

POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 13 JULY 2026

Present: Councillor Terry (Chair);

Councillors Leng (Vice-Chair), Dennis, Eden, Ennis, Griffith, Lanzoni, McEwan, McGoldrick, Nikulina, R Singh, Thompson, White, Williams and Yeo

14. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair made the following announcement:

'I regret to inform Members of the sad news that former Councillor Chris Goodall passed away over the weekend.

Chris was elected to the newly-formed Reading Borough Council in 1973 as a councillor for Church ward and was appointed Leader of the Labour Group. He later served on Berkshire County Council during the 1980s and 90s before returning to the Borough Council, where he continued to represent Church ward until standing down in 2008.

Chris gave many years of public service to the people of Reading, and I am sure Members will wish to join me in expressing our condolences to his family and friends.

Please join me if you are able in standing for a minute's silence.'

15. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2026 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

16. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by Councillors:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Cllr Williams	Road Resurfacing in Reading	Cllr Ennis
2.	Cllr Williams	Prioritising Tree Planting in Reading	Cllr Ennis
3.	Cllr Thompson	Clear and adequate signage for bus lanes	Cllr Ennis
4.	Cllr Williams	Grade II listed Cemetery Arch	Cllr Leng
5.	Cllr White	Cyclist Safety	Cllr Ennis

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

17. THAMES VALLEY SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY - DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

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The Committee considered a report seeking approval to participate in, and help lead, a joint Thames Valley partnership including all Oxfordshire councils, Berkshire unitary authorities and Swindon Borough Council, to progress the pre-inception phase of work for a Thames Valley Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) as set out in the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Annexe 1 - Funding and finance arrangements
- Annexe 2 - High Level Programme and Indicative Timeline
- Annexe 3 - Governance and Resourcing

The report noted that the SDS was a new strategic planning statutory requirement and should provide a high-level spatial framework setting the scale and distribution of growth, investment opportunities and supporting Place infrastructure across multiple local planning authority areas. The proposed Thames Valley partnership would be in the form of an inter authority agreement until the statute was in place, and the report set out the framework for this partnership to proceed.

The report stated that work to date had focused on establishing a shared understanding of the SDS requirements, engaging with Government on the emerging geography as set out in the consultation in February 2026 and legislative timetable, and developing early programme outputs (including a pathway/statement of readiness and a strategic spatial baseline). Government grant funding had been made available to the Thames Valley area to support this early work, alongside defined expectations for transparency and quarterly monitoring and evaluation reporting.

The report explained that the statutory Strategic Planning Board for the Thames Valley was expected to be established through secondary legislation due in Autumn 2026 and therefore interim governance was required to provide clear decision-making, financial accountability and programme oversight during the pre-inception period. A joint partnership model with agreed monitoring, assurance and dispute resolution arrangements was proposed, with Bracknell Forest Council (on behalf of all authorities) acting as the accountable body and host authority for any dedicated staff resource.

Resolved –

- (1) That the establishment of a partnership with the Oxfordshire Councils, Berkshire Unitary Councils and Swindon Borough Council to develop a statutory Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) for the Thames Valley area be approved;**
- (2) That the proposed funding and resource allocations for the pre-inception programme be noted, recognising any final allocation would be brought back to Policy Committee for agreement;**
- (3) That it be agreed that Bracknell Forest Council would act as the accountable body for funds received/held on behalf of the partnership and would host any staff appointed to work on the Thames Valley SDS programme;**

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- (4) That the interim governance, monitoring and assurance arrangements as set out in the report be agreed, including arrangements for the period before a statutory Strategic Planning Board/Spatial Planning Board (SPB) was established through secondary legislation;
- (5) That the working arrangements for development of the SDS be agreed;
- (6) That the group nominated Chief Executive from Bracknell Forest Council, in consultation with individual authority Chief Executives and Monitoring Officers, be authorised to finalise and enter into the necessary inter-authority agreements and to make any consequential amendments required to implement the decisions above.

18. 2025/26 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee considered a report setting out the provisional revenue and capital outturn positions for the Council's General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for 2025/26 and performance for the full year against the measures of success published in the Council Plan. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 - General Fund – Revenue Outturn 2025/26
- Appendix 2 - Savings 2025/26
- Appendix 3 - General Fund – Capital Programme Outturn 2025/26
- Appendix 4 - Delivery Fund 2025/26
- Appendix 5 - Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Outturn 2025/26
- Appendix 6 - Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme Outturn 2025/26
- Appendix 7 - Reserves Position as at 31 March 2026
- Appendix 8 - Council Plan Performance Measures 2025/26
- Appendix 9 - Council Plan Projects 2025/26
- Appendix 10 - Debt Write-Offs (exempt information)

The report stated that the final outturn position, subject to the completion of the external audit process, was an adverse net variance of £3.115m. This reduction of £1.518m from the Quarter 3 forecast represented a significant improvement and reflected work undertaken across the Council to mitigate the financial pressures. The report also set out the year end position on reserves, savings, General Fund – Capital, and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The report sought approval for amendments to the General Fund Capital Programme which would result in a revised budget of £54.994m. The amendments were set out on an individual scheme basis in Appendix 3 to the report. Approval was also sought to remove a budget of £0.371m in the HRA Capital Programme, where the scope of the scheme had been reduced, which would result in a revised HRA Capital Programme budget of £61.783m, as set out in Appendix 6 to the report.

The report also set out performance against the measures of success published in the Council Plan for the 2025/26 year. Of the 29 Council Plan Performance Measures for

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2025/26, at the end of the financial year 45% were rated “green”, 31% “amber”, 21% were “red” and 3% were not available. Of the 51 Council Plan Projects, 8% were “blue”, 57% were “green”, 31% “amber” and 4% “red”. The full list of Performance Measures was set out in Appendix 8 and Projects in Appendix 9.

