

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 21 JULY 2026

Present: Councillor Hoskin (Chair);
Councillors Magyarosy (Vice-Chair), Ayub, Clarke, Cresswell,
Cross, Lanzoni, McEwan, McGoldrick, McGrother, Nikulina,
Thompson, Walkem and Yeo

Apologies: Councillors Ballsdon, Gavin, Keane and Saadat

1. MINUTES OF THE HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 10 MARCH 2026

The Minutes of the meeting of 10 March 2026 were confirmed as a correct record.

2. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meeting were submitted:

Community Safety Partnership – 25 September and 27 November 2025.

Resolved - That the Minutes be received.

3. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
Cllr Nikulina	South Street Arts Centre	Cllr Lanzoni
Cllr Walkem	New Library and Cool Space	Cllr Lanzoni
Cllr Nikulina	Extreme Heat Causes 2,700 excess deaths across the UK	Cllr Yeo
Cllr Clarke	Soft Plastic Recycling in Reading	Cllr McGoldrick
Cllr Cresswell	Maintaining wheelchair accessible footpaths	Cllr McGoldrick

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

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4. DELIVERING A PARTNERSHIP RESPONSE TO ROUGH SLEEPING IN READING: COORDINATED OUTREACH, SUPPORT AND SUPPORTED HOUSING

The Committee received a report and presentation that provided an overview of the way that the Council and its partners delivered a coordinated response to rough sleeping across outreach, emergency provision, supported accommodation and longer-term recovery. Janine Breakspear (Launchpad), Matt Farrow (RBC Housing), Pete Philp (RBC Adult Social Care), Nathan Birch (Salvation Army), Tega Okena and Wendy Dodds (both from St Mungos) attended the meeting and took part in the presentation.

The presentation highlighted the strength and depth of partnership working across statutory services, commissioned providers, and the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS). The presentation demonstrated how joined-up working enabled individuals to access the right support at the right time, particularly those with complex and multiple needs. Key areas of focus included coordinated outreach, partnership led emergency responses such as Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP), specialist pathways including Housing First, and wider work to support recovery, independence and long-term housing outcomes.

The report focused on the partnership response to rough sleeping, rather than wider statutory homelessness duties and explained that the approach was underpinned by *Reading's Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026 – 2031* and the associated Action Plan. The report also highlighted ongoing work to strengthen collaboration, including co-production with people with lived experience and the development of new initiatives with partners. The report showed that partnership working was fundamental to reducing rough sleeping in Reading.

The report also set out the various supported accommodation pathways that were tailored to different needs, with capacity to accommodate 289 people across interventions. These comprised 280 commissioned bed spaces (referral only, not direct access) and nine bed spaces for those needing an immediate off the streets offer (direct access).

The Council worked closely with commissioned partners from the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS), including Launchpad Reading, St Mungo's, The Salvation Army and YMCA Reading, alongside providing ongoing support to FAITH's Winter Shelter. Partnership with statutory organisations was also central to Reading's approach to rough sleeping. Key partners included Adult Social Care, health services (including HOLT), substance misuse services (CGL/MDOT), Thames Valley Police, probation, and Jobcentre Plus. To further strengthen partnership working a quarterly Homelessness Forum would be established to bring together statutory, commissioned and VCFS organisations to improve coordination, share intelligence and identify gaps in provision. The Government's homelessness reform programme, including the proposed Duty to Collaborate, would also require partners to work more formally together to address rough sleeping and homelessness. The Council had introduced a dedicated Senior Social Worker role, improving coordination and safeguarding responses for individuals with complex needs. A representative from the Rough Sleeping Initiatives Team attended the Safeguarding Adults

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Board and Safeguarding Adults Review Panel, ensuring the needs and risks facing this cohort were reflected in wider safeguarding arrangements.

Resolved - That the report be noted for information, alongside the presentation delivered with sector partners.

5. GLL ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2025

Further to Minute 5 of the meeting held on 9 July 2025, the Committee considered a report providing an update on the performance and delivery of Leisure Services and development of new facilities by Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL). Craig Woodward, Steph Smith and Jemma Allen of GLL attended the meeting and gave a presentation on the annual report which covered the following areas:

- Background to the contract;
- Investment in facilities had led to Rivermead Leisure Centre being independently assessed as 'Outstanding' under Sport England's Quest quality scheme;
- Usage statistics, with over one million visits in 2025;
- Valuing a very local workforce including training, upskilling and development, apprenticeships and work experience. GLL had achieved the Investors in People Gold Award;
- Community work during the year had included a visit by the Council's Access and Disabilities Working Group, Reading & Oxfordshire Club Games, outreach events, water safety education and promotion, the GLL Sports Foundation for talented sportspeople and community initiatives;
- Continuing to support the Health Referral Programme to improve health outcomes for people with, or at risk of, long-term conditions.

