

**HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE
12 NOVEMBER 2025**

Present: Councillor Dennis (Chair), Ballsdon, Barnett-Ward, Cresswell, Cross, Gavin, Hacker, Keane, McEwan, Naz, Nikulina, Rowland, Thompson and Yeo.

Apologies: Councillor Ayub, Hoskin and Stevens

13. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Nikulina declared an interest in Item 19 as her employer had been involved in the library development.

14. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING & MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the meeting of 9 July 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

Further to Minutes 9 (3) and (4) of the previous meeting, relating to the proposal to implement a Borough-wide Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO), Councillor Rowland reported that the Council had asked for a statement of clarity from the police about the definitions of antisocial behaviour around e-bikes and e-scooters. No statement had yet been received but was hopefully anticipated. Councillor Rowland also explained that the report which had been expected to come to the Committee detailing the PSPO consultation feedback with recommendations on implementing any new restrictions or amendments was now being submitted to the Policy Committee on 17 November 2025, the papers for which were available online.

Resolved - That the position be noted.

15. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meeting were submitted:

Community Safety Partnership – 3 April and 17 July 2025.

Resolved - That the Minutes be received.

16. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
Melvina Dimmott	Housing Repair	Cllr Yeo

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

17. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
Cllr Nikulina	Possibility of Leasing a Second Narrow-Access Bin Lorry	Cllr Rowland
Cllr Keane	Fly-Tipping on Non-Council Land	Cllr Rowland

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

18. READING FESTIVAL UPDATE

The Committee received a presentation from Claire Armstrong, Melvin Benn, Vicky Chapman and Charlotte Oliver from Festival Republic, giving an update on the 2025 Reading Festival and setting out plans for the 2026 event. The presentation and subsequent discussion included:

- The 2025 festival had been a big success, although the event had not been quite at full capacity.
- There had been an increase in the number of themed camping areas, including Solo, Access, Eco, Glitterball and Calm, which reflected the changes in festival-goer demographics, particularly post-Covid. These sites could be booked in advance. The Get Ready With Me (GRWM) stations, providing hair styling tools, mirrors etc had proved very popular, although there would be improvements to the sign-up system to prevent double booking for future years.
- AIR (Assistance, Information and Response) Hubs had continued to improve, with festival-goers never being more than 200 metres from a Hub if they needed support.
- The Festival had addressed the previous year's complaints about noise from the Chevron Stage by moving it inside a marquee, which had reduced external noise levels and created a good atmosphere for the attendees.
- On and off-site traffic management had worked well, although it was still proving difficult to encourage attendees to be dropped off/picked up away from Richfield Avenue where possible, to avoid congestion. The use of the Festival Bridge and River Taxis had also continued to support alternative travel.
- More partners, including Safe Space, had been involved in the promotion of safeguarding and welfare. Particular emphasis had been placed on zero tolerance of violence against women and girls (VAWG), spiking, drug and alcohol use and looking out for each other, with posters and messages on the large screens to help raise awareness. It was noted that an increase in reported incidents could reflect an increase in people feeling comfortable to report rather than an increase in the number of incidents, and that more data would be needed before any conclusions could be drawn.
- The Festival was staffed by 6-7,000 paid staff, plus volunteers. Volunteers raised money for charity and were more committed, plus they received a free ticket to the event.
- There had been continuing efforts both back and front of house to improve sustainability, which had led to a further decrease in emissions and waste, with overall waste down by 17% and an approximate decrease of 20% in the tonnage of tents left behind. A range of measures had been aimed at festival-goers including Look Out For Our Planet, competitions and rewards. Festival Republic would look to provide greater details on energy use per attendee and total water use going forward.
- Plans for the 2026 Festival included continuous improvements in safeguarding and VAWG, reviewing the named campsites to provide the best possible experience for customers, and expanding them if required, further work on how to persuade people to take all of their camping equipment home, expansion of

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GRWM tents and investigation of groundworks to identify solutions to the very dusty ground caused by a dry summer.

Resolved - That the presentation be noted.

19. STUDIO THEATRE AT THE HEXAGON

The Committee received a presentation and a report giving an update on progress with the new Studio Theatre at the Hexagon. The report explained that work was progressing in accordance with the construction programme and that the Studio Theatre was expected to open to the public in spring 2027. The report added that, over the summer, the back of house had been demolished and a new temporary back of house had been installed. Work was happening to provide a new kitchen that would serve the Hexagon as well as the Studio Theatre, and this was anticipated to open in autumn 2025. The report also explained that the operational and business planning to programme the Hexagon and Studio Theatre from 2027 as complementary venues would start in the coming months.