Resolved –

(1) That it be noted that:

- a) The provisional General Fund revenue outturn position for 2025/26 was an adverse net variance of £3.115m which was an improvement of £1.518m from Quarter 3 (Appendix 1);**
- b) £8.667m (75%) of savings had been delivered in 2025/26, and a total of £0.879m of savings would be carried forward into 2026/27 (Appendix 2);**
- c) The provisional General Fund Capital Programme outturn was a positive net variance of £8.691m against the proposed revised budget of £54.994m (Appendix 3) before the additional net reprogramming of £9.001m of budgets to future years;**
- d) £2.387m of Capital Receipts had been used to fund transformation (the Delivery Fund) in accordance with the Capitalisation Directive (Appendix 4);**
- e) The provisional Housing Revenue Account (HRA) outturn position was an adverse net variance of £3.403m, which resulted in a net drawdown from HRA Reserves of £9.755m rather than the budgeted drawdown of £6.352m (Appendix 5);**
- f) The provisional HRA Capital Programme outturn position was a positive net variance of £16.084m against the proposed revised budget of £61.783m (Appendix 6) before the net reprogramming of £16.084m of budgets to future years;**
- g) The Reserves position as at 31 March 2026 was as set out in Section 13 of the report and Appendix 7;**
- h) The deficit balance on the Dedicated Schools Grant was now £46.935m (an increase of £22.031m);**
- i) The performance achieved against the Council Plan success measures was as set out in Section 15 of the report and Appendices 8 and 9;**

(2) That the General Fund Revenue outturn balance of £3.115m be funded from the Financial Resilience Reserve as set out in Appendix 6;

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- (3) That the amendments to the General Fund Capital Programme (as set out in Section 10 of the report and Appendix 3) resulting in a revised Capital Programme budget of £54.994m for 2025/26 (before the additional net reprogramming of £9.001m of budgets to future years) be approved;**
- (4) That the amendments to the HRA Capital Programme (as set out in further detail in Section 12 of the report and Appendix 6) resulting in a revised HRA Capital Programme net budget of £61.783m for 2025/26 (before the net reprogramming of £16.084m of budgets to future years) be approved;**
- (5) That the write-off of debts as set out in Section 7 of the report and Appendix 10, relating to Non-Domestic Rates of £95,224.80 and Sundry Debt of £50,384.03, be approved.**

19. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved –

That pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of item 20 below as it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to that Act.

20. PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION DELIVERY MODEL

The Committee considered a report setting out the proposed decommissioning of the Caversham Road Pods as part of a transition towards the approach set out in the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026 – 2031 and accompanying Action Plan, as approved by Housing, Neighbourhood and Leisure Committee at its meeting on 10 March 2026 (Minute 30 refers).

The report explained that the supported accommodation delivered at Caversham Road Pods had been established as part of Reading's rapid response to the Covid-19 pandemic, supporting the national "Everyone In" initiative. The Pods had been intended as a temporary, emergency provision, with temporary planning permission currently due to expire in September 2026. The Pods model was not aligned with the Council's usual approach to commissioning and delivering outreach support and supported accommodation services and did not reflect the agreed strategic direction set out in the Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy. Operational experience had also identified limitations with the model in achieving consistent move-on, sustaining recovery and maintaining throughput for this cohort with complex needs. This combination of operational factors, the temporary nature of the provision and its misalignment with the Council's strategic direction, established a clear case for decommissioning.

The report recommended a full decommissioning of the Pods by September 2027, enabling a managed transition for current residents, allowing the Council to redirect resources into alternative supported accommodation and minimising the risk of increased rough sleeping.

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This approach supported the alignment of commissioning cycles across outreach, support and supported housing services for people who were rough sleeping and would enable more coordinated services with improved outcomes to be delivered from available resources. As set out in the agreed Strategy and Action Plan, from September 2027, the Council would fully recommission homelessness support and supported accommodation services, prioritising rapid “off the streets” responses and move-on, the growth of Housing First, and more dispersed model of provision, enabling improved recovery outcomes and tenancy sustainment.

The report noted that the potential redevelopment of the site for a residential-led scheme including policy compliant affordable housing as allocated in the Local Plan would be subject to an options appraisal on use, design and routes to delivery.

Resolved –

- (1) That the decommissioning of the Supported Accommodation provision at Caversham Road Pods by 31 August 2027 be approved;**
- (2) That the Executive Director for Communities and Adult Social Care, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, the Director of Legal and Democratic Services and the Director of Finance, be authorised to:**
 - a) procure, award, and implement any necessary contracts and associated agreements required to decommission the Caversham Road Pods site, including the removal, disposal, sale or relocation of the modular units and restoration of the site, in accordance with procurement and financial regulations;**
 - b) exercise the permitted contractual extension to award an eight-month extension to the existing support contract with Launchpad Reading for the Caversham Road Pods and The Nova Project, covering the period 1 August 2026 to 31 March 2027, up to the maximum value set out in the report;**
 - c) approve and implement a further time-limited contract modification for up to five months, in accordance with Regulation 72 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2025 to extend the same support contract with Launchpad Reading for the Caversham Road Pods and The Nova Project from 1 April 2027 to 31 August 2027, up to the maximum value set out in the report, solely to ensure continuity of support and alignment with planned decommissioning and homelessness service recommissioning;**
- (3) That it be noted that an options appraisal and feasibility study for redevelopment of the site in line with the Local Plan allocation would be undertaken following decommissioning, to inform the future use of the site, and that any proposals and subsequent recommendations would be**

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subject to a separate decision-making process in line with the Council's Constitution.

(Exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 3)

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.46 pm)