

# POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 21 JULY 2025

**Present:** Councillors Leng (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Barnett-Ward, Eden, Emberson, Ennis, Gittings, Griffith, Nikulina, Rowland, R Singh, Thompson, White and Yeo

**Apologies:** Councillor Terry

## 6. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair announced with great sadness that Chris Gavin, husband of Councillor Jan Gavin had passed away.

The Committee stood for a minute's silence in Chris's memory and as a mark of respect.

## 7. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## 8. DELEGATED DECISIONS

The delegated decisions were noted.

## 9. PETITIONS AND QUESTIONS

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

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Sue Sibany-King	Berkshire Pension Fund	Cllr Leng (on behalf of Cllr Terry)
2.	Alison Foster	Council Tax	Cllr Emberson

Questions on the following matters were submitted by Councillors:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Cllr Singh	Nepali Community Facility	Cllr Leng (on behalf of Cllr Terry)
2.	Cllr Singh	Tree Planting	Cllr Rowland
3.	Cllr Thompson	Unacceptable Call Waiting Times	Cllr Emberson
4.	Cllr White	Call Centre Wait Times Too Long	Cllr Emberson
5.	Cllr White	Bus Tickets Too Expensive	Cllr Ennis
6.	Cllr White	Labour's Welfare Reforms	Cllr Leng (on behalf of Cllr Terry)

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

### **10. SIMPLER RECYCLING - GLASS COLLECTIONS FROM KERBSIDE**

The Committee considered a report setting out proposals for the introduction of kerbside glass collections in Reading, in line with the Government's Simpler Recycling initiative. The initiative required all local authorities in England to collect a consistent set of recyclable materials, including glass, from the kerbside by 31 March 2026.

The report outlined the current arrangements for glass recycling in Reading, which relied on 42 bring bank sites, and presented an options appraisal for future service delivery. It was noted that the Council's existing Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) at Smallmead could not accommodate comingled glass without significant investment, which would not be cost-effective given the remaining term of the current contract with FCC Environmental.

Three options were considered:

- Option 1a: Separate fortnightly glass collection using boxes or appropriate containers.
- Option 1b: Separate four-weekly glass collection using wheeled bins.
- Option 2: Comingled glass collection with Dry Mixed Recycling (DMR).

The Committee noted that Option 1a was the preferred approach due to its lower capital cost (£1.37m), medium revenue cost (£0.91m), and deliverability within the required timescale. It was also the most operationally feasible and aligned with national policy objectives, including reducing contamination and improving material quality.

The Committee also noted the need to commence vehicle procurement urgently due to long lead times (12–18 months), and that the vehicles could be repurposed for food waste collection if required.

In response to questions it was noted that there was not expected to be any penalties from central Government in relation to the timelines of the new service. The collections would be monitored so that the service would be as efficient as possible. It was expected that future funding for the service would be more than sufficient to meet any additional costs.

**Resolved –**

- (1) **That the discussion and agreement with re3 partners that, due to the current contract with FCC Environmental ending in 2031/32, the investment required to upgrade the Material Recycling Facility (£10.25m) would not be cost-effective, and therefore comingling of glass with DMR should not be actively pursued at this time be noted.**

- (2) That Option 1a, as set out in the associated report, for the separate collection of glass from a box or other appropriate container on a fortnightly basis, be endorsed as the Council's preferred option.
- (3) That the development of a detailed business case and delivery plan for Option 1a be approved, with a further decision report to be presented to the Committee in Autumn 2025 be approved.
- (4) That the Assistant Director of Environmental and Commercial Services be authorised to undertake a tender exercise including, in consultation with the Director of Finance, an award of contract of the required vehicles as set out in paragraph 10.2 of the associated report.
- (5) That the current long lead times for vehicle delivery that will impact on the detailed delivery plan be noted.

**11. UPDATE ON PROJECTS FUNDED BY 15% LOCAL COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY**

The Committee considered a report providing an update on the progress of projects funded through the 15% local Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which was allocated to the local area in which development takes place.