The Studio Theatre would be state of the art and was anticipated to provide a circa 200 seat flexible theatre (circa 300 standing) with step-free access, accessible toilets on all floors, hearing loops, bar and catering facilities. The Studio Theatre would be easily accessible from town centre transport links, offering a better customer experience and an improved operational environment for visiting companies.

Resolved:

That the progress on the development of the new Studio Theatre at the Hexagon, scheduled to open in spring 2027, be noted.

20. READING LIBRARIES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME: STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES/ THEMES 2025 – 2029

Further to Minute 29 of the meeting held on 11 March 2025, the Committee considered a report that set out a final version of the strategic principles and priorities proposed for libraries improvement following public consultation. The six principles, set out below, were referred to as ‘themes’ for ease of understanding:

- Ensuring all libraries in the borough’s network responded to the needs of communities and partners and building these into external funding applications.
- Supporting children and young people with reading, literacy and language development.
- Improving digital provision, access and content to support learning and skills.
- Supporting improvements for Reading’s health, wellbeing, literacy and cohesion.
- Bringing arts, culture, heritage and creativity into library spaces.

Details of the results of the public consultation were attached to the report at Appendix 1. The consultation exercise on the priorities had also gathered feedback regarding the new Reading Central Library design.

The report explained that the Council’s ambition with these new themes was to deliver a library service across Reading with a high-quality community offer of books, IT and support. This supported the new flagship Reading Central Library in the town centre, with Reading’s residents and organisations using all library buildings for reading, work, digital

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skills and study, increasing users and usage of Council services. It was proposed that Libraries in the Borough would be spaces that further supported equality, development and wellbeing achieved, in part, through successfully securing external funding.

The report stated that the endorsed themes would start immediately and feed into the next round of service planning for libraries, covering the period including the opening of the new Central Library anticipated in 2026.

Resolved:

- (1) That the strategic principles for the library service for 2025-2029, noted at section 3.13 of the report, following the July 2025 public engagement on the draft principles agreed on 11 March 2025, be adopted;**
- (2) That the feedback given regarding the new Central Library from the exercise carried out in July 2025 and the huge opportunity arising from Reading opening a new Central Library during the 2026 National Year of Reading be noted;**
- (3) That the success of the library service in delivering against the strategic principles since inception in 2021, meaning that library issues in Reading have increased year-on-year since the pandemic, be noted.**

(Councillor Nikulina declared an interest in this application as her partner had been involved in the library development. She left the meeting and took no part in the debate or decision.)

21. HIGHWAY ASSET MANAGEMENT 2025/26 UPDATE REPORT

The Committee received a report setting out details of a review carried out on the gully cleansing regime and seeking endorsement of the proposed changes to the Highway Gully Cleaning Regimes. The report also informed the Committee of the Annual Status Options Reports (ASOR) for the condition of the Carriageways, Footways and Bridges. The following documents were attached to the report:

Appendix 1 – Carriageways ASOR Summary 2025

Appendix 2 – Footways ASOR Summary 2025

Appendix 3 – Structures ASOR Summary 2025.

The report explained that the Council managed over 18,500 gullies on the public highway network which currently received an annual clean. The Highways & Drainage Operations Team (H&D) visited each gully with the Gully Emptying Machine and recorded the condition findings for the Highway Asset Management database. The gully cleaning records showed that over the last two years the majority of gullies within Unclassified Residential Roads had not required additional cleanses and could be cleansed less frequently without a significant increase in risk of flooding. Cleaning these gullies annually was limiting the capacity to address more urgent gullies that required more frequent cleaning. The proposal was to amend the gully cleansing frequency for the majority of the Unclassified Roads (Residential) from an annual visit to a bi-annual (every two years), cleaning regime, while acknowledging that some Unclassified Roads would

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still need an annual cleaning regime, as they were known to be in areas where there was high leaf fall and other known drainage issues. The report stated that it was not proposed to amend the gully cleaning regimes on the Classified (A, B & C) Roads, on the strategic routes with the highest volumes and class of traffic and presenting the highest risk, which would therefore remain the highest priority. The capacity generated within this amended gully cleaning regime would allow those gullies that needed more regular cleaning to receive an enhanced clean, either every six or three months in some cases where there were repeated call outs due to slow running gullies or repeated blockages.

The report stated that the Council had invested £17m into improving Roads and Pavements (footways) in Reading since 2020/21 and this had brought the condition of the Classified Major Roads to a good condition. The Council was now looking to bring forward an extensive and cost-effective preservation programme in the coming years to maintain a good steady state. The Council had also extensively invested in the Unclassified (Residential) road network since 2020/21 and 79% of these roads were now in a 'Green' or good condition.

