

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES – 17 OCTOBER 2023

Present: Councillor Page (Mayor);

Councillors Asare, Ayub, Ballsdon, Barnett-Ward, Brock, Challenger, Cresswell, Cross, Davies, G Dennis, Eden, Edwards, Emberson, Ennis, Gavin, Gittings, Goss, Griffith, Hornsby-Smith, Hoskin, Juthani, Keane, Keeping, Kitchingham, Lanzoni, Leng, Lovelock, Magon, McCann, McElroy, McEwan, McGoldrick, Moore, Mpofu-Coles, O'Connell, Robinson, Rowland, Singh, Tarar, Terry, Thompson, White, Williams, Woodward and Yeo.

Apologies: Councillors Hacker and Mitchell.

20. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Councillor McGoldrick

The Mayor welcomed Councillor McGoldrick to her first Council meeting since being elected to represent Norcot Ward on 3 August 2023.

(b) Changes to Committee & Working Group Memberships

The Mayor reported that the Monitoring Officer had exercised his delegation on the recommendation of the Labour Group Leader to make the following changes to the membership of Committees and Working Groups:

- Councillor Finn McGoldrick had been appointed to the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee and Audit & Governance Committee. Councillor McGoldrick had replaced Councillor Edwards on the Audit & Governance Committee.
- Councillor Amjad Tarar had been appointed to the Older People's Working Group and Councillor Paul Gittings had been made the acting Chair of the Working Group.

(c) Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation Award – Benefits Team

The Mayor reported that the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support Service had entered the 'Benefits Team of the year' and 'most improved team' categories at the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation Awards. The Council's team was highly commended in the most improved team category and won the Benefits Team of the Year in a very competitive field. The Council added its congratulations to those of the Mayor and Leader to the Team for their outstanding success.

(d) Mayoral Visit to Düsseldorf

The Mayor passed on greetings from the City of Düsseldorf and the Oberbürgermeister, Stephan Kellar, from his visit to the City in September when it had been hosting the Invictus Games. During the visit, the Mayor also had the privilege of meeting the founder of the Games, Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex.

(e) Toys & Teens Appeal

The Mayor promoted the Reading Family Aid Group's 'Toys & Teens' Appeal, which would be launched on 19 October 2023. Last year, the Appeal had provided over 3,000 gifts to children in the Borough. The Mayor would be writing to all councillors with further details and encouraged everyone to donate to the Appeal.

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21. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

22. PETITION

Kate Nikulina presented a petition in the following terms:

We Need More NHS Dentists in Reading

Reading is a dental desert. Too many Reading residents can't get an NHS dentist.

People are left in pain or if they can afford it having to pay a large private dental bill in a cost of living crisis. Children and others entitled to free dental care aren't able to get it.

This Conservative government has been asleep at the wheel over NHS dentistry.

We want Reading Council to lobby the Integrated Care Board, government and come up with a plan to tackle the dental desert that Reading has become.

RESPONSE by Councillor McEwan (Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health):

The subject of dentistry is of real concern to councillors and officers. The available data shows that there is indeed a clear need for the prevention of poor oral health and improved access to dental care in Reading. We all understand the importance of easy access to treatment when we need it especially if we are in pain. We also recognise there are many people in Reading who have trouble in gaining access to a dentist.

It is important to recognise the role of the council and our relation to the commissioning of dentalcare services.

As part of the integrated care system the council has a prevention role in the promotion of good oral health which prevents the need for emergency dental care. We do this through our public health offer to the system which ensures that the commissioning of dental services is informed by oral health needs assessment and meets the needs of local people. Production of a refreshed oral health strategy commenced in 2019 and this work will be resumed as the local public health system is restructured.

Meanwhile we continue to collaborate with our NHS commissioning partners and to carry out our preventative work by using the ring-fenced public health grant mandate services to promote good oral health through the health visitors and schools nursing contract and through tooth brushing packs for children centres and nurseries.

We have recently received a report from the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board commissioners that set out the current challenges facing the commissioners of dentalcare and dental practitioners as they manage the recovery from the pandemic, the surging demand for their services and a complex payment system which is discouraging to those considering entering as a dentist into the national health service. Much of this is beyond the powers of the council to affect directly. The Council will continue to work with the Integrated Care Board to ensure dentistry provision is targeted based on the needs of our residents within the remit of our role.

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23. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 9

	Questioner	Subject	Answer
1.	Richard Tredgett & Ann Dally	Legacy Benefits	Cllr Terry

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

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

	Questioner	Subject	Answer
1.	Cllr Singh	Fly Tipping	Cllr Rowland
2.	Cllr White	Council Overspend	Cllr Brock

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

25. CORPORATE PARENTING

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report responding to a review of services to care leavers by Mark Riddell MBE, National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers, which took place in March 2023. The report recommendations were aligned with the outcome of the review of care leavers and had been endorsed by the Parenting Panel at its meeting on 13 July 2023. The Panel's terms of reference had been updated in partnership with panel members and children in care and were appended to the report for adoption. This included a rewritten version of the Promise, which was attached to the report at Appendix 2 and stated the corporate parenting commitment to children in care and care leavers. Additionally, the Care Leaver Review had recommended that the sliding scale of Council Tax exemption that was in place for care leavers up to the age of 21 years should be extended to 25 years to reflect the corporate parenting duties continued to this age. The financial impact of this proposal would be included in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) planning for the 2024/25 budget.

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England (May 2022) had recognised the negative outcomes for care experienced young people and adults and had recommended that the Government should make 'care experienced' a protected characteristic. The report recommended that the Council should adopt this approach to tackle the inequalities that care experienced young people faced and, in doing so, support them to improve outcomes, including accessing work readiness and employability skills; building future careers and gaining experience; and championing access to apprenticeships and support through recruitment processes.

