

**HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE
10 NOVEMBER 2021**

Present: Councillor Davies (Chair);
Councillors Barnett-Ward, Emberson, Hacker, Hoskin, Leng,
Manghnani, McGonigle, Mitchell, Mpofu-Coles, O'Connell, Rowland,
Rynn, R Singh, Sokale and J Williams.

Apologies: Councillor Debs Absolom.

14. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of 6 July 2021 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to it being noted that Councillor Sokale had attended remotely.

15. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

No Minutes of other bodies were submitted.

16. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
Councillor White	Insulating Homes in Reading	Cllr Emberson

The full text of the question and reply was made available on the Reading Borough Council website.

17. UPDATE ON THE OPERATION OF LEISURE FACILITIES BY GREENWICH LEISURE LIMITED AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE NATIONAL LEISURE RECOVERY FUND

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an update on the award and commencement of the new leisure contract, informing the Committee of the award of funding from the National Leisure Recovery Fund (NLRF) in the sum of £160,772 to support the reopening of the leisure sector post-COVID-19 and of the Council's application for £1.5m from Sport England Strategic Facilities Fund.

The report explained that, further to Minute 62 of the Policy Committee meeting held on 20 January 2020, Greenwich Leisure Ltd had been awarded a 25-year design, build, operate and maintain contract for Boroughwide leisure facilities.

Paul Shearman and Jamie Coleshill of GLL gave a presentation outlining service provision and contract delivery. The presentation covered the following areas:

- Capital Investment in Reading's leisure facilities;
- Timetable for the works to be carried out;
- Plans detailing the works that would be carried out at each site;
- Details of the recovery progress post Covid-19, which was better than the national average;
- The next phase;
- Energy and environmental improvements and links to the BerkshiRe Active Healthy Me programme.

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The report also explained that, in December 2020, Sport England had launched the NLRF to support publicly owned leisure facilities through the Covid-19 crisis and applications had been accepted from local authorities in England who had outsourced their leisure centre provision to external operators. The Council had submitted a bid for NLRF funding of £149,000 in respect of Rivermead Leisure Centre and had been awarded a total of £160,772 comprising the full bid amount, plus an additional £10,230 grant funding and a £1,542 monitoring and evaluation grant. The Council had accepted the NLRF grant on Sport England's standard terms and conditions on 9 March 2021.

The report further stated that, in July 2021, the Council had applied to Sport England for further £1.5million from its Strategic Facilities Fund to support the new leisure developments at both Rivermead and Palmer Park. The Council was awaiting the decision from Sport England in respect of its bid submission.

Resolved -

- (1) That GLL be thanked for their presentation in respect of para 4.1.1 of the report;**
- (2) That the award and commencement of the new leisure contract to Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) on 1 July 2021 for a term of 25 years be noted;**
- (3) That the successful application and acceptance of Sport England's National Leisure Recovery Fund (NLRF) grant of £160,772 to support the reopening of the Rivermead Leisure Centre post Covid-19 lockdowns be noted;**
- (4) That Executive Director for Environment, Neighbourhoods and Economic Growth, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Health Wellbeing and Sport, allocate funding of £160,772 from NLRF grant award to GLL, the operator of Rivermead Leisure Centre on behalf of the Council;**
- (5) That the submission of the funding application to Sport England for £1.5m contribution to the construction cost of the new leisure facilities at Rivermead and Palmer Park be noted;**
- (6) That the Executive Director for Environment, Neighbourhoods and Economic Growth, in consultation with the Assistant Director for Legal & Democratic Services, the Director of Finance and the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport, be authorised to:**
 - (i) accept an award of funding from Sport England's Strategic Facilities Fund, subject to acceptable grant terms and conditions;**
 - (ii) enter into the related grant agreement with Sport England; and**
 - (iii) be legally empowered to act on behalf of the Council for all purposes connected with the grant agreement, including the**

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authority to spend this money in line with the grant funding terms.