The report explained that, under the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended), 15% of CIL receipts must be spent in the relevant local area unless a neighbourhood development plan or order was in place. In Reading, this was managed through a CIL Spend Protocol, originally approved by Policy Committee in July 2018 and amended in February 2021, which sets out the principles and priorities for allocating 15% local CIL.

The Committee were advised that the protocol prioritises projects that support open space and leisure improvements, local highway schemes, air quality, community infrastructure, renewable energy, and economic support. Allocations must also demonstrate alignment with the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan or Capital Programme, and may be used to unlock additional funding or address impacts of development not covered by planning obligations.

The report provided updates on the delivery status of previously approved projects and confirmed that the allocations continued to support the Council's strategic aims, particularly in promoting thriving communities.

**Resolved –**

**That the progress on the projects benefitting from the 15% local Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) allocated be noted.**

**12. INSURANCE CONTRACT TENDER**

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The Committee consider a report seeking approval to undertake a competitive tendering process for the Council's insurance arrangements, with a view to new contracts being in place by 1 April 2026. The report explained that the Council's current insurance contracts would expire on 31 March 2026 and that a new procurement exercise was required in accordance with the Procurement Act 2023.

The report set out the Council's current approach to insurance, which balanced self-retained risk with external insurance cover, and proposed that this approach be continued. It was noted that the new contracts would include provision for Combined Liability (Public and Employer's Liability), Motor Fleet, and Property insurance, and would also incorporate run-off cover for the decommissioned Children's Company, Brighter Futures for Children.

It was noted that the current year's total value of insurance contracts was £1.2million. The estimated value of the new contracts over a seven-year period was £8.4 million, subject to variables such as claims history, staffing levels, market conditions, and insurance premium tax.

### **Resolved -**

- (1) That an open tender procedure be carried out with a view to the resultant insurance contract(s) being in place by 1st April 2026 allowing for an element of both self-insurance and cover by an external insurance policy as set out in 3. 3.2 of the associated report be agreed;**
- (2) That the Director of Finance in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Corporate Services and Resources and the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to make relevant decisions regarding policy cover, levels of deductibles and award the contract at the end of the tender process to the winning tenderer/s;**
- (3) That the Director of Finance be authorised to approve the runoff insurance cover where appropriate for the decommissioned Children's Company 'Brighter Futures for Children'.**

### **13. FOOD SERVICE PLAN 2025-2026**

The Committee considered a report presenting the Council's Food Service Plan for 2025-2026, which outlined how the Council would meet its statutory obligations under the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) Framework Agreement.

The report detailed the Council's responsibilities for food hygiene, food standards, and food safety enforcement, and set out the planned activities for the year, including:

- Delivery of a risk-based inspection programme for food premises.
- Investigation of food complaints and food poisoning incidents.
- Sampling and analysis of food products.
- Provision of advice and education to businesses and the public.
- Enforcement action where necessary to protect public health.

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The Plan also included performance data from the previous year, staffing levels, and resource allocation, and highlighted the challenges faced by the service, including recruitment and retention of qualified officers and the impact of new legislative requirements.

**Resolved –**

**That the content of the statutory Food Service Plan 2025-2026 be noted.**

### **14. MANAGED STORES PROCUREMENT 2025**

The Committee considered a report seeking approval to procure a new managed stores contract for the Council's Housing Property Services.

The report explained that the current managed stores contract, which supported the delivery of responsive repairs, voids, and planned works to the Council's housing stock, was due to expire on 31 March 2026. The proposed procurement would ensure continuity of service and support the Council's statutory landlord responsibilities.

The report set out the procurement strategy, including a proposed contract term of five years with an option to extend for a further two years. It also outlined the benefits of a managed stores model, including improved stock control, reduced downtime for operatives, and better value for money.

