

**HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE
8 NOVEMBER 2023**

Present: Councillor Dennis (Chair);
Councillors Asare, Ayub, Barnett-Ward, Challenger, Cresswell,
Emberson, Goss, Kitchingham, Magon, McCann, O'Connell, R Singh,
Tarar and Yeo.

Attended Councillors Hacker and Rowland

Remotely:

10. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of 6 July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record.

11. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meeting were submitted:

Community Safety Partnership – 13 July 2023 and 14 September 2023.

Resolved - That the Minutes be received.

12. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
Mr Philip Brooks	Green Waste Collection	Cllr Rowland

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

13. READING FESTIVAL UPDATE

James Crosbie, Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services, introduced Claire Armstrong, Victoria Chapman, Charlotte Oliver and Noel Painting of Festival Republic who gave a presentation on the 2023 Reading Festival. The presentation set out some of the successful initiatives which included the Assistance, Information and Response (AIR) Hubs, a ban on campfires, the Ask for Angela and Challenge 25 schemes, relocation of the silent discos to a single venue and the larger eco-campsite. The organisers had also ensured that festival goers were well informed about sustainability issues, and this was reflected in the 31% decrease in greenhouse gas emissions from the 2019 baseline, 77% of waste being sent for recycling and zero waste being sent to landfill. There had been a 28 tonne decrease in abandoned tents, disposable vapes had been banned from the site, and a three- bin waste disposal scheme had been put in place to help people to sort waste. £1 from each parking fee would be donated to Trees for Cities: the donations from the 2022 event had provided 22 mature trees which had been planted in Spencer Road, Reading, and it was hoped that a similar number would be planted following this year's event. Festival Republic were still finalizing exact figures for the event, and would make these available once they had been completed. Planning for the 2024 event would start in December 2023 and would build on this year's successes.

The Committee discussed the presentation and took the opportunity to ask further questions of Festival Republic including:

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- There had been fewer noise complaints this year;
- Further work would be needed to address attendees arriving before the festival site had officially opened;
- Security staff would continue to be trained to ensure that certain groups were not disproportionately stopped and searched when entering the site;
- The lack of smoke from campfires had been positively noted by local residents;
- There had been a reduction in numbers seen by the major safeguarding partners, as a result of people being helped at or directed straight to the appropriate partner by the staff at the AIR Hubs;
- Thames Valley Police had provided an additional police boat on the Thames, and their work with the Environment Agency and other partners had reduced problems such as illegal water taxis on the river;
- Plans for 2024 included working with Brighter Futures for Children to get involved with schools before the Festival, promoting public health messages and further expansion of the eco campsites.

Resolved - That Festival Republic be thanked for an interesting and informative presentation.

14. WINTER SERVICE PLAN 2023-2024

The Committee received a report which set out details of the outputs that had been delivered by the Winter Service Plan 2022-23, of the Winter Service Plan review that had been carried out to ensure compliance with the Highway Act 1980 and 'Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice' and sought approval for the Winter Service Plan 2023-2024. A copy of the Winter Service Plan 2023-2024 was attached to the report at Appendix 1 and a Financial Implications Report was attached to the report at Appendix 2.

The report explained that the 2022-2023 winter season had been relatively mild overall although interspersed with colder spells including one brief snow event. However, there had been numerous occasions when the temperature reached the trigger point for precautionary salting action, (below 1°C and predicted to go below freezing), resulting in 51 primary runs and five secondary runs. The colder spells, including the single snow event, had not been severe or prolonged enough for activation of the Snow Plan. There had been no issues with salt supply/delivery which had enabled the contractor to maintain stock levels throughout the winter season. There had been no issues with the contractor replenishing the grit bins as and when required. The winter decision making process to determine when to salt had worked well during the last winter season and the Vaisala weather stations had provided the correct data for informed decisions to be made.

The report added that the joint arrangement/agreement with Wokingham Borough Council, through their Consultants, Volker Highways, for providing the decision-making service, had worked well and delivered against the set key performance indicators during the 2022-2023 winter season. The Winter Service Plan 2022-2023 had provided a robust service for the duration of the winter period with no disruption to the primary and secondary road network during the season, except for some inevitable disruption during the snow event.