The report set out the following priorities that would remain a focus in 2026/27:

- Increase physical activity, reduce obesity and widen participation in the local population;
- Facilities improvements at Palmer Park Sport and Leisure Centre and South Reading Leisure Centre;
- Financial sustainability.

The report explained that performance during 2025 had remained strong and demonstrated the positive impact of the Council's investment in leisure provision. Resident satisfaction with sport and leisure services achieved 62%, well above the Local Government Association benchmark, while dissatisfaction reduced to 10%. Participation also continued to grow and this upward trend reflected the investment and improvements made across the centres and aligned with the Council's wider priorities, including public health objectives and tackling health inequalities. GLL continued to offer a range of targeted programmes to

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improve access to physical activity for residents who might otherwise face barriers to participation.

The report added that major capital improvements had been progressed during the year, including the completion of the athletics track at Palmer Park Leisure Centre and Stadium. Rivermead Leisure Centre had been independently assessed as 'Outstanding' under Sport England's Quest quality scheme, confirming high standards of customer experience, accessibility, compliance and environmental management - one of only seven centres to achieve this standard nationally.

GLL had joined the Water Safety Partnership Board and was working closely with Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service to deliver preventative water safety education at Rivermead. This included sessions with local schools to strengthen awareness and reduce water-related risks across the borough.

Mental wellbeing had also remained a key focus, with 10% of Physical Activity on Referral (PARS) referrals citing mental health as the primary reason. Among completers, 60% had achieved a positive wellbeing score on the Short Warwick-Edinburgh scale and showed improvement from baseline, with a further 24% also demonstrating meaningful progress. Collectively, these outcomes highlighted the programme's continued impact on physical health, emotional resilience and community cohesion.

GLL's key Healthwise objectives and priorities for 2026 had focused on expanding specialist health pathways, strengthening staff capability, and increasing opportunities for residents to engage in programmes that supported long term health, wellbeing and community connection. The key areas of focus for the year were:

- Launch the new Cancer Rehabilitation pathway to support residents following cancer treatment;
- Continue delivering and strengthening specialist pathways, including Phase 4 Cardiac Rehabilitation and Better Balance;
- Upskill staff to Level 3 Exercise on Referral to enhance capacity within the PARS programme;
- Train staff to deliver Aquatics for Health sessions;
- Further expand the Healthwise timetable and increase the range of social events offered;
- Launch Better Health and Wellbeing Events across leisure centres;
- Support 12 targeted health promotion initiatives throughout the year.

The Committee discussed the presentation and took the opportunity to ask further questions of GLL.

AGREED:

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- (1) That the presentation by GLL in respect of the operation of the leisure contract be noted:**
- (2) That the following be noted:**
 - a. the successful renovation of the athletics track at Palmer Park stadium;**
 - b. Rivermead Leisure Centre's 'Outstanding' rating from Quest, Sport England's national quality scheme, one of only seven facilities nationally;**
 - c. £12m social value from the leisure contract with GLL, a 37% increase on 2024;**
- (3) That the priorities for 2026/27 as set out in section 4 of the report be noted.**

6. RBC LANDLORD SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT - YEAR END UPDATE 2025/26

Further to Minute 13 of the meeting held on 10 March 2026, the Committee received a report providing an update on the performance of Reading Borough Council's Housing Landlord Service delivered in the financial year 2025-26.

The report explained that the service had met the expectations under the Tenancy Standard, demonstrating strong performance and delivering positive outcomes for tenants. This reflected the Council's ongoing commitment to providing high-quality housing management and tenancy support. The Housing Landlord service continued to meet monthly with the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) under the Provider Improvement regime, with positive feedback received on progress made on the Council's Service Improvement Plan and the outcomes that had been delivered to date to address the root causes of the issues that had been identified.

The RSH had confirmed that, based on the Council's evidence submissions, the service was demonstrating its ability to deliver sustainable, long-term change and was moving closer to regrading or reinspection. The report noted that the underperformance of elements of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contract delivered by Affinity Reading Ltd remained a key barrier, but the Council was actively addressing this through robust governance with Affinity and the associated contractors. The Housing Landlord Service remained committed to continuous improvement and regulatory compliance, ensuring that tenants received safe, secure, and high-quality housing services.