**Resolved –**

**(1) That the Executive Director of Communities and Adult Social Care, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, the Director of Finance, and the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to:**

- 1.1 Procure and award a contract with the successful tenderer(s) for the Managed Stores contract. The contract will be for up to 7 years (5 initial years and then up to 2 further years).**
- 1.2 Negotiate with the successful tenderer to mobilise the contract, vary the contract, extend the contract at the appropriate time, and otherwise contract manage the contract throughout its lifecycle.**

### **15. IMPLICATIONS OF OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION PROPOSALS**

The Committee considered a report outlining the potential implications for Reading Borough Council (RBC) of the proposed Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Oxfordshire. The report set out the current position, the potential impacts on RBC, and the proposed approach to engagement and response.

The report explained that Oxfordshire County Council had submitted a proposal to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to create a single unitary

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authority for Oxfordshire, replacing the existing two-tier structure. Although Reading was not within the Oxfordshire boundary, the proposal had potential implications for the Berkshire authorities, particularly in relation to cross-boundary services, regional collaboration, and strategic planning.

The report highlighted the following key issues:

- The potential for changes to regional governance structures, including the Oxfordshire-Cambridgeshire Arc and sub-national transport bodies;
- Risks to existing joint arrangements and partnerships, particularly in areas such as transport, economic development, and infrastructure planning;
- The importance of maintaining Reading's strategic influence in the region, particularly given its role as a key economic centre;
- The need for proactive engagement with DLUHC, neighbouring authorities, and regional bodies to ensure Reading's interests were represented.

The report recommended that the Council monitor developments closely, engage with relevant stakeholders, and prepare a formal response to any consultation on the proposals.

At the invitation of the Chair, Chris Pike addressed the Committee members to speak on the item and ask a question.

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

The Committee discussed the report and a number of points were made. It was noted that the formal request would be submitted to Council ahead of submission to Government in November 2025.

### **Resolved –**

- (1) That the interim proposals submitted for local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire be noted;**
- (2) That a formal request be made to Government for a modification of the boundary between Reading and West Berkshire be agreed;**
- (3) That the Chief Executive be authorised to undertake all necessary activities to inform and evidence the request, in line with the initial proposal as set out in Appendix 3 of the report, and consultation with the Leader of the Council; and**
- (4) That the request will be presented to Council for approval prior to submission to Government in November 2025, to align with the reorganisation timetable, thereby enabling the Secretary of State to consider the rationale for a modified boundary.**

### **16. 2024/25 QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

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The Committee considered a report setting out the projected revenue and capital outturn positions for 2024/25 for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as at the end of Quarter 4 and the performance against the measures of success set out in the Council's Corporate Plan. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 - Summary of the General Fund Outturn 2024/25
- Appendix 2 - Recovery Plan 2024-25
- Appendix 3 - Savings Tracker Quarter 4
- Appendix 4 - General Fund Capital Programme Outturn
- Appendix 5 - Delivery Fund
- Appendix 6 - Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Revenue Outturn
- Appendix 7 – HRA Capital Programme Outturn
- Appendix 8 – Reserves Position as at 31 March 2025
- Appendix 9 - Corporate Plan Performance Measures Quarter 4
- Appendix 10 - Corporate Plan Projects Quarter 4
- Appendix 11 – Confidential Annex

The report explained that the provisional General Fund revenue outturn position for 2024/25 was an adverse net variance of £9.305m, which was an improvement of £1.313m from the position reported at Quarter 3. The outturn included a request for additional funding support of £6.393m to Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) over and above the 2024/25 contract sum. The report also noted that 73% of savings had been delivered in 2024/25, with £3.116m of savings to be carried forward into 2025/26.

The report further explained that the provisional General Fund Capital Programme outturn was a positive net variance of £12.884m against the revised budget of £69.637m, before the reprogramming of £13.137m into future years. The HRA revenue outturn was an adverse net variance of £0.528m, resulting in a drawdown of £4.076m from HRA reserves. The HRA Capital Programme outturn was a positive net variance of £5.485m, with the same amount reprogrammed into future years.