The report also explained that the level of satisfaction with carriageways and footways, using the NHT (National Highways and Transport Network) survey, compared well to other authorities, with all indicators above national averages. The Council's investment was bringing the condition of the public footways to a 'steady state', and the Council was now looking to bring forward a preservation cost effective programme in the coming years to maintain a good steady state.

The report stated that the Council managed a stock of 275 highway structures, of which 19 structures were in need of strengthening and 16 were currently rated to be in a 'poor' condition. The ASOR report had confirmed that the current routine, reactive and cyclical maintenance revenue budget was sufficient and that over the next five financial years approximately £1.430m per annum was to be invested in structures maintenance which would enable nine structures to be strengthened and three 'poor' condition structures to be refurbished. The Council would continue to seek funding from Department of Transport for addressing the Bridges backlog as and when opportunities arose. The report also noted that 'poor' condition structures did not mean that they were unsafe and needed to be closed as often only one element of the structure was in poor condition and just that element required strengthening or replacement, not the entire structure.

Resolved:

- (1) That the proposed changes to the Highway Gully Cleaning Regimes be endorsed;**
- (2) That the Annual Status Option Reports (ASORs) for condition of the Council's Carriageways, Footways & Bridges be noted.**

22. WINTER SERVICE MAINTENANCE PLAN 2025-26

The Committee considered a report that set out details of the outputs that had been delivered by the Winter Service Plan 2024-25 and 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'. It also sought approval for the Winter Service Plan 2025-2026. A copy of the Winter Service Plan 2024-2025 was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

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The report explained that the 2024-2025 winter season had been relatively mild overall but there had been numerous occasions when the temperature had reached the trigger point for precautionary salting action, (below 1⁰C and predicted to go below freezing), resulting in 54 primary runs and four secondary runs. The colder spells had not been severe nor prolonged enough for activation of the Snow Plan. By comparison there had been 34 primary runs and three secondary runs during the previous winter season 2023/2024. 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, to provide gritting decision making had worked well and delivered against the set key performance indicator. The Winter Service Plan 2024/2025 had provided a robust service for the duration of the Winter period with no disruption to the primary and secondary road network.

A review of the Winter Service Plan 2024-2025 had been carried out and the main points, including updates for the Winter Service Plan 2025-2026, were summarised in the report.

Resolved -

- (1) That the outputs delivered by the Winter Service Plan 2024-2025 be noted;**
- (2) That the outcome of 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 2025-2026 be approved.**

23. RBC LANDLORD SERVICES – APRIL TO JULY 2025 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee received a report providing an update on the performance of Reading Borough Council's Housing Landlord Service delivered year to date, up to and including July 2025, following the inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) which had concluded in April 2025.

The Housing Landlord service was working with the RSH under Provider Improvement, and it was anticipated that regular meetings with the RSH would continue for a minimum of 12 months, after which the Regulator might consider reinspection or regrading. The Service needed to demonstrate sustained change embedded across the service, achieving positive outcomes for tenants and it had received positive feedback from the RSH in relation to progress made on the Service Improvement Plan to date. The Regulator had also complimented the Service on the volume of the work in progress to address the root cause of issues and ensure sustainable change. The Housing Landlord Service remained committed to continuous improvement and regulatory compliance, ensuring that tenants received safe, secure, and high-quality housing services.

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The report explained that Landlord performance was monitored against the four Consumer Standards:

- Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard (including Tenant Satisfaction Measures);
- Tenancy Standard;
- Safety and Quality Standard;
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard.

To meet these new standards, housing providers were required to ensure that performance was reported transparently and subject to robust oversight through their established governance structures. In the last period an additional 'cross party working group' had been formed to provide further opportunities to share progress and encourage scrutiny of performance and key issues. Housing Services also submitted a performance update to the Committee on a regular basis to provide clear insight into performance and support informed scrutiny, challenge, and strategic discussion.

The report stated that a comprehensive Service Improvement Plan had been developed to address the root causes identified during the inspection alongside wider service improvements. The Plan was being actively monitored and delivered through cross-service collaboration, with a focus on ensuring that all actions were delivered, achieved the desired outcomes, embedded sustainable change and were aligned with the Consumer Standards.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Housing Landlord Service Performance and key achievements delivered year to date, up to and including July 2025, be noted;**
- (2) That the themes and programmes of the Service Improvement Plan against the Consumer Standards (Appendix 1) be endorsed.**

(The meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.31 pm).