A review of the Winter Service Plan 2022-2023 had been carried out and the main points, including updates for the Winter Service Plan 2023-2024 were summarised in the report.

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Resolved -

- (1) That the outputs delivered by the Winter Service Plan 2022-2023 be noted;
- (2) That the Winter Service Plan review carried out to ensure compliance with the Highways Act 1980 and 'Well-managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice' be noted;
- (3) That the Winter Service Plan 2023-2024 be approved.

15. AWARD OF CONTRACTS FOR ROUGH SLEEPING ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME

The Committee received a report which sought authority to award and enter into new contract arrangements for The Nova Project and 57 Caversham Road (the Pods) from 1 April 2024 to relieve and prevent rough sleeping in Reading. The contracts would be funded utilising Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) grant funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing (DLUHC).

The report explained that, under DLUHC's RSAP Round 1 Reading had been awarded three years revenue funding to the value of £2.3m to deliver 50 units of "Move-on Homes" between 2021 and 2024. These units provided an off the streets offer to those rough sleeping, or those who were at risk of rough sleeping having previously and repeatedly been verified. The units had a specific focus on supporting people with mental ill-health issues, substance misuse and preventing re-offending and returns to the streets. Support to ten "Move-on Homes" had been delivered under contract with St Mungo's since 21 December 2020 for females with complex needs requiring a 24/7 supportive environment at The Nova Project. A further 40 units of "Move-on Homes" at 57 Caversham Road had been completed in November 2021, with all clients having moved into their self-contained studio 'pod' with 24/7 on-site staffing presence by January 2022.

The report explained that a waiver to the Council's Contract Procedure Rules (CPR) had been signed off by the Assistant Director of Procurement and Contracts and Executive Director of DEGNS on 23 November 2020 to award a contract for 12 months to St Mungo's from 5 July 2021 until 4 July 2022 under Covid exceptions. Since officers had insufficient time to undertake a procurement without risk to service delivery, a further waiver had been agreed to award contracts to St Mungo's from 5 July 2022 until 31 March 2023. A further open procurement exercise for the Nova Project and 57 Caversham Road had been undertaken in November 2022 following the award of further RSAP grant funding for 12 months. St. Mungo's secured the tender and the contract started on 1 April 2023 and would be coming to an end on 31 March 2024.

The report explained that the current grant conditions did not allow for spend or contract extension beyond March 2025, although there might be opportunity for RBC to bid for further funding from DLUHC for this purpose, but that could not be confirmed at this stage. Clients could be accommodated for up to three years before moving on and multi-agency work to progress move-on from these units was ongoing. It was therefore proposed that, RBC undertake an open tender exercise and award a 12-month contract from 1 April 2024. Options were being explored including a contract extension if further grant funding was secured beyond March 2025.

Resolved –

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- (1) That the DLUHC award of funding in the sum of £760,919 from the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) to deliver 50 units of “Move-on Homes” in 2024/25 comprising 10 units at The Nova Project and 40 units at 57 Caversham Road be noted;**
- (2) That the Assistant Director of Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing and Director of Finance, be authorised to enter into a 12-month contract with the successful tenderer in respect of services to deliver “Move-on Homes” from 1 April 2024.**

16. PROCUREMENT OF EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION

The Committee received a report which recommended the establishment of a pseudo-Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) under the Light Touch Regime to deliver emergency accommodation for families and vulnerable people placed by the Council’s Housing Needs department. This would replace existing processes and formalise arrangements between the Council and Providers. The aim of the DPS was to ensure a continuity of supply of good quality privately managed properties for households placed into emergency accommodation by the Housing Needs department, whilst guaranteeing that the Council was meeting its legal requirement in the procurement of its services and delivering of value for money.

The report explained that all Local Authorities had a duty to provide interim accommodation to certain households whilst investigating their circumstances and temporary accommodation to applicants who were homeless, eligible for assistance, in priority need and not intentionally homeless. In addition, the Council held discretionary powers which could be used for the provision of emergency accommodation to individuals and couples who were not owed a statutory duty, in certain circumstances, such as during periods of severe weather as part of the Council’s Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) or in response to an emergency or disaster that was a danger to life as seen during the Covid pandemic.

