

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 28 FEBRUARY 2023

Present: Councillor Eden (Mayor);

Councillors Ayub, Barnett-Ward, Brock, Carnell, Challenger, Cresswell, Cross, Davies, C Dennis, G Dennis, Edwards, Emberson, Ennis, Gavin, Gittings, Griffith, Hacker, Hoskin, Keane, Keeping, Khan, Kitchingham, Lanzoni, Leng, Lovelock, McElroy, McEwan, McGonigle, Mitchell, Moore, Mpofu-Coles, Page, Robinson, Rowland, Singh, Terry, Thompson, White, Williams, Woodward and Yeo;

Apologies: Councillor Ballsdon, Hornsby-Smith, Kretchmer, McCann, O'Connell and Sultan.

30. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor announced that Fairtrade Fortnight 2023 was currently taking place and would run until 12 March 2023. Fairtrade Fortnight was encouraging consumers to switch to Fairtrade products to support producers in protecting the future of some of our most-loved food and the planet. The Mayor distributed some fairtrade chocolate to those present at the meeting.

31. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

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

	Questioner	Subject	Answer
1.	Kate Nikulina	Narrow Bin Lorry	Cllr Rowland

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

33. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 10

	Questioner	Subject	Answer
1.	Cllr Cross	Bin Collection (ultra-narrow refuse collection vehicle)	Cllr Rowland
2.	Cllr Cross	Bins Left on Pavements	Cllr Rowland
3.	Cllr Singh	Reading Council Staff Well-being	Cllr Terry
4.	Cllr Singh	Blocked Drains and Road Safety	Cllr Rowland
5.	Cllr White	Rough sleeping increase in Reading	Cllr Emberson

As there was insufficient time, pursuant to Standing Order 10(4), a written reply to Question 5 above was provided in accordance with Standing Order 11(3).

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

34. CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER'S REPORT ON THE ROBUSTNESS OF THE COUNCIL'S 2022/23 BUDGET

The Director of Finance submitted a report fulfilling the requirement on him under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 as the Council's Chief Finance Officer to report on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations of the budget and the adequacy of the proposed level of financial reserves. The Council had a duty to have regard to the advice set out in the report when considering setting its 2023/24 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy for the subsequent two financial years. The Statement of Reserves and Balances, which provided a summary of estimated reserve movements from 31 March 2023 and 31 March 2026, were attached to the report for information.

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

Resolved -

That the Chief Finance Officer's report on the robustness of the Council's 2023/24 budget and indicative budgets for the subsequent two financial years 2024/25 and 2025/26 be noted and the opinion contained therein be taken into account in making the decisions set out below in Minutes 35-38 below.

35. 2023/24 BUDGET & MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023/24 - 2025/26

Further to Minutes 39 and 53 of the Policy Committee meetings held on 15 December 2022 and 20 February 2023 respectively, the Director of Finance submitted a report on the Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the three years 2023/24 - 2025/26. The report provided an update on the results of the budget consultation exercise as well as changes arising from the publication of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement and other changes that had arisen since the report to Policy Committee in December 2022. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 - The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2023/24 - 2025/26
- Appendix 2 - Summary of the General Fund (GF) budget proposals 2023/24 - 2025/26
- Appendix 3 - General Fund Revenue Budget by Service 2023/24 - 2025/26
- Appendix 4 - Detailed General Fund Budget Changes 2023-24 to 2025-26
- Appendix 5 - The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget proposals 2023/24 - 2025/26
- Appendix 6 - The Dedicated Schools Budget proposals 2023/24 - 2025/26
- Appendix 7 - The General Fund and HRA Capital Programmes 2023/24 - 2025/26
- Appendix 8 - The Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy 2023/24 - 2025/26
- Appendix 9 - Fees and Charges proposals from April 2023
- Appendix 10 - Equality Impact Assessment of the budget proposals
- Appendix 11 - Summary of the Response to the Budget Consultation

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- Appendix 12 - Summary of the Results of the Residents Survey 2022

The report explained that the underpinning rationale of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy was to deliver a balanced and affordable 2023/24 budget and ensure that the Council's finances were robust and sustainable over the medium term, and that in the longer term the Council's finances were not reliant on the unsustainable use of one-off reserves or funding. The Strategy was informed by the Council's Vision: "to ensure that Reading realises its potential - and that everyone who lives and works in Reading can share in the benefits of its success" and the Corporate Plan themes of Healthy Environment, Thriving Communities and Inclusive Economy.

