

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 8 JUNE 2021

Present: Councillor Stevens (Mayor);

Councillors David Absolom, Debs Absolom, Ayub, Ballsdon, Barnett-Ward, Brock, Carnell, Davies, Duveen, Eden, Edwards, Emberson, Ennis, Hacker, Hoskin, James, Khan, Leng, Lovelock, Maskell, McElroy, McEwan, Mitchell, Mpofu-Coles, O'Connell, Page, Pearce, Robinson, Rowland, Rynn, D Singh, Skeats, Sokale, Terry, White, Whitham, and R Williams.

Apologies: Councillors Carnell, Challenger, Gittings, Manghnani, McGonigle, Stanford-Beale, J Williams and Woodward.

10. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor was delighted to announce that this year four organisations from Reading had received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, which was recognised as being the highest accolade given to charitable organisations. The winners were: No.5 Young People; Reading Family Aid Group; Reading Rowing Club; and Smart Works Reading. The Mayor had written to the charities to congratulate them and was looking forward to visiting them in the future.

11. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

12. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER 9

	Questioner	Subject	Answer
1.	Richard Stainthorp	Support for Parents to Help Children Thrive in Education	Cllr Pearce
2.	Andrew Hornsby-Smith	Hydrotherapy Pool at Royal Berkshire Hospital	Cllr Hoskin
3.	Andrew Hornsby-Smith	Henley Road Cemetery	Cllr McEwan

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

12. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER 10

	Questioner	Subject	Answer
1.	Cllr James	Central Club	Cllr Brock
2.		WITHDRAWN	

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3.	Cllr McElroy	Fly Tipping	Cllr Barnett-Ward
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(The full text of the questions and replies was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

13. UPDATE ON CONSTRUCTION COSTS OF NEW LEISURE FACILITIES

The Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhoods submitted a report seeking approval to increase the capital spend allocation for the new leisure facilities at Rivermead and Palmer Park by £2,433k largely as a result of an increase in construction costs due to delays to the schemes starting on site as a result of Covid-19. The Policy Committee had authorised the award of a 25-year contract with GLL to design, build, operate and maintain (DBOM) the Council's four leisure centres; and delegated authority to officers to finalise contractual arrangements with GLL (Minute 62 of Policy Committee on 20 January 2020 refers). These contractual discussions were progressing but had been disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the temporary closure of leisure facilities, which had delayed the signing of the DBOM contract. In the interim, Policy Committee, at its meeting on 24 August 2020 (Minute 40 refers), delegated authority to officers to enter into a Planning Cost Agreement with GLL to progress the design and planning approval of the new build elements at Rivermead and Palmer Park and limit the impact of Covid-19 on leisure facilities. Planning Applications Committee, on 31 March 2021, gave consent for the two schemes (Minutes 93 and 95 refer). An expression of interest seeking funding had been submitted to Sport England for £1,500k to contribute to the construction cost of the new leisure facilities. In view of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic a new timetable for the construction of the facilities was also set out in the report.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Hoskin and seconded by Councillor Brock and CARRIED:

Resolved -

- (1) That the capital budget be increased by £2,433k for the provision of new leisure facilities;
- (2) That the capital budget be increased by a further £1,500k if the funding application submitted to Sport England for £1,500k did not materialise in full or part;
- (3) That the Director of Finance be authorised to amend the Medium Term Financial Strategy to reflect the £3,933k increase in capital spend for the new leisure provision;
- (4) That the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services be authorised to give scheme and spend approval for £38.451m for the full cost of the Leisure procurement project, in consultation with the Director of Finance;

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- (5) That the submission of the funding application to Sport England for £1,500k contribution to the construction cost of the new leisure provision be noted;
- (6) That the updated timetable to construct the new facilities at Rivermead Leisure Centre and Palmer Park Sports Stadium be noted;
- (7) That it be noted that the Council considered the use of a pensions bond as poor value for money and would assume the small risk that the contractor ceased trading in the future and that a deficit on the pension scheme developed;
- (8) That the Director of Finance be authorised to utilise Community Infrastructure Levy as a funding source for the project.