The Council currently used a range of accommodation to meet both the interim and temporary accommodation needs for those placed into emergency accommodation, including designated blocks of flats, purpose constructed modular units, permanent stock and paid nightly emergency accommodation. Wherever possible the Council avoided the use of paid nightly accommodation provided by an external landlord, including Bed and Breakfast (B&B), however, due to ongoing demand there remained a need for its use as emergency accommodation for homeless households.

The report added that there had been a steady increase in the numbers approaching the Council due to the cost-of-living increase, fuel prices and rising interest rates, putting significant financial pressures on owner occupiers, landlords and tenants, the lack of affordable accommodation in the private sector for people facing homelessness and fewer options to assist households in crisis. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 had made changes to provisions available to protect survivors and had expanded the definition of domestic abuse. It had also made those approaching as homeless as a result of domestic abuse automatically priority need and entitled them to interim accommodation duties. There had also been an increase in approaches from those fleeing conflict.

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The report also stated that there had been increased grant provision from DLUHC to specifically offer short-term discretionary paid nightly accommodation for those who slept rough to encourage engagement with supported accommodation as well as reconnections to other areas with the overarching aim of reducing rough sleeping numbers in the Borough. Wherever the Housing department used externally sourced accommodation it was subject to a programme of initial checks by the Housing Needs Department to provide assurances for the safety and wellbeing of tenants. However, there were currently no formal contractual arrangements in place between the Council and providers to manage the procurement and ongoing monitoring of the accommodation.

The report explained that arrangements for procuring and managing emergency accommodation had emerged over time and whilst they were robust, they had not been subject to formal procurement processes. Formalising the process of procurement of accommodation was important for:

- Maintaining standards of accommodation within a cohort of landlords who were contractually required to provide accommodation to meet minimum standards regarding property condition, maintenance, and management. The DPS would aid the Council to manage any quality through proportionate entry standards of providers and through ongoing contract monitoring;
- Establishing a pool of providers who were able to provide accommodation as demand dictated. There would be no limit on the number of providers joining the DPS and no obligation on the Council to use any unrequired accommodation. This would allow the Council to manage fluctuations in demand providing flexibility in sourcing and reducing the use of accommodation as required;
- Providing a formal system to allow the Council to direct the market in terms of type and location of accommodation and provide greater clarity to providers regarding projected need;
- Replacing and formalising current arrangements, ensuring that the Council was compliant with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules, EU regulations for the procurement of services and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. This system would also improve operational process and efficiency, saving officer time and making better use of Council resources;
- Providing a prescribed pricing schedule that would act as a guide for providers to encourage them to set their rates competitively and in line with other landlords. This would set expectations for providers in terms of charges and would ensure that the market remained more stable if there were times of increased demand;

The report also explained that the DPS would provide a mechanism for any providers that fell short of the expected standards to be suspended whilst quality issues were addressed. The DPS would be established in early 2024 and run for a period of five years. The DPS would operate by running a fully compliant open tender procedure to accredit and enrolling Providers onto the DPS to ensure that only Providers that met the Council's standards could join. New Providers could apply and be enrolled during the DPS' period of operation providing they could meet the required standards. There would be a transition period of up to six months providing time for existing placements to be moved onto Providers within the new Scheme.

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Resolved:

- (1) That the Assistant Director of Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing and the Director of Finance be given delegated authority to approve the establishment of a pseudo–Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) under the Light Touch Regime for the provision of emergency accommodation for a period of five years.**
- (2) That the Assistant Director of Housing and Communities be authorised to (i) enter into call-off contracts with the successful providers and (ii) directly award placements on a spot contract basis where suitable arrangements cannot be made via the DPS; or where crisis or emergency circumstances dictate that it is not possible to do so via the DPS during its lifetime for the provision of emergency accommodation.**

17. READING CLIMATE FESTIVAL 2023 EVALUATION

The Committee received a report which gave an evaluation of the 2023 Reading Climate Festival that had taken place from 10-21 June 2023 with the stated aim of ‘inspiring and encouraging positive action on climate change’.