18. READING RENT WITH CONFIDENCE SCHEME

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which provided an update on the Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme and the new website - www.rrwc.org.uk. The report explained that the purpose of the scheme was to accredit properties and their landlords, and to encourage landlords to work with the Council to provide good quality accommodation to its tenants in the private rented sector along with good management services.

The report stated that the Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme formed part of the Housing Charter that had been launched in 2016 and aimed to give tenants in the private rented sector greater confidence in the properties they rented, raise standards and enable landlords to market good properties to those tenants. The Council had submitted a successful bid to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to create a stand-alone website, which was interactive and simplified the accreditation process, and 12 animated videos to inform tenants about the safety standards they could expect in a privately-rented home. The website and the Reading Rent With Confidence Scheme would be launched early in 2022 and a further report would be submitted to the Committee.

Resolved -

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That an update report be submitted to the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee meeting to be held on 10 March 2022.

19. THE CHARTER FOR SOCIAL HOUSING RESIDENTS - SOCIAL HOUSING WHITE PAPER

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which informed the Committee of the details of the Social Housing White Paper and the work that the Council was taking in response to the Paper. The following documents were appended to the report:

Appendix 1 - The Proposed Tenant Satisfaction Measures;

Appendix 2 - Current Proposed Reactive and Proactive Inspections.

The report set out seven commitments that Social Housing tenants could expect from their landlords at paragraph 4.2 and explained that the main aims of the White Paper were to ensure that tenants were treated with respect, listened to about their concerns and a fairer and safer system was established for all those living in social housing. The report also contained a table which set out the expectations listed in each of the commitments in the White Paper, and the current position in terms of additional legislative requirements and any Reading Borough Council responses where possible.

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Resolved: That the details of the Social Housing White Paper and the current position in terms of implementation be noted.

20. BUILDING SAFETY AND FIRE SAFETY NEW LEGISLATION

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an update on the new Fire Safety Act 2021 and the Building Safety Bill. The report set out the main aspects of the legislation, the implications for Social Landlords and actions the Housing Service was taking in preparation for the implementation.

The report explained that the Safety Act 2021 amended the Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order 2005 and clarified that measures the responsible person or duty holder for multi-occupied (two or more sets of domestic properties) residential buildings must manage and reduce the risk of fire.

The report also explained that the Building Safety Bill 2020 would put in place an enhanced safety framework for high rise residential buildings including the introduction of a Building Safety Regulator. The new building safety regime would apply to high-rise residential buildings of 18 metres and above or more than six storeys (whichever was reached first).

The Housing Service's response to the legislation, which included reviewing current fire risk assessments and identifying the new properties that would require a fire risk assessment by virtue of having two or more sets of domestic properties in one building, was set out in the report.

Resolved: That the implications of the Fire Safety Act 2021 and the Building Safety Bill and the actions that the Housing Service was taking in preparation for their implementation be noted.

21. HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME REVIEW

Further to Minute 16 of the meeting held on 21 March 2021, the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which detailed Reading Borough Council's requirement to review its Allocations Scheme, including national and local drivers for change, the outcome of a consultation on the proposed changes, the subsequent recommended amendments made to the scheme and the timetable for their proposed implementation. The report explained that there had been 684 responses to the eight-week consultation exercise, which had been used to inform the proposed changes to the Scheme. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 Summary of consultation findings;
- Appendix 2 Allocations Scheme;
- Appendix 3 Equality Impact assessment.

The report set out the main proposed changes to the Scheme as follows:

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- Reading Borough Council tenants who wished to move would be awarded a level of priority even where their circumstances did not attract a Reasonable Preference priority, as outlined in the draft Allocations Scheme.
- An exception would be provided to the three-year residency criteria that was required to join the Housing Register, which would allow key workers supporting those that were providing essential services in Reading to have access to key worker accommodation in the town. It was proposed to ensure greater priority for this group through the creation of a quota queue, letting a number of properties each year.
- Applicants who had previously been evicted due to serious, threatening or violent behaviours which had not been addressed would not qualify for the Reading Borough Council housing register for a minimum period of five years and this period might be increased for up to 10 years on reasonable consideration of all the relevant facts.
- The number of priority bands to be reduced from six to five, made up of priority bands 1-4 and a further band where applications did not attract any priority for housing, reflecting the current scheme.
- The creation of a separate Adapted Housing Register for those applicants that required property adaptations.

