (11) That benefits available to Council staff also be made available to Councillors, where this is possible.
- (12) That the Basic Allowance and the Special Responsibility Allowances set out above be increased at the beginning of each new financial year in accordance with the Local Government Services pay agreement for the period of the scheme (ie until April 2027).

Council

27 January 2026



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Title	Appointment of Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Jayne La Grua, Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Report author	Simon Hill, Acting Democratic Services Manager
Lead Councillor	Cllr Liz Terry, Leader of the Council
Council priority	Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future
Recommendations	<p>It is recommended that Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Approve the appointment of Louise Duffield, Executive Director of Resources, as Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer; and (2) Authorise the Monitoring Officer to make the consequential amendments to the Council's Constitution set out in the Appendix to this report.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Personnel Committee on 20 November 2025 considered a report outlining the arrangements to follow the departure of Michael Graham, Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services, in December 2025. The post incorporated the statutory roles of Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer. Pursuant to the Council's Constitution, the Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer roles must be appointed by Full Council.
- 1.2. At its meeting on 20 November 2025, Personnel Committee made a recommendation to Council to appoint the Executive Director of Resources as Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer.
- 1.3. If the recommendation is approved, consequential amendments will need to be made to the Council's Constitution to reflect the changes. The proposed amendments are set out in the Appendix to this report.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The statutory officer roles of Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer are currently assigned to the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services by Council, through the Constitution. The proposed change to this arrangement therefore requires formal approval at a Council meeting.

3. The Proposal

- 3.1. Following the previous postholder's departure from the Council in December 2025, the post of Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services is filled by an interim officer

pending permanent recruitment. Recruitment for a permanent replacement will begin in early 2026.

- 3.2. However, with local elections scheduled for May 2026, it was not considered appropriate for them to be managed by an interim officer, and therefore Personnel Committee were asked to recommend that the Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer roles be reallocated to Louise Duffield, the Executive Director of Resources. This was agreed at their meeting on 20 November 2025.
- 3.3. It is essential for the Council to have both an Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer in place to ensure the smooth running of electoral processes and uphold democratic integrity. These statutory roles are crucial for overseeing the organisation of elections, maintaining accurate electoral registers, and guaranteeing that all legal requirements are met.
- 3.4. The Executive Director of Resources has experience of managing local elections and has undertaken relevant training.
- 3.5. The Council can revisit the permanent arrangements for elections, should it wish to, once it has recruited to the substantive Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services post.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. The statutory officer roles discussed in the report contribute to meeting the priorities set out in the Council Plan by facilitating the participation of residents in local democracy.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. There are no environmental or climate implications arising from this report.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. There is no requirement for consultation or community engagement for this matter.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Public Sector Equality Duty) a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
 - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not relevant to this decision.
- 7.3. The Returning Officer has personal responsibility for the conduct of local government elections, including consideration of accessibility for voters at polling stations and the postal voting procedure.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1. There are no other relevant considerations to report.

9. Legal Implications

Appointment of Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer

- 9.3. Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 ('RPA') places a duty on the Council to appoint an Electoral Registration Officer responsible for compiling and maintaining the register of electors for the Council's administrative area.

- 9.4 Section 35 of the same Act places a duty on the Council to appoint a Returning Officer for the election of councillors to their local authority. The Returning Officer's role is to ensure that the election is administered effectively and in accordance with the law.
- 9.5 The Returning Officer and the Electoral Registration Officer may be the same person, and in practice these are usually combined functions. The Returning Officer / Electoral Registration Officer should be a senior officer who has undertaken relevant training.
- 9.6 The appointment of an Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer for Local Government elections is a power reserved to the Council and which has not been delegated to any committee or officer of the Council (see paragraphs (30) and (31) of Part 3.1 of the Council's Constitution). Accordingly, this decision requires the approval of Council.
- 9.7 Whilst appointed by the Council, the role of the Returning Officer is one which involves and incurs personal responsibility and accountability and is statutorily separate from their duties as an employee of the Council. As Returning Officer, they are paid a separate allowance for each election for which they are responsible.
- 9.8 As the Returning Officer is personally liable for the conduct of an election, it is essential that the Council ensures there is adequate insurance cover in place in the event of any challenge to the election and a claim against the insurance policy.
- 9.9 The Returning Officer may appoint one or more Deputy Returning Officers.

