

POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 22 JUNE 2020

Present: Councillor Brock (Chair);
Councillors Page (Vice-Chair), Barnett-Ward, Duveen, Emberson, Ennis, Jones, Skeats, Stevens and White

RESOLVED ITEMS

3. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved -

That pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of item 4 below as it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to that Act.

4. WHITLEY LIBRARY

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report setting out commercially sensitive information relating to a marketing exercise to dispose of the freehold of Whitley Library. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 - Location Plan
- Appendices 2 (a) & (b) - schedule and summary table of offers received
- Appendices 3(a) & (b)- evaluation of Third Sector bids
- Appendix 4 - summary of Bidder A business plan

Resolved -

That the information contained within the report and appendices be noted and taken into account in making a decision on the proposed disposal (Minute 12 refers).

(Exempt information as defined in paragraph 3)

5. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair made the following announcement:

'On Saturday night three people, enjoying the late evening sunshine and beautiful surroundings of the Forbury Gardens, were killed in a brutal and senseless attack. I speak for everybody at the Council when I say our thoughts and prayers remain firmly with the families of those three people who lost their lives, and for those who were seriously injured. We cannot begin to imagine the hurt and grief.

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I would also like to again express my appreciation for the incredible response of police and emergency service colleagues who acted so swiftly to prevent further harm.

Reading remains in a state of shock. That will be the case for some considerable time. If there is one thing I know about our town, however, it's that we are a community that stands resolute in the face of challenges. Earlier today I joined both the town's MPs, faith and community leaders and the Mayor of Reading to lay flowers at the Abbey Gateway. We are a safe and peaceful town with a long and proud history of good community relations. Over the difficult days, weeks and months ahead it is more important than ever to stand by these local strengths, and I am confident we will.

Can I now respectfully ask everybody taking part in this meeting, and those watching, to participate in a minute's silence in memory of those who died this weekend?

6. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 18 May and 27 May 2020 were agreed as correct records and would be signed by the Chair.

7. QUESTIONS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by Councillors:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Cllr Duveen	Support for Homeless People	Cllr Ennis
2.	Cllr White	Road Safety	Cllr Page
3.	Cllr White	Rough Sleeping	Cllr Ennis

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

The Chair noted that arrangements had now been made for members of the public to submit questions to the online meetings of the Committee, although none had been received for this meeting.

8. DECISION BOOKS

The Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services submitted a report listing the Decision Books that had been published since the meeting of the Committee held on 18 May 2020.

Resolved -

That Decision Book Nos 594-600 be noted.

9. COUNCIL RECOVERY PROGRAMME - CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

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The Chief Executive submitted a report outlining the Council's approach to the Recovery phase of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic, which followed the Council's initial response to the Pandemic and the update report provided to Policy Committee on 18 May 2020 (Minute 94 refers). The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 - Pandemic Response Strategic Framework and Underlying Principles;
- Appendix 2 - Reading Borough Council Recovery Structure Diagram;
- Appendix 3 - Local Resilience Forum Multi Agency Recovery Structure Diagram.

The report explained that the overall vision for the Recovery phase was to ensure Reading could be a thriving, virus-resilient community, based on: ensuring the Council itself was resilient and fit for the future; helping people be safe and communities thrive; and securing the economic future of Reading.

These strategic priorities were a supplement to, but in no way a replacement of, the Corporate Plan, acknowledging that the context of the crisis required a shift in focus. The Recovery plan sought to cover the period until the end of the calendar year and it was envisaged that the impact assessment, and the outcome of the Recovery work, would feed into the next Corporate Plan which would cover the period from 2021-2025.

The report explained that 'Ensuring the Council is itself resilient and fit for the future' was a strategy which was applicable to the Council's own operations and delivery of services and would be delivered through an Operational Recovery Group. 'Helping people be safe and communities thrive' was a strategy which needed to be delivered with partners, particularly the voluntary sector in Reading and the health and social care sector, and would be led by a Social Regeneration and Voluntary Sector Group. 'Securing the economic future of Reading' would require wide participation from businesses and partners and would be delivered through an Economic Recovery and Renewal Group. All three groups would report into the Corporate Management Team which would be the strategic co-ordinating group for the Council's Recovery programme. Appendix 2 of the report illustrated the framework and the relationship between the different groups and priorities.

The report noted that the structures set up in Reading mirrored similar structures in the Thames Valley area under the Local Resilience Forum. The Council was working with its partners in Berkshire and the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum under the requirements of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and relevant guidance. In discussion with other councils in Berkshire, it had been agreed that the Thames Valley area was not a natural and cohesive economic area around which to build economic recovery and that therefore regional structures should be considered at the county level. Appendix 3 to the draft report showed the corresponding structures under the Local Resilience Forum.