The report set out the budget assumptions which included: Council Tax increases of 2.99% plus an Adult Social Care precept of 2.0% for the first two years of the MTFs (2023/24 to 2025/26) with increases of 1.99% and 1.0% respectively in 2025/26; delivery of £9.841m (£9.591m services and £0.250m corporate) of efficiencies and increased income across the period; a contingency provision over the three years (£4.1m 2023/24; £4.9m 2024/25; and £5.1m 2025/26) to mitigate possible slippage or non-achievement of higher risk savings and/or income targets over the period; a housing rent increase of 7.0% (Government Cap) in 2023/24, returning to a rent increase in line with approved policy of CPI + 1% in subsequent years; General Fund capital investment of £188.0m and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capital investment of £151.3m over the period 2023/24 to 2025/26; and £3.580m of transformation funding (over the period 2023/24 to 2024/25) to support delivery of efficiency savings assumed within the MTFs, taking the total transformation funding to £21.729m across the whole life of the Delivery Fund.

The deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs Block was anticipated to be £4.3m by 31st March 2023. An updated deficit recovery plan would be presented to Schools Forum in March 2023. The Government recognised that there was a national SEND funding crisis and in 2022/23 the Department of Education had launched a "Delivering Better Value" programme inviting 55 local authorities to take part. Reading was one of the authorities invited to join the programme and work had started in February 2023. Further details were set out in paragraphs 4.5 and 4.6 and in Appendix 6 of the report.

The preparation of the 2023/24 Budget and MTFs 2023/24 - 2025/26 had again been challenging due to the continuing uncertainty caused by the wide-ranging implications of inflation and the 'cost of living' crisis, Covid-19, the war in Ukraine, climate change, and, despite a multi-year Autumn Statement, yet another one-year Local Government funding settlement from Central Government.

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

Resolved -

That, taking due regard of the results of the budget consultation exercise (as outlined in Appendices 11 and 12 of the report), the 2023/24 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets, Capital Programme and Medium-Term Financial Strategy as set out in Appendices 1-10 be approved, whilst noting the following:

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- (a) the Council's General Fund Budget Requirement of £164.411m for 2023/24 and an increase in the band D Council Tax for the Council of 2.99% plus an additional 2.00% Adult Social Care Precept, or £91.30 per annum, representing a band D Council Tax of £1,921.02 per annum, excluding precepts from Police and Fire, as set out in paragraph 4.3 to the report;
- (b) the proposed efficiency and invest to save savings of £3.810m together with additional income of £1.485m in 2023/24 required to achieve a balanced budget for that year as set out in Appendices 2 and 3 to the report;
- (c) the overall savings proposed within the MTFs of £9.841m (of which increases to income, fees and charges was £2.902m) and three-year growth changes to service budgets of £20.431m as set out in Appendices 3 and 4 to the report;
- (d) the budgeted net contribution to earmarked reserves totalling £6.128m, as set out in paragraph 3.25 of Appendix 1 to the report;
- (e) the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2023/24 of £49.229m as set out in Appendix 5 to the report and the average increase of 7.0% in social dwelling rents from April 2023;
- (f) the allocation of £93.765m Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) as set out in Appendix 6 to the report;
- (g) the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programmes totalling £188.045m and £151.304m respectively, as set out in Appendices 7a and 7b to the report;
- (h) the Strategy for the use of flexible capital receipts to deliver future transformation and ongoing savings as set out in Appendix 8 to the report;
- (i) the Fees and Charges set out in Appendix 9 of the report;
- (j) the Equalities Impact Assessment as set out in Appendix 10 to the report.

A recorded vote having been demanded, the voting was as follows:

For the motion: 32

Councillors Ayub, Barnett-Ward, Brock, Challenger, Cross, Davies, C Dennis, G Dennis, Eden, Edwards, Emberson, Ennis, Gavin, Gittings, Griffith, Hacker, Hoskin, Keeping, Khan, Kitchingham, Lanzoni, Leng, Lovelock, McEwan, Moore, Mpofo-Coles, Page, Rowland, Terry, Thompson, Woodward and Yeo.

Against the motion: 10

Councillors Carnell, Cresswell, Keane, McElroy, McGonigle, Mitchell, Robinson, R Singh, White and Williams.

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36. CAPITAL STRATEGY 2023/24

Further to Minute 54 of the Policy Committee held on 20 February 2023, the Director of Finance submitted a report setting out the draft Capital Strategy 2023/24, which was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report noted that the CIPFA 2021 Prudential and Treasury Management Code required the Council to prepare a Capital Strategy report which set out the Council's capital requirements arising from policy objectives, as well as the associated governance procedures and risk appetite of the Council. The Strategy provided an overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contributed to the provision of services; along with an overview of how associated risk was managed and the implications for future financial sustainability. It showed how revenue, capital and balance sheet planning were integrated and set out, among other things, the Council's approach to asset management planning, development and monitoring of the Capital Programme.