Resolved:- That the Year End position for the Housing Landlord Service Performance for 2025-26 be noted.

7. REFRESH OF HOUSING LANDLORD SERVICES POLICIES

The Committee received a report that sought agreement for minor amendments to existing policies, that were required under the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) Standards, and their expectations of Landlords. The policies were based on best practice examples and proposed no changes to the current service offered to tenants. However, the published policies ensured that the Council as a Landlord was clearly setting out their obligations to tenants, managing the expectation of tenants, and improving ease of access of information for tenants. A copy of the RSH Standards was attached to the report at Appendix 3.

The report proposed that two policies be amended to reflect best practice standards, and ensure the Council met the requirements of the standards as set out by the Regulator of Social Housing (Appendix 3), whilst continuing to meet all current legal requirements. Both policies were designed to protect tenants, uphold community safety, and provide the Council with appropriate mechanisms to respond to evolving challenges.

The proposed changes were summarised as follows:

The Rent Recovery Policy (attached at Appendix 1) had been taken out of the larger Corporate Debt Policy (2020) to form a standalone policy. This was required to reflect the detailed ways in which the Council collected rent, recovered arrears and set out the ways in which tenants were supported early on to prevent enforcement action and help tenants to repay their rent arrears. There were no proposed changes to the way the Council would collect rent and recover arrears, but this standalone policy would make it easier for tenants to access the information.

The Tenancy Policy (attached at Appendix 2) had been updated to reflect changes in the types of tenancies offered and clarified that the default was introductory and secure tenancies, in line with best practices. The policy also set out changes to the way the Council managed succession, which had been updated to include assignment. Assignment was a legal process by which a tenancy was transferred to someone else, who must meet the eligibility criteria. Social housing landlords must have this in place to aligns with their legal obligations.

The report explained that, once agreed the policies would be made available via the relevant pages of the Council's website and would also be proactively advertised with tenants and shared with the teams that delivered these services or worked closely with Landlord Services. The policies would be reviewed every two years, or sooner if triggered by legislative changes, changes to consumer standards or the identification of further best practice.

Resolved - That the changes to the following policies be agreed for publication:

- **Rent Recovery Policy – This had been separated out from the corporate debt recovery policy to provide clarity for tenants;**

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- **The Tenancy Policy – This had been updated to reflect the types of tenancies the Council offered.**

8. REVIEW OF THE 'GUIDE FOR BUSKING AND STREET PERFORMANCE IN READING'

The Committee considered a report which gave an update on the Guide for Busking and Street Performance in Reading. The report explained that the Guide had been agreed at the Licensing Applications Committee meeting held on 14 November 2024 (Minute 8 refers) and that the Committee had requested that a further report on the success of the Guide be submitted in due course; the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee was considered to be more appropriate as there were no licensing implications.

The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 Existing Guide for Busking and Street Performance in Reading, November 2024;
- Appendix 2 Complaints Spreadsheet;
- Appendix 3 AI Complaints Analysis & Summary;
- Appendix 4 Facebook Comments (responding to the TVP social media post);
- Appendix 5 Analysis of the Complaints Spreadsheet by themes.

The report explained that while busking and other forms of street entertainment were important to the vibrancy of the Town Centre, buskers and street entertainers shared the streets with everyone else that lived, worked and visited the town. Certain areas of the town centre, primarily along Broad Street, had been experiencing a high number of loud performances daily, which could have a detrimental effect primarily on the businesses and staff located near to where the performances were taking place. The Council wanted to continue to support opportunities for buskers and street entertainers in the town, but at the same time, the Council also wanted to protect the needs and rights of residents, visitors and businesses.

The report explained that In January 2026 Thames Valley Police (TVP) had requested views from the public on busking via a social media post and whilst there were negative comments, on the whole the feedback had demonstrated a lot of public support for busking and the performers.

The report also explained that Reading BID had confirmed that The Guide had worked well when speaking with buskers who were willing to engage. Reading BID had been tracking reports regarding buskers and street entertainers on a weekly basis, recording complaints coming in via email, verbally, through social media channels, text messages and personally witnessed by BID wardens and other BID staff. Alexa Volker, Reading BID, attended the meeting and gave an example of recent action that had been taken with regard to noise nuisance. In particular, she thanked the Council's Environmental Protection Team, who had supported the BID quickly and effectively when necessary.