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

Resolved –

- (1) That the revised Terms of Reference for Corporate Parenting Panel, as attached to the report at Appendix 1, be approved.

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- (2) **That the proposal to include the revised sliding scale of Council Tax dispensation for Children Looked After and Care Leavers in the Council's MTFS planning be noted.**
- (3) **That the proposal for Care Experience to become a Protected Characteristic be approved.**

26. RENEWAL OF STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY

Further to Minute 8 of the Licensing Applications Committee held on 28 September 2023, the Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhoods submitted a draft report on the renewal of the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy. The Policy was a key document concerning the regulation of licenced premises (pub and clubs), late night refreshment, and regulated entertainment venues within Reading. The Licencing Policy set out the Council's aims, objectives and policies for applicants and licence holders and clearly outlined what the Council expected of them. The key aim of the Licensing Policy was to ensure that the four licensing objectives, as prescribed in the Licensing Act 2003, were actively promoted. The updated Policy had remained largely unchanged from the previous version, but the opportunity had been taken to update it and add in some additional information where legislation and guidelines had changed. The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix RS-1 - Draft Licensing Policy 2023-2028
- Appendix RS-2 - Summary of Changes to Existing Policy
- Appendix RS-3 - Climate Impact Assessment
- Appendix RS-4 - Responses to Consultation

The report explained that, under the provisions of the Licensing Act 2003, the Council, as the named Licensing Authority for Reading, was required to review its Licensing Policy every five years. The current policy was due to expire in October 2023 and so was due for renewal. The new Statement of Licensing Policy would come into effect on 22 October 2023.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Rowland and seconded by Councillor Woodward and CARRIED:

Resolved –

That the Statement of Licensing Policy 8, as attached to the report at Appendix RS1, be adopted.

27. REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION

Further to Minute 25 of the Policy Committee held on 25 September 2023, the Monitoring Officer submitted a report on a review of the Constitution, which had been adopted on 18 October 2022 (Minute 21 refers). The revised Constitution had introduced a new way of working to simplify the Key Decision definition and directing other decisions not captured by the Key Decision criteria to be within the remit of officers. The Financial Regulations and the Contract Procedure Rules were being revised as part of the review. The Financial Regulations because, they had not been reviewed for some time and it was not possible to update them for inclusion in the Constitution agreed in October 2022. The Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs) had further refinement because of the introduction of new procurement legislation, and the expected further roll-out of the hub and spoke model of procurement which may impact them. A separate report on the CPRs had been considered by the Audit & Governance Committee on 27 September 2023 (Minute 18 refers) and the recommendations had been incorporated into this report for approval. It was anticipated that the Financial Regulations would be presented to a forthcoming Policy Committee and then to Council for formal adoption.

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

Resolved –

- (1) That the progress to simplify decision making since October 2022 be noted.**
- (2) That progress towards revised Financial Regulations be noted.**
- (3) That, in respect of the Contract Procedure Rules (as set out in Appendix 1):**
 - (a) the revised CPRs be adopted;**
 - (b) the further development and implementation of a Procurement Manual for staff, containing the procedural and practical details and guidance to support the processes outlined within the updated CPRs be supported;**
 - (c) the Assistant Director of Procurement and Contracts, in consultation with the Chief Executive and Executive Director of Resources, be authorised to make appropriate amendments to ensure that the proposed Contract Procedure Rules aligned with terminology included within the new Procurement Bill due to be introduced in autumn 2024;**
- (4) That Article 12 of the Constitution be revised in accordance with the recommendations of this report (as set out in Appendix 2);**
- (5) That references to the School Admission Forum and the Cultural Partnership Board be removed from Article 10 (Consultative Committees and Forums);**
- (6) That the revised wording for Sealing of Documents be adopted as set out in paragraph 3.39;**
- (7) That the existing power of the Monitoring Officer to make changes to Committees etc during the municipal year be added, to Part 3 (Officer Delegations) of the Constitution.**

28. CIPFA PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES ON AUDIT COMMITTEES

Further to Minute 14 of the Policy Committee held on 10 July 2023, the Executive Director of Resources submitted a report on the CIPFA Practical Guidance for Local Authorities on Audit Committees. Attached to the report at Appendix 1 were proposed revised terms of reference for the Committee and at Appendix 2 a self-assessment of good practice against the CIPFA Practical Guidance for Local Authorities on Audit Committees. The report noted that the Guidance updated previous CIPFA guidance from 2018 and complemented the CIPFA Position Statement on Audit Committees; it also incorporated recent legislative changes and professional developments following the Redmond Review into the effectiveness of external audit and transparency of financial reporting in local authorities.

The report explained that a self-assessment using the CIPFA self-assessment tool had been conducted by Internal Audit in January 2023. This had concluded that current arrangements partially complied with the guidance, with 'moderate' improvement required. One of the outcomes from the self-assessment review was to propose that the Committee's terms of reference should be updated to those suggested by CIPFA for local authorities.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Terry and seconded by Councillor Williams and CARRIED:

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Resolved –

- (1) That the revised Audit & Governance Committee's terms of reference, as attached at Appendix 1, and the removal of its decision-making powers in relation to the approval of the annual financial statements, returning the latter to Council, as recommended by Policy Committee, be approved.
- (2) That the recommendations of the Redmond Review and Policy Committee that the external audit annual report should be submitted to Council by the external auditor be endorsed.
- (3) That, in accordance with Policy Committee's recommendation, the Audit & Governance Committee be required to submit a public report annually to Council on an assessment of its performance, which would include how it had complied with the CIPFA position statement and discharged its responsibilities.

(The meeting closed at 7.36pm).