The report proposed a phased implementation of the new scheme to allow for the changes to be implemented in the most effective way. Throughout 2022 the Housing Service would be implementing a new Housing IT system and it was proposed that different elements of the scheme be introduced in line with the implementation milestones.

Resolved:

- (1) That the findings from the Allocations Scheme Consultation be noted;
- (2) That the proposed changes to the Council's Housing Allocations Scheme as informed by the consultation be approved and the revised Allocation Scheme including the relevant changes be adopted;
- (3) That the influencing factors relating to implementation be noted and the timetable for delivery of the new scheme be agreed.

22. READING LIBRARIES: FUTURE STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2022-2025

Further to Minute 11 of the meeting held on 6 July 2021, the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which summarised the responses to recent libraries consultation on vision and strategy, proposed the adoption of key strategic priorities for the library service and the development of a strategy and delivery plan for Reading Libraries. The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix 1: Detailed findings from Consultation August - September 2021;
- Appendix 2: Library Consultation Survey Results in full;
- Appendix 3: Home Library Survey Results in full;
- Appendix 4: Equality Impact Assessment for Library Strategy 2022-2025.

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The report explained that officers had used the results of the consultation to identify five strategic priorities for the Library Service for 2022 to 2025:

- Supporting our communities as we recovered from the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Helping Children and Young People;
- Improving access to online services;
- Supporting improvement in Health, Wellbeing and Literacy;
- Bringing arts, culture and heritage into library spaces.

The report stated that the most regularly used services were book lending, rhymetime, e-books and the Summer Reading Challenge for children. Most service users wanted more online resources, computer coding clubs, spaces to create and use new technologies and community language and culture collections to be developed in the future. Overall the consultation showed strong agreement for the proposed strategic themes, with a particularly large number of additional comments focusing on the importance of the children's side of the library service. Officers would use that data provided by the consultation responses to inform the development of the new Library Delivery Plan.

Resolved:

- (1) That the outcome of the consultation activity be noted;
- (2) That the strategic priorities for the library service be adopted as follows:
 - Supporting our communities as we recovered from the Covid-19 pandemic;
 - Helping Children and Young People;
 - Improving access to online services;
 - Supporting improvement in Health, Wellbeing and Literacy;
 - Bringing arts, culture and heritage into library spaces;
- (3) That officers be authorised to develop a delivery plan for the library service, which was based upon and took into consideration the strategic priorities for the library service.

23. ENHANCED GRAFFITI REMOVAL PROJECT

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which gave an update on the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding available in 2021/22 and a proposal to implement an enhanced graffiti removal policy to tackle graffiti not included within the current Graffiti Removal Policy. The report also sought approval to proceed with the proposed Enhanced Graffiti Removal Policy and to fully commit the available CIL funding to improve the Town's appearance. The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix 1: Current & Enhanced Graffiti Removal Policy;
- Appendix 2: Proposed list of Enhanced Additional Graffiti sites;
- Appendix 3: Financial Implications Report;
- Appendix 4: Street Art Advisory Panel.

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The report explained that the Council proposed that the available CIL funding be used to operate under the current policy guidelines - i.e. gain appropriate permissions to remove graffiti from private property but to increase the size of the free to remove to area from 1m² to 2m². This would allow for the removal of a maximum of 502 additional pieces of graffiti up to 2m², or multiples thereof to remove any reported graffiti over this size. These removals would then be recorded on the Love Clean Reading App. The Council would also make available 20 Community Removal Kits for allocation to local community groups who showed an interest to use on low level graffiti in their local area. These kits would include the necessary tools and safe chemicals needed to clean off the graffiti.