Resolved -

That the Council's response to the Recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic as set out in the report and summarised above be endorsed.

10. 2019/20 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT

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The Executive Director of Resources submitted a report setting out the provisional revenue and capital outturn positions for the Council's General Fund and Housing Revenue Account for 2019/20. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 - General Fund Outturn;
- Appendix 2 - Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Outturn
- Appendix 3 - Capital Programme Outturn
- Appendix 4 - Savings;
- Appendix 5 - Delivery Fund;
- Appendix 6 - Reserves Position as at 31st March 2020;
- Appendix 7 - Performance Outturn.

The report stated that the provisional General Fund revenue outturn position was a (£3.065m) underspend. This was a deterioration of £0.050m from the forecast as at the end of Quarter 3 (Period 9) and the position was prior to any service carry forward requests. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was projected to account for £0.911m of additional revenue cost and income pressures in the final month of the year.

The provisional outturn for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was an underspend compared to budget of £12.176m. This had arisen due to the budgeted drawdown of £10.466m, actually being a reserve contribution of £1.710m. This was an improvement of (£3.562m) on the forecast position reported at Quarter 3; the main reasons for the improvement were due to rent collection, major works and capital financing.

The provisional General Fund Capital Programme outturn was a (£3.806m) net underspend as at the end of March 2020 against the revised net budget of £66.507m, agreed as part of the budget setting process in February 2020. The provisional HRA Capital Programme outturn was a (£1.401m) net underspend against the net budget of £15.343m.

The report stated that £7.716m of savings had been delivered in 2019/20 against a target of £12.720m. Of the non-delivered savings £2.465m had been deleted as non-deliverable as part of 2020/21 budget setting, with the remaining £2.539m being carried forward into 2020/21. The carry forward of non-delivered savings and the financial impact of Covid-19 had significantly increased the risk of delivering the 2020/21 budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy as originally approved in February 2020, and options to mitigate the projected financial gap were currently being prepared for consideration in due course.

The report also set out performance against the measures of success published in the Council's Corporate Plan. At the end of 2019/20 54% of measures were rated green, 14% rated amber and 32% rated red.

Resolved -

- (1) That the following be noted:**

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- The provisional General Fund revenue outturn position for 2019/20 was an (£3.065m) underspend;
 - The provisional Housing Revenue Account outturn position for 2019/20 was a (£1.710m) transfer to the HRA reserve;
 - The provisional General Fund Capital Programme outturn position for 2019/20 was a (£3.806m) net underspend;
 - The provisional HRA Capital Programme outturn position for 2019/20 was a (£1.401m) net underspend;
 - That £7.716m of agreed savings had been delivered in year with £2.539m of non-delivered savings being carried forward into 2020/21;
 - That £3.068m of Capital Receipts had been used to fund transformation in accordance with the Capitalisation Directive (Appendix 3);
 - The performance achieved against the Corporate Plan success measures as set out in Section B of this report and Appendix 7;
- (2) That the following be approved:
- The service requests to roll-forward funds totalling £0.518m into 2020/21 to complete agreed programmes of work;
 - That, in light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the remaining underspend of £2.547m be set aside to bolster reserves;
 - That the £1.093m overspend in 2019/20 relating to Brighter Future for Children be funded by the Council;
 - That the net roll-forwards of budget within the Capital Programme totalling £4.169m be agreed; resulting in a revised Capital Programme net budget of £121.963m for 2020/21;
- (2) That the net roll-forwards of budget within the HRA Capital Programme totalling £1.533m be agreed; resulting in a revised HRA Capital Programme net budget of £31.795m.

11. COVID-19 - FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Executive Director of Resources submitted a report setting out the projected financial impact of Covid-19 on the Council's revenue and capital budgets up to 31 March 2021.

The report explained that the estimated impact of Covid 19 on the Council included actual and projected expenditure arising directly as a result of the pandemic necessary to either maintain existing services or to provide additional capacity/services as necessary; actual and projected income lost due to reduced demand and cessation of services; and the projected impact on the delivery of agreed Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) savings as a result of the refocussing of staff to respond to the Pandemic. The Council had received a total of £8.3m in general support funding from Central Government in two tranches: £3.8m and £4.5m respectively. Based on the latest projections, the total net additional cost to the Council, including BfC, as a result of Covid-19 up to 31 March 2021 was £15.6m, of which £1.1m was the total net cost incurred in 2019/20 and £14.5m the projected net impact in 2020/21.