This year, the Capital Strategy had been subject to updates arising from the revised Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities 2021. The figures in the various tables, most particularly the Capital Programme itself had been updated to reflect the latest position consistent with the MTFs report. During 2022/23, a Capital Programme Board had been established to increase oversight of the Capital Programme and its delivery. Terms of Reference for the Board were included at Appendix C to the Strategy document.

The revised Code also clarified that non-treasury management investments would need to be reported as part of the Capital Strategy rather than within the Treasury Management Strategy. Consequently, where the Council had loaned funds to or held equity investments in its wholly owned companies to facilitate service provision/investment this was now incorporated into the Capital Strategy (Appendix 1 - Section 4). Appendix A to the Strategy set out a prioritisation matrix for new capital schemes. The proposed Action Plan at Appendix D of the Strategy identified four areas of ongoing work required for the Council to remain compliant with the CIPFA Code requirements.

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

Resolved -

- (1) That the Capital Strategy 2023/24, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;**
- (2) That the updated Action Plan that forms Appendix D of the Capital Strategy (Appendix 1) be noted, together with the associated financial implications.**

37. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT (2023/24); MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION POLICY (2023/24); ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY (2023/24)

The Director of Finance submitted a report setting out a Treasury Management Strategy for endorsement. The Strategy required approval before the start of the

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new financial year in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice 2021 and the CIPFA Prudential Code for capital finance in local authorities (2021). The Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report explained that the TMSS set out the parameters for the Council's planned treasury activity during 2023/24 under which the Council's Treasury Team would manage day to day activity, and that the successful identification, monitoring and control of financial risk were central to the Strategy. Included in the TMSS alongside the Treasury Management Strategy were Capital Prudential Indicators, a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement, a Borrowing Strategy and an Annual Investment Strategy.

The CIPFA 2021 Prudential and Treasury Management Code also required the Council to prepare a Capital Strategy report which set out the Council's capital requirements arising from policy objectives, as well as the associated governance procedures and risk appetite. The Capital Strategy included non-treasury investments and was reported separately from the TMSS (Minute 36 above refers). The CIPFA Treasury Management Code 2021 further broke down non-treasury investment into: Investments for service purposes - taken or held primarily for the provision and purpose of delivering public services (including housing, regeneration, and local infrastructure), or in support of joint working with others to deliver such services; Investment for commercial purposes - taken or held primarily for financial return and were not linked to treasury management activity or directly part of delivering services.

The report had been prepared with reference to the following documents:

- CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management in the Public Services 2021;
- CIPFA The Prudential Code 2021;
- MHCLG Statutory Guidance on Local Government Investments (February 2018); and
- CIPFA Bulletin Treasury and Capital Management Update (October 2018).

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

Resolved -

- (1) That the Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2023/24 be approved as set out in Appendix A, section 2 to the report;**
- (2) That the Capital Prudential Indicators be approved as set out in Appendix A, section 3 to the report;**
- (3) That the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy for 2023/24 be approved as set out in Appendix A to the report;**
- (4) That the Borrowing Strategy for 2023/24 be approved as set out in Appendix A section 5 to the report;**

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- (5) That the Annual Investment Strategy for 2023/24 be approved as set out in Appendix A, section 6 to the report; and
- (6) That the Prudential and Treasury Management indicators be approved as set out in Appendix A, Annex 1 to the report;
- (7) That the requirement within the Prudential Code 2021 for quarterly reporting on the Council's Treasury Management activities from 2023/24 be noted and that these reports would be presented to Audit & Governance Committee in line with the current delegation.

38. COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2023/24

The Director of Finance submitted a report seeking approval of the calculations for determining the Council Tax requirement for the year 2023/24, in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992. The report also sought approval to set the Council Tax amounts for each property valuation band in the Borough including precepts from the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley and Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service.