The report explained that the Festival had been run by the Reading Climate Action Network (RCAN), the public-facing brand of the Reading Climate Change Partnership, a multi-agency partnership for which the Council acted as host and accountable body. In 2023 RCAN, the Council, the University of Reading and the Reading Economic & Development Agency (REDA) recognised the potential of a partnership approach to deliver against a number of shared objectives. These included showcasing the important role Reading has played on the world stage in understanding and addressing climate change, informing and engaging the community about the work towards a net-zero, climate resilient town by 2030 and inspiring and facilitating individuals/families to make clear pledges to adopt greener behaviours in support of our community’s effort to address climate change. The Gaia Evaluation Report was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The report informed the Committee that the centrepiece of the Festival had been the exhibition of a major international artwork, Luke Jerram’s Gaia, at Reading Town Hall engaging more than 13,000 people over 20 events held across Reading, attracting people from all parts of Reading and the UK. As well as engaging a wide range of people in conversations about climate change, the festival represented a significant cultural, educational and economic event for Reading as a whole. The costs of bringing Gaia to Reading were recovered through income, delivering high value at little or no cost to the public purse. The Committee was shown a video highlighting the installation and related activities.

The report explained that Gaia, as part of the Reading Climate Festival, had helped to engage new people in the climate conversation growing the audience by approximately 1,200% in one year. The combined cooperation and use of each partner’s online resources meant that reaching a wider audience was possible. This event put Reading

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on the map and engaged Reading residents that might not have previously engaged in the festival. Key outcomes from the Festival in 2023 included:

- 12,000 people attended Gaia at the Reading Climate Festival, of whom approximately 24% were from outside the town. A further 1,300 attended other events at the festival.
- The partnership's social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn) impressions were 283,772. The Council's reach was 82,893. 100,000 people were reached via newsletters.
- Via the What'sOnReading.com website the Gaia webpage had 23,615 unique page views (16,649 Unique Users) from the 23 March to the 21 June, an impressive number when compared to a Reading favourite, the annual Panto which had 52,049 unique page views (37,844 unique users) for the calendar year of 2022.
- The Committees from both Reading Central and Abbey Quarter Business Improvement Districts (BID), representing over 700 local businesses, voted unanimously to support the installation of Gaia.
- During the Gaia exhibition, the BID sponsored three separate events developed to engage the local businesses and their workforce: including a talk by bushcraft and survival expert, Ray Mears. This engaged with nearly 300 people from 100 local businesses.
- The Festival had enhanced Reading's sense of place and reinforced its identity as a place which was engaged with the climate change issue. In a post-event survey 90% of respondents who were from Reading said Gaia and the ancillary programme had made them feel proud of the town.
- Climate anxiety was a growing concern in the UK, with 80% of those surveyed by Statista having some concern about climate change. Many people reported feeling daunted by the enormity of the problem, and by incorporating the RCAN Small Pledge initiative into the booking process it was hoped that this sense of helplessness could be alleviated and participants given a sense of agency. Details of the impact of these small changes were set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- Of the 503 people who responded to a post event survey, 25% were moved to join the climate action conversation as a result of seeing Gaia.
- The festival engaged young people: The Reading Museum Education Team and University of Reading managed the schools' outreach programme for Gaia engaging with 18 primary schools and 6 secondary schools.

The report added that plans for the 2024 Reading Climate Festival, centred around Show Your Stripes Day on 21 June, were already in development with the same partners. The partnership was keen to build on the success of the 2023 festival and Arts and Culture would continue to feature strongly and a full legacy plan were set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

Resolved:

- (1) That the evaluation of the 2023 Reading Climate Festival as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report be noted and the efforts of the partners be recognised;**

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- (2) That the committee note the impact of Luke Jerram's Gaia on participation and engagement in Reading Climate Festival 2023 be noted;**
- (3) That the value of arts, culture and creativity in engaging people in wider social issues, in this case, climate change, be noted.**

(The meeting opened at 6.30pm and closed at 8.25pm).