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The report identified £3.4m of 2020/21 MTFs savings as being at risk as a result of Covid-19. Assumed income would be delayed, albeit a significant percentage may only be temporary whilst lockdown and recovery ensue. The Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy included all prior year savings and income targets within the base budget for future years. There was therefore a significant risk that, without further action, the Council's 2021/22 budget would need to find equivalent levels of savings to address the gap which would arise if the at-risk savings were not realised or mitigated on an ongoing basis. In addition, it was highly likely that Council Tax and Business Rates collection would be impacted; projected losses based on a comparison with 2019/20 collection rates indicated a potential total loss of £7.559m with the Council's share being £5.149m. This amount would be a pressure on the 2021/22 budget in addition to the lost savings and income.

HRA rent collection was being closely monitored and the collection rate for April was at 97.48%, which was slightly above the budgeted collection rate of 97.40% but lower than the pre-Covid collection rate of 98.75%. The Council's Capital Programme would not be delivered as originally planned due to delays caused by lockdown restrictions and social distancing, which created risks associated with investment property investment and slippage of capital receipt forecasts.

The report noted that all councils were required to provide a monthly return to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) setting out the estimated financial impact of Covid-19, and that this report reflected the amounts included on the Council's second Covid-19 return submitted to the MHCLG on 15 May 2020.

Resolved -

That the projected financial impact of Covid-19 as set out in the report be noted, and that further reports on both the forecast position and outcomes arising in respect of next steps be brought to the Policy Committee in due course.

12. WHITLEY LIBRARY

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the outcome of a marketing exercise to dispose of the freehold of Whitley Library. Confidential information relating to the proposed disposal had been considered in closed session (Minute 4 above refers). A location plan was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report noted that, as part of the Community Hubs projects, Policy Committee had approved the relocation of the Whitley library service to the South Reading Youth & Community Centre, and the subsequent disposal of the previous site. A marketing process had been carried out and five bids had been received. The report recommended that the property be sold to 'Bidder A' who had offered the highest price and had advised that it was their intention to use the building for community purposes. The purchaser

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would be required to respect the Local Listing of the building and the Preservation Orders placed on the qualifying trees.

The report explained that disposal of the library would also include an area of land currently used under a licence by the owner of the neighbouring property for garden land and driveway purposes, and that part of this land could be excluded from the library sale and sold to the owner of the neighbouring property to enable them to retain and regularise their driveway.

Resolved -

- (1) That the freehold interest in Whitley Library be disposed of to Bidder A in accordance with the terms set out in paragraph 4.2 of the report considered in closed session;**
- (2) That the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services be authorised to agree terms for a supplementary minor disposal of adjacent land in accordance with the terms set out in paragraph 4.4 of the report considered in closed session;**
- (3) That the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services be authorised, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Lead Councillor for Corporate & Consumer Services, to re-engage with other bidders as appropriate or remarket the property for disposal at best consideration, in the event that the offer price was subsequently reduced or the purchasers did not perform to an acceptable timescale.**

13. NEW EMERGENCY DUTY SERVICE CONTRACT - SOCIAL CARE AND HOMELESS PROVISION

The Executive Director of Adult Care and Health Services submitted a report seeking approval to enter into a joint arrangement with Bracknell Forest Council to supply the out of hours Emergency Duty Service for Reading.

The report explained that the Emergency Duty Service (EDS) was a joint arrangement responsible for all social services emergencies and statutory duties which arose outside normal office hours, including out of hours homelessness support. The service was hosted, and managed, within the People's Directorate of Bracknell Forest Council, and was responsible for all client groups (Adults & Children's' Social Care Emergencies) of the six local authorities of Berkshire. The EDS provided a service to individuals and families in social crisis which required an immediate and/or urgent response. The role of the EDS was to carry out an initial screening of the presenting situation and establish a safe and viable solution pending follow up by the appropriate local authority's daytime services. In terms of volume, during 2019/20 approximately 500 referrals from Reading service users had been actioned by the EDS per month.

The report explained that the current agreement for the service expired in June 2020 and there was a new agreement to cover a seven-year period from June 2020 - May 2027.

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The new agreement would still include all six Berkshire local authorities and Brighter Futures for Children had access to this service as part of a Service Level Agreement with the Council. The report recommended authorising the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Health Services in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care and the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services to enter into proposed replacement contract with Bracknell Forest Borough Council on the basis set out in the report and noting that the total contract value was in the sum of £2,766,330.