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

Resolved -

- (1) That the following amounts that had been calculated for the year 2023/24 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 be agreed:
 - (i) £508,467,550 - Gross Revenue Expenditure, including transfers to reserves and any collection fund deficit, being the estimated aggregate expenditure of the Council in accordance with section 31A (2) of the Act;
 - (ii) £397,381,550 - Gross Revenue Income, including transfers from reserves, general government grants and any collection fund surplus, being the estimated aggregate income of the Council for the items set out in section 31A (3) of the Act;
 - (iii) £111,086,000 - Net Revenue Expenditure, being the amount by which the aggregate at (i) above exceeds the aggregate at (ii) above, calculated in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act, as the Council's Council Tax Requirement for the year (Item R in the formula in Section 31A (4) of the Act);
 - (iv) £1,921.02 - Reading Borough Council band D Council Tax, being the amount at (iii) above (Item R) divided by the Council's tax base 57,826.56 (Item T) calculated in accordance with Section 31B (1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year, representing an increase of 2.99% in the Council's own tax;

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- (2) That the net tax base of 57,826.56 band D equivalent properties (being the gross tax base adjusted for an assumed collection rate) for 2023/24 was agreed by Council on 31 January 2023 be noted; and
- (i) that the band D charge for Reading Borough Council be £1,921.02 as shown in section 4.4 of the report; and
 - (ii) that, including the Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service and Thames Valley Police precepts, Council Tax by property valuation band be as set out in section 4.9 of the report.

39. CARER'S LEAVE

Pursuant to Notice, a motion was moved by Councillor Thompson and seconded by Councillor Moore.

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Terry and seconded by Councillor Brock and CARRIED:

'Delete all after "This Council" in the first line of the fourth paragraph and insert the following:

"also notes that it has a long record of working, in concert with trade union colleagues, to provide terms and conditions of employment that consider the needs of our diverse workforce. Reading Borough Council provides the following terms and guidance in support of staff with caring responsibilities:

Mangers should work with the employee (with support and advice from HR) to find a solution which recognises that employees may have caring responsibilities (of different types) but want to continue working. The options are:

Flexible working

This can take different forms: for example, working compressed hours (working longer days but will total the same number of contracted hours) or working part-time (working fewer contracted hours). This is a permanent change to the employee's contract.

Flexi-time

Allows the employee to vary their hours around the Council's core working times (10am - 12pm and 2pm-4pm). The employee can work extra hours and use them later to take time off work as flexi-leave. A maximum of 10 hours can be taken within the flexi-time period (which is usually four weeks). Surplus hours can be rolled over to the next four-week period, provided that the 10 hour maximum is not exceeded.

Compassionate Leave

This applies to all employees regardless of their length of service. Caring is considered to be broad and the employee does not need to be a registered or paid carer. A maximum of 5 days' paid leave, in each year, can be requested to care for dependants. Caring responsibility includes accompanying a dependant (or a dependant with a disability) to an appointment, caring for a sick dependant and where there is disrupted care or an emergency related to school.

Paid bereavement leave is also available for employees, if the need arises.

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Severe personal problems

The employee can also request up to a maximum of five days paid leave if there are significant serious circumstances (for example, serious financial issues).

Managers should be mindful of individual circumstances including those which arise due to faith or cultural practices.

Remote working

The employee may work remotely, service needs permitting.

Term time contracts

Employees have set annual leave times, but the manager should explore if working a week (or days) outside of term time is possible.

Unpaid leave

This should not be the first option (especially given the difficulties with rising costs), but may be considered

It may be appropriate to take annual leave, flexi leave, or unpaid leave or a combination of those depending on the circumstances. Managers are encouraged to explore all different options and contact HR for support and advice.

For staff on term time only contracts who are not eligible for annual leave, as this is included within their weeks per year, management can explore the staff member working an additional week or day(s) outside of term time in order to take time off while school is in session; they also can access all of the above.

The Council notes that the Carer's Leave Bill currently making its way through parliament seeks to create a statutory entitlement to unpaid leave for employees with caring responsibilities. It welcomes the fact the Reading Borough Council has already made this option available to Council employees for some time now and has no objection to this becoming a statutory right, but would encourage all employers to consider the wide range of options set out above which provide much more flexible support to staff with caring responsibilities whilst maintaining Council services.

This Council resolves to:

- 1 To ask the Chief Executive to write to our two local MPs urging them to support the Carer's Leave Bill, observing that this Bill already has cross-party support;
- 2 Note the wide range of support already available to council employees;
3. Note the services available to unpaid carers in Reading, as set out in the Reading Services Guide (servicesguide.reading.gov.uk/kb5/reading/directory/adult.page?adultchannel=5).”