Consequential Amendments to the Council's Constitution

- 9.10 The Council's Constitution makes provision for the appointment of Proper Officers for various statutory functions and the delegation of certain responsibilities to officers. These will need to be amended to reflect the transfer of responsibility for functions related to the conduct of elections from the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services to the Executive Director of Resources.
- 9.11 The proposed amendments are set out in the Appendix to this report. If approved, Council is asked to authorise the Interim Monitoring Officer to make these amendments and arrange for their publication on the Council's website.

10 Financial Implications

- 1.1 There are no financial implications, as no changes are proposed to the currently agreed approach. The current payment and funding arrangements will continue, with the payments made to the Executive Director of Resource and funded directly by the Elections Budgets. The current payment and funding arrangements will continue, with the payments made to the Executive Director of Resource and funded directly by the Elections Budgets.

10 Timetable for Implementation

- 10.1 The Executive Director of Resources has had direct managerial responsibility for Elections since the departure of the previous Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services Officer in December. This report seeks to formalise the statutory appointments.

11 Background Papers

- 11.1 There are none.

APPENDIX: CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

* proposed amendments are shown in red.

Part 3 - Responsibility for Functions – Terms of Reference of Council, Committees and Delegations to Officers

1. Council Responsibilities

[...]

Functions Relating to Elections and the Name and Status of Areas and Individuals

- (28) To change the name of the council or its wards under Section 74 of the Local Government Act 1972;
- (29) To confer the title of Freedom of the Borough and Honorary Alderman under Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972;
- (30) To appoint an electoral registration officer under Section 8(2) of the Representation of the People Act 1983;
- (31) To appoint a returning officer for Local Government elections under Section 35 of the Representation of the People Act 1983;
- (32) To divide constituencies into polling districts under Section 18 of the Representation of the People Act 1983;
- (33) To divide wards and parliamentary constituencies into polling districts at local government elections under Section 31 of the Representation of the People Act 1983;
- (34) To declare vacancy in office in certain cases under Section 86 of the Local Government Act 1972;
- (35) To submit proposals to the Secretary of State for an order under section 10 (pilot schemes for local elections in England and Wales) of the Representation of the People Act 2000 under Section 10 of the Representation of the People Act 2000;
- (36) To decide whether to carry out governance and/or electoral reviews.

[Note. The balance of the electoral functions are delegated to the Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer which is ~~the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services~~ Executive Director of Resources. These include (but are not limited to):

- To assign officers in relation to requisitions of the registration officer under Section 52(4) of the Representation of the People Act 1983;
- To exercise all powers in respect of holding of elections under Section 39(4) of the Representation of the People Act 1983;
- To pay expenses properly incurred by electoral registration officers under Section 54 of the Representation of the People Act 1983;
- To give public notice of a casual vacancy.

[...]

7. Officer Scheme of Delegation of Functions

[...]

6. Proper Officer Appointments

- 6.1 The following table, subject to 2 and 3 below, sets out the proper officer appointments of the Council.

[...]

Legislation	Responsibility	Proper Officer
Representation of the People Act 1983 And Section 87 of the Local Government Act 1972¹	With the exception of powers reserved to the Council as set out in Article 4, to exercise the Council's powers and duties in relation to electoral registration and local and parliamentary elections.	AD of Legal and Democratic Services <u>Executive Director of Resources</u>

7. Statutory Officers

Legislation	Function	Officer
Sections 8 and 35 , ² Representation of the People Act 1983	Electoral Registration Officer	Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services <u>Executive Director of Resources</u>
S24(3) <u>Section 35</u> ³ Representation of the People Act 1983	Returning Officer / <u>Acting Returning Officer</u>	Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services <u>Executive Director of Resources</u>

¹ Reference to section 87 of the Local Government Act 1972 here is a drafting slip. This section makes provision for determining the date upon which the occurrence of a casual vacancy is to be determined.

² Reference to section 35 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA) here is a drafting slip. Section 35 deals with the appointment of a Returning Officer for local elections and is dealt with in the following provision.

³ Reference to section 24(3) of the RPA here is a drafting slip. Section 35 of the Act deals with the appointment of a Returning Officer for Local Elections. Section 24 makes provision for the conduct of parliamentary elections. At a parliamentary election, the Returning Officer (RO) is a largely ceremonial position. Most duties of the RO are discharged by the (Acting) Returning Officer ((A)RO). The (A)RO for Reading Central Borough is the ERO. The (A)RO for parliamentary constituencies which cross local government administrative areas (including Reading West and Mid Berkshire and Earley and Woodley is designated by an order made by the Secretary of State under s.28 of the RPA.

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