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The Council had existing enforcement powers and tools to tackle busking and street entertainment that was causing adverse impacts on the surroundings. However, in practice these powers could only be used in very serious incidences, with officers being required to collate strong evidence over a period that an individual was persistently causing a statutory nuisance or negative impact by acting unreasonably or refusing to co-operate. This perceived lack of enforcement had resulted in a belief that action could not be taken quickly or effectively. It was noted that it would be disproportionate to include busking and street entertainment under the Council's existing Public Spaces Protection Order

The report therefore suggested that the Council should continue to use The Guide as a tool to help buskers self-regulate and officers would continue to look at using available powers on a case-by-case basis where offences were potentially being committed. In addition, BID would issue further communication plans for continued promotion of The Guide and to engage with performers.

Resolved - That it be noted that no changes would be made to the Guide for Busking and Street Performance following the review.

9. HEXAGON THEATRE INVESTMENT

The Committee received a report which stated that the Council had successfully applied to Arts Council England's (ACE) Creative Foundations Fund for £2,068,000 of grant funding with match funding of £230,500 being provided by the Council (consisting of: £109,000 in-kind contribution, £71,500 fundraising and £50,000 capital funding). The funding would be used to make improvements to the Hexagon Theatre seating, drainage, fire stopping and fire door remedial works. The report explained that, in line with the Council's constitution and a report to Policy Committee on 13 April 2026, (minute 72 refers) the Director of Culture, Leisure and Skills had accepted the grant offer and the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Director of Legal and Governance and the Director of Finance, would progress the procurement and enter into the necessary contracts to carry out the works. The first phase of work was due to be completed in winter 2026/27 with other works concluding in autumn 2027.

The report also explained that work was progressing on the new Studio Theatre at the Hexagon in accordance with the construction programme. The Studio Theatre was expected to open to the public in spring 2027, providing circa 200 seating flexible theatre (circa 300 standing) with step free access, accessible toilets on all floors, and bar and catering facilities. Work to install the new ground source heating system in the Hexagon was also progressing with the aim for full operation by October 2026. This would replace the existing gas boilers to help meet the decarbonisation aims of the Council. Officers had started The operational and business planning to programme the Hexagon and Studio Theatre from 2027 as complementary venues.

Resolved -

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- (1) That the successful grant from Arts Council England of £2.068m for investment in the Hexagon Theatre be noted;**
- (2) That the update on the Studio Theatre build due to open in spring 2027 be noted.**

10. READING COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP (CSP) ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee considered a report that provided an overview of the work that Reading's Community Safety Partnership (CSP) had carried out over the last year to meet the priorities outlined within the Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy 2023-2026. The report covered the period from July 2025 - May 2026. The report also informed the Committee that a new Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy for 2026-2029 had been commissioned alongside an associated Strategic Needs Assessment.

The report set out key highlights from this year's activity including:

- Over the previous five years the overall crime rate had spiked in 2022 and then fallen steadily between 2022 and 2024. Crime rates were down 1.58% in 2023, and 6.05% in 2024. There had been a small increase in 2025 of 0.37%.
- Perceptions of how safe residents felt in Reading had remained the same in 2025, in comparison to the previous year. In the 2025 Community Safety Survey 50.5% responded that they felt safe in Reading; compared to 51% in 2024.
- A new Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy for 2026-2029 had been commissioned and an associated Strategic Needs Assessment had started.
- A new Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) had been brought into force on 24 March 2026, providing an additional partnership tool to address Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB).
- The Young Voices network had continued to expand, allowing the voice of children and young people to contribute to decision-making and shaping delivery. The Young Voices Survey was now embedded as an annual survey alongside the main Community Safety Survey.
- Partners had implemented improved approaches to community cohesion and resilience including a process involving community leaders for reassuring communities during high-profile events, such as terrorist attacks.
- Independently recommended improvements had been made to the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, including ways to embed the voice of the child and lived experience into decision-making.
- New processes had been created to enable better partnership working on water safety, including the creation of regular partnership patrols to address crime and ASB on Reading's waterways.
- Key community events linked to crime reduction, including the CSP's annual Domestic Abuse Conference and annual Young Voices Safety Summit, were held regularly.

The report explained that the data in the report had been sourced from Berkshire Observatory, which collated data from national and validated data sources including the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Police data and stated that it was important to note

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that offence data shifted regularly as old offences came to light or longstanding investigations were completed. The Committee noted that it would be helpful to have data that covered a longer period, to give a comprehensive view of crime figures.

Resolved -

- (1) That the annual Community Safety Partnership report outlining the activities and impact over the last year be endorsed for publication;**
- (2) That the commissioning of a new Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy for 2026-2029 alongside an associated Strategic Needs Assessment be noted.**

(The meeting closed at 9.24 pm)