

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 24 MARCH 2026

Present: Councillor Mpofu-Coles (Mayor);

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

Remote attendance: Councillor Magon

Apologies: Councillors Emberson, Goss, Hacker and McGoldrick

54. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor made the following announcements:

'I would like to ask the Council to remember one of our former Councillors who recently passed away. Shirley Corti was a Councillor for Peppard ward between 1997 and 2000. She also worked at Reading Central Library in the music and drama section. Councillors please will you join me in standing for a minute's silence.'

The Council stood for a minute's silence.

'I am delighted to announce that Reading Borough Council has been formally recognised as a Council of Sanctuary by City of Sanctuary UK.

This accreditation is awarded to local authorities that demonstrate a strong and sustained commitment to welcoming and supporting people seeking asylum, refugees, and those who have experienced displacement, to working collaboratively with local partners and people with lived experience, and to ensuring that their services are accessible, inclusive, and shaped by compassion.

To help achieve this, we published our Sanctuary Strategy, in Summer 2025, along with a detailed three-year action plan, which aims to embed a culture of welcome across all Council services.

Together, we will continue to build a welcoming environment that supports people seeking sanctuary to thrive.'

The Mayor also invited Councillor Terry to pay tribute to Councillors Jo Lovelock and Debs Edwards, who were attending their last full Council meeting before standing down at the 2026 local elections. Councillors Lovelock and Edwards also addressed the meeting.

55. MINUTES

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The Minutes of the meeting of 24 February 2026 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

56. PETITIONS

Sarah Jones presented a petition as follows:

Lack of accessibility to and inside Albert Road Recreation Ground for all

Access is difficult for wheelchair users of all ages, with uneven pavements along Albert Road, and the pedestrian gate in Richmond Road is too hard to manoeuvre through. Added to these unnecessary accessibility barriers, there are no disabled parking bays in the car park.

The playground is outdated and not DDA-compliant. As a result, local children with special needs are excluded from playing alongside their siblings and peers.

All children deserve safe, inclusive places to play. We call on the Council to urgently:

- Upgrade the playground with inclusive, accessible equipment
- Improve wheelchair access throughout the park
- Provide designated disabled parking near the entrance

Albert Road Rec should be a space for everyone. Please act now to make it inclusive.

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

Thank you for raising your concerns about accessibility and inclusion at Albert Road Recreation Ground. We appreciate residents taking the time to highlight barriers faced by disabled children, young people, and adults. Creating safe, inclusive, and accessible public spaces is a priority for the Council and is reflected in our wider programme of investment in play areas across Reading.

Reading's Labour Council maintains over eighty parks and open spaces and has invested more than £1.7m since 2024, and over £3.5m since 2021, in public play and sports facilities across the Borough. Albert Road Recreation Ground was one of my nearest playgrounds when my children were younger, so I know it very well and have spent a great deal of time there.

Last year, the Council delivered a £100,000 improvement programme at Albert Road. This investment refurbished the popular and free-to-use tennis courts, improved the car park layout, and provided a new wheelchair-accessible entrance. We are also looking to refresh the car park markings to further support safe and accessible use.

Across Reading, the Council has invested significantly in inclusive equipment such as accessible swings, roundabouts, multi-play units, and mobility-aid-friendly surfacing. We will apply this experience and approach as we review the needs at Albert Road Recreation Ground. Any future works would need to be considered carefully as part of a future capital programme, alongside needs and priorities across all of Reading's parks and open spaces. It must be noted that the playground at Albert Road Recreation Ground presents a greater challenge than the playgrounds we have replaced so far, because there are mature trees

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next to the play area. The root network of these trees extends beneath the play equipment. To date, we have not been able to identify a solution for altering or replacing the play equipment that would not result in the loss of some or all of the trees.

I agree wholeheartedly that this park should be a space for everyone. I hope that the Council's strong recent record of investment in inclusive play demonstrates both our capability and our commitment. Our ambition for Albert Road Recreation Ground is for it to be a safe, accessible, and welcoming environment for all children and their families.

To support this, I would be happy to bring Council officers to meet Ward Councillors and residents at the park so concerns can be discussed and understood directly on site.

57. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

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

	Questioner	Subject	Answer
1.	Alison May	Air Quality	Cllr Ennis
2.	Ulrike Magyarosy	Flooding in the Holybrook Area	Cllr Rowland
3.	Pratikshya Gurung	Bins & Littering on the Oxford Rd	Cllr Rowland
4.	Roy Rangarirai	Leisure & Sport	Cllr Barnett-Ward

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

58. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by councillors:

	Questioner	Subject	Answer
1.	Cllr McCann	Road Safety on Kings Road and Cemetery Junction	Cllr Ennis
2.	Cllr Hoskin	Adult Social Care Referrals	Cllr Gittings
3.	Cllr Moore	X	Cllr Emberson
4.	Cllr White	Supporting the Local Economy through Buying Local	Cllr Emberson
5.	Cllr Nikulina	City of Sanctuary	Cllr Terry

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

59. COUNCIL PLAN UPDATE

The Executive Director of Resources submitted a report on a review of the 2025-28 Council Plan. A Council Plan Update proposed for publication was attached to the report at Appendix

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One and a change log at Appendix Two. The Update had been recommended to Council by the meeting of Policy Committee on 16 March 2026 (Minute 65 refers).

The report explained that the review of the Council Plan had focused on factual updates to sections on key achievements in 2025, resident services, and the Council's budget, updating Council Plan projects to reflect any completed projects, those that are or will become business as usual, or new projects in 26/27, and updating KPIs to ensure these were still the correct measures going forward and add results for 2024/25. Several KPIs had been updated to align with the newly published Local Outcomes Framework.

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

Resolved –

That the Council Plan Update 2026 be adopted and published on the Council's website.

60. READING BOROUGH COUNCIL ANTI-RACISM STATEMENT

The following motion was moved by Councillor Dennis and seconded by Councillor Eden and CARRIED:

Resolved –

This Council notes the motion passed on 19 March 2024 in support of black women.

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

Reading is a diverse and vibrant Borough. We celebrate this diversity and recognise that it enriches our community and our organisation. Racism - whether overt or subtle, individual or institutional - has no place in Reading. We condemn racism unequivocally and commit to playing a leading role in making Reading an anti-racist town.

This Council resolves to adopt the below anti-racism statement and publish it on the Council's website to demonstrate commitment as an anti-racist place to work and live.

Anti-racism statement

It is not enough to simply avoid racism; we must be actively anti-racist. This means identifying and dismantling barriers to equality, challenging injustice wherever we see it, and embedding anti-racist practices into our structures, systems, and culture. Racism can take many forms - from conscious, intentional

acts to unconscious bias and systemic discrimination. Without understanding these root causes, we cannot dismantle the structures that perpetuate inequality.

Our principles

- **Action, not words:** Becoming an anti-racist organisation means making real changes in our workplaces and communities.
- **Utilising our influence:** We will use our position, influence and partnerships to drive forward our ambition in making Reading an anti-racist place to live and work.
- **Transparency and accountability:** We will publish progress and invite feedback to ensure lasting change.

Our Commitments

1. Speak Out and Act Together

- **Zero tolerance for racism across the organisation and in our partnerships.**
- **Provide support to victims of racism and take a lead in inclusive community conversations, wherever we are present, to build understanding and unity.**
- **Challenge racist behaviour and address microaggressions and subtle bias.**

2. Change Systems and Structures

- **Review policies, procedures, and services to ensure they are inclusive and anti-racist.**
- **Tackle institutional and structural racism, ensuring leaders exhibit moral leadership.**
- **Put in place measures to eliminate gaps in outcomes between racial and ethnic groups.**

3. Listen, Learn, and Educate

- **Promote racial literacy by supporting community workshops, public campaigns, and allyship initiatives that build shared understanding of privilege and inequality**
- **Champion inclusive leadership in the community by working with local organisations, schools, and partners to embed collective responsibility for equality across all our areas of influence.**

4. Celebrate and Amplify Voices

- **Actively promote and celebrate the history and achievements of Black, Asian, and other minority communities.**

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- **Foster meaningful relationships across communities to ensure everyone is seen, heard, and valued.**

(The meeting closed at 8.35 pm)