The amended substantive motion was then put to the vote and CARRIED as follows:

Resolved -

This Council notes:

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- 1 The growing care crisis in our country. There are over two million employees (Family Resources Survey 2019-2020) who provide unpaid care to friends and family. This care may include personal care, arranging medical and social support, or attending appointments. As the population ages and with more people staying in work longer, these numbers will only increase;
- 2 The pressure on residents as they balance their work with caring for loved ones. Carers are often required to use their own annual leave allowances to meet their caring responsibilities, risking burn out.

This Council believes that more action is needed to support people in work who have caring responsibilities.

This Council also notes that it has a long record of working, in concert with trade union colleagues, to provide terms and conditions of employment that consider the needs of our diverse workforce. Reading Borough Council provides the following terms and guidance in support of staff with caring responsibilities:

Mangers should work with the employee (with support and advice from HR) to find a solution which recognises that employees may have caring responsibilities (of different types) but want to continue working. The options are:

Flexible working

This can take different forms: for example, working compressed hours (working longer days but will total the same number of contracted hours) or working part-time (working fewer contracted hours). This is a permanent change to the employee's contract.

Flexi-time

Allows the employee to vary their hours around the Council's core working times (10am - 12pm and 2pm-4pm). The employee can work extra hours and use them later to take time off work as flexi-leave. A maximum of 10 hours can be taken within the flexi-time period (which is usually four weeks). Surplus hours can be rolled over to the next four-week period, provided that the 10 hour maximum is not exceeded.

Compassionate Leave

This applies to all employees regardless of their length of service. Caring is considered to be broad and the employee does not need to be a registered or paid carer. A maximum of 5 days' paid leave, in each year, can be requested to care for dependants. Caring responsibility includes accompanying a dependant (or a dependant with a disability) to an appointment, caring for a sick dependant and where there is disrupted care or an emergency related to school.

Paid bereavement leave is also available for employees, if the need arises.

Severe personal problems

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The employee can also request up to a maximum of five days paid leave if there are significant serious circumstances (for example, serious financial issues).

Managers should be mindful of individual circumstances including those which arise due to faith or cultural practices.

Remote working

The employee may work remotely, service needs permitting.

Term time contracts

Employees have set annual leave times, but the manager should explore if working a week (or days) outside of term time is possible.

Unpaid leave

This should not be the first option (especially given the difficulties with rising costs), but may be considered.

It may be appropriate to take annual leave, flexi leave, or unpaid leave or a combination of those depending on the circumstances. Managers are encouraged to explore all different options and contact HR for support and advice.

For staff on term time only contracts who are not eligible for annual leave, as this is included within their weeks per year, management can explore the staff member working an additional week or day(s) outside of term time in order to take time off while school is in session; they also can access all of the above.

The Council notes that the Carer's Leave Bill currently making its way through parliament seeks to create a statutory entitlement to unpaid leave for employees with caring responsibilities. It welcomes the fact the Reading Borough Council has already made this option available to Council employees for some time now and has no objection to this becoming a statutory right, but would encourage all employers to consider the wide range of options set out above which provide much more flexible support to staff with caring responsibilities whilst maintaining Council services.

This Council resolves to:

- 1 To ask the Chief Executive to write to our two local MPs urging them to support the Carer's Leave Bill, observing that this Bill already has cross-party support;
- 2 Note the wide range of support already available to council employees;
3. Note the services available to unpaid carers in Reading, as set out in the Reading Services Guide (servicesguide.reading.gov.uk/kb5/reading/directory/adult.page?adultchannel=5).

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40. CITY OF SANCTUARY PRINCIPLES AND EQUITABLE TREATMENT OF COUNCIL TAX REDUCTIONS

Pursuant to Notice, a motion was moved by Councillor Williams and seconded by Councillor Terry and CARRIED.

Resolved -

That this Council notes that:

- Reading is a town with a long and proud history of taking in refugees.
- The people of Reading have always been generous in their support for refugees from all parts of the world.
- The operation of the Homes for Ukraine scheme means that single-occupancy Council Tax discounts are not affected by offering accommodation to a Ukrainian guest.
- Outside of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, no national regulation protects single-occupancy discounts for eligible residents offering accommodation to a refugee.

This Council believes that Reading must always be a City of Sanctuary, in both name and action, for refugees in need, wherever they come from.

Consequently, this Council resolves to use its powers under Section 13A of the Local Government Act 1992 to therefore allow a resident who would normally qualify for the single-occupancy discount on Council Tax to maintain this reduction for three months if they take a refugee into their home, in line with the practice recently adopted in some other local authorities.

This Council provides further guidance to officers administering the Council Tax scheme to also consider any individual requests for an extension of this three-month period in a compassionate, fair and equitable manner.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 9.06pm).