14. GOVERNMENT VOTER IDENTIFICATION PROPOSALS

In accordance with Standing Order 14(10)(a), Councillor Davies received the consent of the Council to alter his motion, as follows:

‘Delete the words after “purposes” in the final line of the motion and replace with:

“...or if a nationally funded ID scheme is made available by the Government then ensure access to this is provided free of charge to residents. In either case, make vigorous efforts to encourage take up of such a scheme.”’

Pursuant to Notice, the following ‘altered’ motion was moved by Councillor Davies and seconded by Councillor Edwards and CARRIED:

Resolved -

This Council notes that:

- The recent Queen’s Speech contained Government proposals to require people to show identification including a photograph in order to vote in General Elections.
- There is no evidence of widespread electoral fraud by voter impersonation in the UK. Of the 595 alleged cases of electoral fraud investigated by police in relation to the 2019 General Election, only 33 were related to voter impersonation at a polling station, a vanishingly small proportion of the more than 58 million votes cast.
- Turnout at the local elections in Reading in 2021 was 36%. It is estimated that at the 2019 General Election in parts of Reading, turnout was as low as 50%.
- According to an Electoral Commission report on a proof of identity scheme for polling station voters, 11 million people have no driving licence or passport and 3.5 million people have no access to photo ID at all.
- It is estimated that it will cost about £20 million per election to implement photo ID at polling stations.

This Council believes that:

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- Voting at elections is the cornerstone of democracy at both local and national level.
- In a democracy the authority of all levels of government is derived from belief that those governing us have been chosen by the will of the majority of the people.
- Participation in elections should be encouraged in all those who are qualified regardless of age, ethnicity, income or ableness.
- Unnecessary barriers to voting are likely to reduce voter participation in elections, proper representation of all parts of the community and so legitimacy of those elected to office.
- The requirement to produce photo ID is likely to disproportionately discourage younger people and people from disadvantaged communities from voting so this measure amounts to voter suppression affecting specific groups of people.

Consequently, this Council resolves to:

- Oppose the introduction of photo ID as a requirement to vote at polling stations.

And, should mandatory photo ID be passed into law, this Council further resolves to:

Make all reasonable efforts within the Council's means and available budget to introduce a low-cost ID scheme, available to all voters in the Borough, that will qualify as legitimate ID for voting purposes or if a nationally funded ID scheme is made available by the Government then ensure access to this is provided free of charge to residents. In either case, make vigorous efforts to encourage take up of such a scheme.

15. HYDROTHERAPY POOL AT THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE HOSPITAL

Pursuant to Notice, the following motion was moved by Councillor Hoskin and seconded by Councillor Eden and CARRIED:

Resolved -

This Council notes that:

- The Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust have taken the decision to permanently close the hydrotherapy pool at the Royal Berkshire Hospital and is commencing an 'engagement' exercise which will report back to the RBFT Board in July 2021.
- There was no public consultation by the trust before it took this decision.
- There is a suggestion that NHS commissioners (the Berkshire West NHS Clinical Commissioning Group) are looking at other hydrotherapy facilities

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to provide Individual Funding Request referral hydrotherapy - a much more limited service than that previously offered.

- On a number of occasions, this Council has, unanimously and across parties, passed motions opposing the closure of NHS hydrotherapy in Reading.

Consequently, this Council resolves to:

- Request that the Reading Borough Council Chief Executive writes to the chief officers of the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust and the Berkshire West NHS CCG expressing this Council's strong opposition to the decision to permanently close Reading's NHS hydrotherapy pool with no confirmed replacement.
- Request that the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport seeks to gain the support of Reading's two MPs, as well as Wokingham Borough Council and West Berkshire Council, and works with various interested groups to oppose permanent closure of Reading's NHS hydrotherapy pool without adequate replacement and, instead, pushes for the expanded provision of NHS hydrotherapy in our town.

(Councillor Duveen declared a personal interest in this item. Nature of interest: Councillor Duveen was the Secretary of the Reading Branch of Parkinson's UK)

(The meeting closed at 8.04 pm).