Resolved -

That the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Health Services be authorised, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care and the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services, to enter into a joint arrangement with Bracknell Forest Borough Council to supply out of hours Emergency Duty Service for Reading.

14. ICT FUTURE OPERATING MODEL BUSINESS CASE

The Executive Director of Resources submitted a report presenting the outline ICT Future Operating Model Business Case and seeking approval for officers to proceed with procurement and implementation of the preferred option. The Business Case was attached to the report as an Appendix.

The report explained that the strategic requirements of the Future Operating Model were robust, responsive delivery and future fitness. The business case had identified four options:

- 0** Replicate the current arrangements - a “do minimum” baseline;
- 1** Continue with a single prime outsource, but remedy deficiencies;
- 2A** “Smart-source”, optimally sourcing different service elements, including service desk/management, and integrating them;
- 2B** As 2A, but building service desk and service management in-house.

The report summarised an analysis of these options in terms of the economic case, financial requirement, commercial case and management case. The analysis had shown option 2A to be the best for both the Council’s strategic requirement and cost: it provided the most effective model and the best value for money. Option 2B had not been recommended on the basis that there would be significant additional cost in bringing the service desk and management back in-house, compared with continuing to outsource this function.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Option 2A, as described in the report, be endorsed as the preferred option for the ICT Future Operating Model on the basis it provided the most effective model and the best value for money;**

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- (2) That the Executive Director of Resources be authorised, in consultation with the Chief Digital and Information Officer, the Assistant Director for Procurement and Lead Councillor for Corporate and Customer Services, to proceed with procurement and implementation of the preferred option, subject to delivery remaining within the financial envelope set out in the Outline Business Case, and a satisfactory report on progress being made to the Policy Committee in September 2020.

15. ONLINE MEETING PROTOCOLS - AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

The Executive Director of Resources submitted a report setting out proposed arrangements for holding online meetings of the Audit & Governance Committee and the Traffic Management Sub-Committee as permitted by the Coronavirus Act 2020 and subsequent Regulations that had come into force on 6 April 2020. The protocols for these meetings were attached to the report at Appendix A for the Committee's approval.

The report recommended that the Committee retain the membership of the Audit & Governance Committee; reduce the membership of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee; and agree the quorum thresholds for the new online meetings. It was also recommended that provision should be made to allow substitutes where a member of the Committee could not attend the online meeting.

Resolved -

- (1) That the protocols for meetings of the Audit & Governance Committee and Traffic Management Sub-Committee, drafted in accordance with the provisions of 'The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020', and attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved;
- (2) That the provisions agreed in (1) above be applied only to those Committee and Sub-Committee meetings required to be held, or held, before 7 May 2021 and the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, be authorised to end or make amendments to the arrangements prior to 7 May 2021;
- (3) That, during these arrangements, the attendance of members at the Audit & Governance Committee and Traffic Management Sub-Committee be as follows:
 - (a) Audit & Governance Committee (8)
Councillors (Labour 5; Conservative 2; Green 1);
 - (b) Traffic Management Sub-Committee (10)

Councillors (Labour 6; Conservative 2; Green 1; and Liberal Democrat 1)

- (4) That the quorum for the Audit & Governance Committee and the Traffic Management Sub-Committee both be set at three members.

16. ANNUAL SAFEGUARDING REPORT 2018/19

The Executive Director of Adult Care & Health Services submitted a report presenting the West of Berkshire Safeguarding Report, which provided a current overview of safeguarding in Reading and the wider local area. The Safeguarding Report was attached at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the Care Act 2014 stipulated that each local authority must have a Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) to lead on adult safeguarding arrangements across its locality and have oversight and co-ordination with regard to the effectiveness of the safeguarding work of its member and partner agencies. The SAB's aim was to help and safeguard adults with care and support needs by ensuring that local safeguarding arrangements were in place, as defined by the Care Act 2014, and that: safeguarding practice was person-centred and outcome-focused; work was collaborative in order to prevent abuse and neglect where possible; agencies and individuals gave timely and proportionate responses when abuse or neglect had occurred; safeguarding practice was continuously improving; and quality of life for adults in its area were enhanced.

The report stated that the West of Berkshire Safeguarding Report reflected performance and priorities with regard to Safeguarding. It highlighted the work that had been carried out across the multi-agency partnership (Reading, West Berks & Wokingham) and included information on Safeguarding in Reading Borough Council Directorate of Adult Care & Health Services.

Resolved -

- (1) That the West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Report, which was appended to the report, be noted;
- (2) That the Strategic Plan be noted.

(The meeting started at 6.15 pm and closed at 8.23 pm)