The report also explained that, following the visit of Banksy to Reading earlier this year, a strong desire from the community had been noted to keep valued street art, should it fit within the policy as set out above. Appendix 4 to the report set out a proposal to establish a Street Art Advisory Panel to consider and advise on how street art in Reading could be managed and how the definition of graffiti/street art could be updated to better support and inform artists.

Resolved:

- (1) That the current position on Graffiti Boroughwide and the available Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding in 2021/22 be noted;
- (2) That the Enhanced Graffiti Removal Policy set out in Appendices 1 & 2 of the report be approved;
- (3) That the immediate commencement of the Enhanced Graffiti Removal Policy approved;
- (4) That a Street Art Advisory Panel as set out in Appendix 4 to the report be set up.

24. ALLOTMENTS SELF MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Further to Minute 7 of the meeting held on 15 December 2020, the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that an update on the progress towards establishing self-management as an option for the Council's allotment sites. The report set out a summary of the progress made against the Allotments Action Plan, which had been attached at Appendix A, as follows:

Potential self-management groups: Since the publication of the consultation report, the Parks Team had provided active support and advice to groups or active individuals.

Site clearance and improvement: The Parks Team had made significant progress in clearing and levelling overgrown and abandoned plots.

Allotment Project Officer: A fixed term Project Officer had started work on 1 October 2021 to lead all aspects of the introduction of self-management in allotments and develop further the Allotments Plan.

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The report proposed that all elements of the Action Plan be progressed and that the completed allotment plan be submitted to the March 2022 meeting of the Committee for approval prior to implementation from 1 June 2022.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report be noted;**
- (2) That the Self-Management Allotment Plan be submitted to the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee meeting to be held on 10 March 2022;**
- (3) That self-management of allotments be introduced as an option from 1 June 2022.**

25. PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY 2036

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which presented an assessment of the current provision of sports pitches within the Borough and identified what the anticipated future demand in terms of quality and quantity of pitches would be by 2036 using Football Association methodology. The report identified a long-term level of provision for the Council to work towards.

The report explained that variation in demand would be experienced throughout the 15-year period, with changing age and gender mixes playing requiring a different mix and number of pitch sizes. Demand would be accommodated through regular reviews and amendments of the provision of pitches, moving towards the long term identified provision. The proposals in this strategy did not commit the Council or its partners to the funding, provision or management of sites, but the recommended actions would be used as a guide for investment, including via the Community Infrastructure Levy, other developers' contributions, and national governing body of sport funding. The level of provision and proposed action plan were identified in the following documents which were attached to the report:

Appendix 1 - Pitch provision 2020/21;

Appendix 2 - Recommended Site Action Plans 2019-2036.

The Committee considered key issues relating to the provision, allocation, maintenance and management of playing pitches, including:

- Variation in pitch quality across provider sectors;
- Need for consistent maintenance of pitches especially with regard to drainage and flooding;
- There would need to be a balance between the need for all-weather pitches and any negative environmental impact that they might have;
- Car parking at many sites was limited meaning that users would have to park in surrounding roads, thereby having an impact on local residents.
- Existing pitches were not necessarily located in the optimum places for usage by local communities, although the majority of sites were well-located in respect of public transport, often sited adjacent to key bus routes and stops.
- The effect on clubs as there would be a need to move clubs 'home' locations to meet the proposed 2036 pitch provision model. The re-allocation of pitches

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would be required to ensure adequate provision was maintained. The development of facilities would be dependent on available funding and changing demand over the years leading to 2036. Many clubs were also responsible for bookings of their own pitches.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Council endeavour to provide sufficient sports pitches, subject to available funding, to accommodate the predicted demand up to 2036 for Football, Cricket, Rugby, Hockey, Lacrosse, Gaelic Football and Australian Rules Football as identified in Table 8 and Table 9 of the report;**
- (2) That the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) laid out within the report be adopted, including the updated site action plan in Appendix 2, which was based upon research undertaken by sports provision consultants 4Global in 2019;**
- (3) That the action plan in Appendix 2 be reviewed every three years, including consultation with pitch users, to reflect changing demands through to 2036.**

(The meeting opened at 6.32pm and closed at 9.42pm).