The report also set out the position on reserves, with General Fund revenue reserves totalling £49.035m as at 31 March 2025, and noted that the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit had increased to £24.904m.

Performance against the Corporate Plan was also reported, with 42% of KPIs rated green and 67% of projects were on track.

### **Resolved –**

- 1) That the provisional General Fund revenue outturn position for 2024/25 of an adverse net variance of £9.305m, an improvement of £1.313m from Quarter 3 (Appendix 1 of the report), be noted;**
- 2) That the provisional General Fund revenue outturn position includes the outturn position reported by Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC), as summarised in Section 3 of the report, be noted;**

- 3) That £5.451m (73%) of savings have been delivered in 2024/25, with £3.116m of savings to be carried forward into 2025/26 (Appendix 3 of the report), be noted;
- 4) That the provisional General Fund Capital Programme outturn of a positive net variance of £12.884m against the revised budget of £69.637m (Appendix 4 of the report), before the reprogramming of £13.137m into future years, be noted;
- 5) That £1.717m of Capital Receipts have been used to fund transformation (the Delivery Fund) in accordance with the Capitalisation Directive (Appendix 5), be noted;
- 6) That the provisional Housing Revenue Account (HRA) outturn position of an adverse net variance of £0.528m, resulting in a drawdown of £4.076m from HRA reserves (Appendix 6), be noted;
- 7) That the provisional HRA Capital Programme outturn of a positive net variance of £5.485m, against the proposed revised budget of £33.721m (Appendix 7) before the net reprogramming of £5.485m to future years, be noted;
- 8) That the Reserves position as at 31 March 2025, as set out in Section 14 of the report and Appendix 8, be noted;
- 9) That the deficit balance on the Dedicated Schools Grant of £24.904m, an increase of £15.499m, be noted;
- 10) That performance against the Corporate Plan success measures, as set out in Section 16 of the report and Appendices 9 and 10, be noted;
- 11) That the General Fund Revenue outturn balance of £9.305m be funded from the Demographic & Cost Led Pressures Reserve and the Financial Resilience Reserve, as set out in Appendix 8, be approved;
- 12) That the Council provides £6.393m of additional funding support to Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) over and above the 2024/25 contract sum in respect of their 2024/25 outturn position, be approved;
- 13) That the amendments to the General Fund Capital Programme, as set out in Section 11 of the report and Appendix 4, resulting in a revised Capital Programme budget of £69.637m for 2024/25 (before the reprogramming of £13.137m into future years), be approved;
- 14) That the amendments to the HRA Capital Programme, as set out in Section 13 of the report and Appendix 7, resulting in a revised HRA Capital Programme budget of £33.721m for 2024/25 (before the net reprogramming of £5.485m into future years), be approved;
- 15) That the write-off of debts be approved, as set out in Section 8 and Appendix 11 of the report, relating to:

- a) Non-Domestic Rates – £790,992.78;**
- b) Housing Benefit Overpayments – £21,619.45;**
- c) Sundry Debt – £125,036.77.**

**17. READING HAMPSHIRE PROPERTY PARTNERSHIP LTD - COMPANY CLOSURE**

The Committee considered a report outlining the proposal to formally close Reading Hampshire Property Partnership Ltd (RHPP), a joint venture between Reading Borough Council and Hampshire County Council established in 2014 to deliver professional property services.

The report explained that Hampshire County Council had served notice to terminate the Service Contract, citing an inability to continue supplying the necessary capacity to Reading Borough Council. As a result, the Council had sought alternative suppliers to meet its property service needs. All outstanding projects and contractual obligations were being completed, and the closure process was expected to commence following the approval of final accounts and a Board resolution.

The Committee noted that RHPP had successfully delivered a range of capital projects, including education infrastructure, decarbonisation programmes, and building improvement works. The closure of the Company would be managed in accordance with legal requirements, including the Companies Act 2006 and the Company's Articles of Association.

