

COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES - 14 OCTOBER 2025

Present: Councillor Mpofu-Coles (Mayor);
Councillors Gittings (Deputy Mayor), Asare, Ayub, Ballsdon, Barnett-Ward, Cresswell, Cross, Davies, Eden, Edwards, Emberson, Ennis, Gavin, Griffith, Goss, Hacker, Hornsby-Smith, Hoskin, Juthani, Keane, Keeping, Lanzoni, Leng, Lovelock, Magon, McCann, McElroy, McEwan, McGoldrick, McGrother, Moore, Naz, Nikulina, O'Connell, Rowland, R Singh, Stevens, Tarar, Terry, Thompson, White, Williams and Yeo

Apologies: Councillors Dennis, Mitchell, DP Singh and Woodward

21. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor made the following announcement:

'Before we begin this evening's proceedings, I would like us all to dedicate some time to remember the victims of the attack at Heaton Park synagogue in Manchester on Thursday 2nd October. I am certain I speak for everyone here this evening when I say our thoughts and prayers go out to the families and loved ones of those killed or injured in this senseless act, which of course took place on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. Two people lost their lives, the impact will be felt by many more.'

This horrible attack is also a reminder to us as elected representatives of our joint responsibility of taking a stand against reckless words and actions. The importance was brought home just 48 hours later, on Saturday 4th October, with the cowardly and appalling arson attempt at Peacehaven mosque.

Reading has a long history of welcoming different communities, of embracing inclusivity, of tolerance and of solidarity across all communities. Indeed, it is one of the reasons I chose to make it my home.

Recent events have emphasised to us once again the value of us all standing together against hatred in all its forms.

I invite everyone to stand with me now for a minute's silence to remember the victims of those recent events.'

The meeting stood for a minute's silence.

22. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 24 June 2025 were agreed as correct records and signed by the Mayor.

23. PETITIONS

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Chloe Kidd presented a petition as follows:

Refurbish the Meadway Recreation Ground Play Area

A lone swing, an empty space where the zip line used to be, and an ageing slide – this is the children's playground at the Meadway Rec in Tilehurst. The play area desperately needs some attention. It serves five local schools – two of them for children with special needs from across our town – and is easy to reach by bus or car. Playgrounds all over Reading have had a revamp, but this part of Tilehurst has been left behind.

We call upon Reading Borough Council to refurbish the dilapidated play area at the Meadway Recreation Ground in Tilehurst. Our children deserve better.

RESPONSE by Councillor Barnett-Ward Lead Councillor for Leisure and Culture:

Thank you for your petition, and the interest it demonstrates in Reading's play facilities.

Reading Borough Council maintains over eighty parks and open spaces, most of which have play and/or sport facilities. Reading's Labour council believes that every child deserves a place to play and we value every one of our play areas, from flagship facilities like the recently replaced playground at Prospect Park, to small but perfectly formed local play spaces where neighbours can meet and chat while their children blow off some steam.

Outdoor play is essential for children's health and wellbeing, so we believe that money invested in play areas is money well spent. Four years ago we reviewed the condition and accessibility of all our playgrounds, prioritising them in order of need and launching an ambitious programme of replacement and refurbishment. This programme has delivered fantastic fun, free and accessible play across the borough. Just this year we have opened improved play and/or sports facilities at Victoria Recreation Ground, Emmer Green Recreation Ground, Westfield Recreation Ground, Oxford Road Recreation Ground, and Albert Road park, with many more delivered in the previous years. All our new play facilities are designed to be used by every child in Reading, so they are not only exciting and inviting, but also accessible to children and carers with mobility support needs, and they include sensory play areas. We consult the local community on playground proposals to ensure that each facility is tailored to the children and community who will use it.

This Council has invested over £1.7m in playground equipment since April 2024, with a number of schemes already delivered and the remainder underway and expected to complete this financial year. These projects are not paid by council tax: they are typically funded using developers' contributions obtained via Community Infrastructure Levies (often referred to as CIL). The availability of this funding therefore depends not only on whether eligible developments are being built, but also where in the Borough they are being built. Areas of Reading with more large-scale development attract more CIL funding than areas with no big building projects.

With the first wave of new playgrounds successfully delivered we are currently finalising the priorities for the next refurbishment programme, so this petition is timely. Facilities will be prioritised on condition, use and accessibility of the current equipment, but availability of funding will also be a factor. I am pleased to be able to confirm that we have already identified

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Meadway Play Area as a high priority for refurbishment, but I am not currently able to give any guarantees on timescale as Council officers need to identify and secure £350,000 of eligible funding before the project can go ahead.

24. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Questions on the following matters were submitted by members of the public:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	David Milne-Buckley	Armed Forces Act 2021	Cllr Emberson
2.	Caroline Basden	Junk Food Advertising	Cllr Eden
3.	Oliver White	Primary Schools in Emmer Green	Cllr Eden
4.	Shuet Han Tsui and Breege Brennan	Deterioration of No 10 Bus Service	Cllr Ennis

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

25. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by Councillors:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Cllr Williams	Vision Zero	Cllr Ennis
2.	Cllr Williams	Reading Cemetery Arch	Cllr Leng
3.	Cllr White	Genocide in Gaza and Berkshire Pension Fund	Cllr Terry
4.	Cllr Raj Singh	Reading Festival	Cllr Rowland
5.	Cllr Moore	QR Stickers on Bins	Cllr Rowland
6.	Cllr Raj Singh	Alleyways in Kentwood and Tilehurst	Cllr Rowland

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

26. READING YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2025/26

The Executive Director of Children's Services submitted a report setting out for approval the Reading Youth Justice Plan 2025-26, which was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 placed a duty on the Local Authority to produce an annual Youth Justice Plan and that production of a plan was also a condition of the Youth Justice Board Grant. The production and sign-off of the Plan was overseen by the multi-agency Youth Justice Partnership through the independently-chaired Youth Justice Management Board. The 2025/26 Youth Justice plan had been signed off by the Youth Justice Management board and submitted to the Youth Justice board for England

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and Wales by the required deadline of 30 June 2025, and an update report on the Plan had also been submitted to the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee on 2 July 2025 (minute 10 refers).

The report noted that the Youth Justice Plan, as attached at Appendix 1, included a review of performance for 2024/25 and it summarised some of the notable performance updates. The priorities agreed by the Youth Justice Management Board for 2025/26 were:

- Reducing First Time Entrants
- Reducing Reoffending
- Reducing the use of custody
- Reducing ethnic disproportionality
- Reducing Serious Youth Violence
- Embedding Child First and Identity Development Practice as the practice model across the partnership
- Improving outcomes for victims of youth crime

Seeking to improve educational outcomes for children in the YJS cohort would also continue to cut across all seven priorities. It had been agreed to merge these targets with the HMIP inspection action plan, to form a single delivery plan for continuous improvement.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Griffith and seconded by Councillor Asare and CARRIED:

Resolved –

That the 2025/26 Youth Justice plan be approved.

27. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2025/26

The Executive Director of Resources submitted a report setting out the Council's policy on pay for 2025/26 and information about changes to pay scales for the Council's workforce. The Pay Policy Statement was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report explained that the Pay Policy Statement met the statutory duty to provide the Council with a description of the policy on staff remuneration for annual approval. It provided information on remuneration arrangements for staff directly employed by the Council, excluding staff in schools. The Statement was broadly unchanged from 2024/25 other than it had been updated with the recent nationally agreed pay settlements.

The following Motion was moved by Councillor Emberson and seconded by Councillor Terry and CARRIED:

Resolved –

That the Council note the Pay Policy statement for 2025/2026.

28. AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

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The Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee submitted a report setting out at Appendix 1 the Audit & Governance Committee annual report. A summary of feedback from Committee and key Officer surveys was attached to the report at Appendix 2.

The report noted that the Audit & Governance Committee annual report set out the Committee's remit and membership, areas covered and work of the Committee during 2024/25, training undertaken by members during the year, and a summary of an assessment of the Committee's effectiveness carried out by committee members and key Officers (a detailed analysis was attached at Appendix 2). The annual report also considered how the Committee had complied with the 2022 CIPFA Position Statement on Audit Committees and an update on the progress since the last assessment against the CIPFA guidance had been carried out. Possible areas identified for improvement and forthcoming plans were also outlined.

The report noted that generally the Audit and Governance Committee complied with the 2022 CIPFA Position Statement, although it did not have any independent members on the Committee and did not review the Annual Governance Statement during the year.

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

Resolved –

That the Audit & Governance Committee annual report be noted.

29. AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION - BUDGET & POLICY FRAMEWORK PROCEDURE RULES / FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The Director of Finance submitted a report setting out updated Budget & Policy Framework Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations for adoption. The revised Budget & Policy Framework Procedure Rules were attached to the report at Appendix 1 and the revised Financial Regulations at Appendix 2.

The report noted that Council was responsible for the adoption of the authority's budget framework, and for adopting the policy framework, comprised of the policies, plans and strategies set out in Part 3 of the Constitution. Other policies, plans and strategies, and any successor documents, could be adopted, approved, amended, modified, varied or revoked by the Committee to which the subject function had been delegated, or by the Policy Committee. The Financial Regulations set out the financial policies and procedures and the framework for managing the Council's financial affairs. The Budget & Policy Framework Procedure Rules and the Financial Regulations had been reviewed and updated in order to bring them up to date and to simplify where possible.

At the meeting an amendment was moved and agreed to delete the words 'must be certified' and replace with 'must be submitted for certification' in paragraph 2.3 of the Budget & Policy Framework Procedure Rules (Appendix 1), relating to amendments to the proposed budget.

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The following motion was proposed by Councillor Emberson and seconded by Councillor Terry and CARRIED:

Resolved –

- (1) **That the revised Budget & Policy Framework Procedure Rules, as attached to the report at Appendix 1, with the amendment to paragraph 2.3 as agreed at the meeting, be adopted;**
- (2) **That the revised Financial Regulations, as attached to the report at Appendix 2, be adopted.**

30. RECOGNITION OF THE STATE OF PALESTINE AND STEPS TOWARDS PEACE IN GAZA

In accordance with Standing Order 14(10)(a), Councillor Terry received the consent of the Council to alter her motion.

The altered motion was moved by Councillor Terry and seconded by Councillor Eden and CARRIED as set out in the resolution below.

The following amendment was moved by Councillor McElroy and seconded by Councillor Thompson and LOST:

Add the following bullet points to the list at the end of the motion that starts “This Council”:

- Recognises the genocide committed by Israel against the Palestinian people, as per the findings of the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory.
- Recognises that in supplying arms and military and intelligence support to the Israeli government the UK government is complicit in this genocide.
- Recognises that all terrorists and irregular militants should be disarmed and play no part in any future governance arrangements in Israel or Palestine.
- Demands that the UK government immediately implement a full arms embargo on the Israeli government.
- Demands that the UK government immediately withdraw all military and intelligence support for the Israeli government until there is significant progress towards a lasting peace.
- Demands that the UK government support and resource all international cases of genocide and war crime against those responsible for the atrocities committed in Palestine and Israel at the International Criminal Court.
- Will use all means at their disposal to require that the Berkshire Pension Fund divests from companies that supply arms or military technology to the Israeli government.

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

For the amendment: 12

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Councillors Cresswell, Hacker, Keane, Magon, McCann, McElroy, Moore, Nikulina, O'Connell, Thompson, White, Williams.

Against the amendment: 32

Councillors Asare, Ayub, Ballsdon, Barnett-Ward, Cross, Davies, Eden, Edwards, Emberson, Ennis, Gavin, Gittings, Goss, Griffith, Hornsby-Smith, Hoskin, Juthani, Keeping, Lanzoni, Leng, Lovelock, McEwan, McGoldrick, McGrother, Mpofu-Coles, Naz, Rowland, Singh, Stevens, Tarar, Terry, Yeo.

Resolved –

We welcome the Labour Government's decision to recognise Palestine as an Independent State delivering its manifesto commitment and taking a vital step to protect the viability of a two-state solution, which must be part of a wider plan for peace.

We also welcome the release of hostages and the resumption of much needed aid being delivered in Gaza, as part of a developing plan for peace in Israel and Palestine.

Furthermore, we are proud that Reading is home to a diverse community, with many of our residents celebrating different faiths. Every resident in Reading deserves to feel safe, celebrated and valued as part of our town no matter their faith or background and we will continue to champion Reading as a diverse and tolerant town.

This Council:

- Welcomes the safe return of hostages held by the terrorist group Hamas, as well as those held by the Israeli Government.**
- Welcomes the developing steps towards a permanent peace plan and calls on all parties to bring an end to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and work to secure a permanent peace and a two-state solution in Israel and Palestine.**
- Agrees that the Leader of the Council write to the Foreign Secretary to welcome the Government's decision to recognise the state of Palestine as part of progress towards a two-state solution.**

(The meeting closed at 8.29 pm)