**Resolved –**

- (1) That Reading Hampshire Property Partnership Ltd is no longer required to meet the Council's property service needs, be noted;**
- (2) That the Committee, acting as 49% shareholder of Reading Hampshire Property Partnership Ltd, approves the closure of the Company following completion of all outstanding projects and contractual obligations;**
- (3) That the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to act as the shareholder representative with full authority to approve the Board resolution for the formal closure of Reading Hampshire Property Partnership Ltd and to deal with all miscellaneous and consequential matters;**
- (4) That the closure process will commence following the Board resolution and completion of final accounts, with formal dissolution expected in summer 2025, be noted.**

**18. BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR CHILDREN LTD - WAIVER FOR ARTICLES**

The Committee considered a report seeking approval for a waiver of certain provisions in the Articles of Association of Brighter Futures for Children Ltd (BFFC), in anticipation of the company's closure following the end of the service contract on 30 September 2025.

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The report noted that the Council, as the sole member of BFFC, had resolved on 28 January 2025 to bring Children's Services back in-house. The service contract with BFFC would therefore end at 23:59 on 30 September 2025, with services transferring to the Council from 1 October 2025. The Independent Non-Executive Directors and Chair were expected to retire on or before this date, leaving only two Directors: the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Council-nominated Director of Finance.

To enable the company to continue operating for the limited purpose of finalising accounts and overseeing closure, the report recommended that the Council waive certain requirements of the Articles of Association, including those relating to Board composition and quorum.

### **Resolved –**

- (1) That the Brighter Futures for Children Ltd service contract will end on 30 September 2025, with Children's Services transferring to the Council from 1 October 2025 be noted.**
- (2) That, as of 1 October 2025 and until the Company closes or a further decision is made by Policy Committee, the Council, acting as the sole member of Brighter Futures for Children Ltd, waives the following requirements of the Articles of Association:**
  - 2.1 the requirement to appoint Independent Non-Executive Directors and a Non-Executive Board Chair;**
  - 2.2 the minimum number of Directors, and the minimum numbers of Directors in each category;**
  - 2.3 the quorum for a Directors' meeting, which may be reduced from three to two;**
  - 2.4 the requirement for an Independent Non-Executive Director or a Non-Executive Chair to always be present at Board meetings;**
  - 2.5 the requirement for the meeting Chair to be either the Non-Executive Board Chair or a nominated Independent Non-Executive Director (Chair Nominee);**
- (3) That the Executive Director of Resources, be authorised to act on behalf of Policy Committee (as the representative of the sole member of the Company) from 1 October 2025 and deal with all company closure matters which are the responsibility of the members of the Company, in particular, to agree to the closure of the Company following the signing of the final accounts;**
- (4) That the Executive Director of Resources, be authorised to act on behalf of Policy Committee (as representative of the sole member of the Company) from 1 October 2025 in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Lead Councillors for Children's Services and Education, to deal with any other miscellaneous matters, including Reserved Matters, which arise whether about the closure of the Company or otherwise.**

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### **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. DIGITAL AND IT NEXT GENERATION OPERATING MODEL PROCUREMENT**

The Committee received a report setting out a programme to reprocure core ICT services.

The report provided information on the proposal, objectives and options for consideration.

#### **Resolved –**

- (1) That the initiation of the programme to reprocure core ICT services as existing services come to an end between December 2025 and August 2026 be noted.**
- (2) That the Executive Director Resources, in consultation with the Assistant Director Digital &IT, Director of Finance, Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services, and the Lead Councillor for Corporate Services & Resources, be authorised to award Digital and IT managed services contract at the end of the tender process to the winning bidders having followed compliant procurement processes.**
- (3) That the Executive Director Resources be authorised to extend existing contracts via short term direct award in order to mitigate the risk of business continuity.**

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.34 pm)

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