

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE
9 JULY 2025

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

Apologies: Councillor Ballsdon, Hacker, Nikulina and Stevens

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of 11 March 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

2. DELEGATED DECISIONS

Resolved - That the outstanding delegated decisions be noted.

3. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meeting were submitted:

Community Safety Partnership – 20 February 2025.

Resolved - That the Minutes be received.

4. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
Jonathan Moore	Litter in the Kensington Park Area	Cllr Rowland
Richard Wong	Environmental Enforcement Partnership	Cllr Rowland
Cllr Cresswell	Footpath 15 linking Southcote Lock to Cottage Lane	Cllr Rowland

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

5. GLL ANNUAL REPORT JANUARY 2024 - DECEMBER 2024

Further to Minute 21 of the meeting held on 21 February 2024, the Committee considered a report providing an update on the performance and delivery of Leisure Services and development of new facilities by Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL). Craig Woodward and Stephanie Smith of GLL attended the meeting and gave a presentation on the annual report. The report set out the following priorities for 2025:

- Increase physical activity, reduce obesity and widen participation in the local population;
- Educate participants on healthy eating habits and sustainable weight management;
- Foster a sense of community through group activities and social support;
- Enhance mental well-being by providing a positive outlet for stress and anxiety;

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- Financial sustainability.

The report explained that the Council's £40m investment programme in leisure provision had included further significant works to the leisure centres this year. Structural repairs to the pool tank and the upgrade of the swimming pool and associated changing areas at South Reading Leisure Centre had been completed. The new swimming pool, diving pool and splash pad at Rivermead Leisure Centre had been completed and since reopening to the public in June 2024 the Leisure Centres had attracted over one million visitors. The Council had also successfully applied to the Swimming Pool Support Fund for a capital grant to help improve energy efficiency at Meadway Sports Centre and had been awarded £29,000 to cover the cost of replacing the swimming pool hall windows and pool cover in February 2025. The Artificial Turf Pitch at Rivermead had been refurbished in August 2024 and a significant increase in use had been observed. Formal comparison of user numbers would be made at the end of the winter season. The Stadium track lights and outdoor sport court lights at Palmer Park Leisure Centre and Stadium had been replaced in October 2024.

GLL was required to obtain Quest accreditation for quality assurance and continuous improvement and maintain it throughout the contract period, with 'Good' being the quality management target. Palmer Park Sports Stadium and Rivermead Leisure Centre had been audited by Quest this year and had received scores of "Excellent" and 'Very Good,' respectively. South Reading Leisure Centre and Meadway Sports Centres were due to be audited in Summer/Autumn 2025 and were aiming for 'Good'.

Use of the centres continued to grow as new facilities opened, and service improvements were made. GLL continued to broaden the range of services being provided including:

- the Healthwise Programme to increase participation by underrepresented groups and those with specific health conditions;
- developing partnerships locally with schools and other community organisations to increase participation in physical activity beyond the boundary of the leisure centres;
- improving the quality of customer service;
- improving data collection and analysis to measure the impact of the services provided and to engage and increase participation by underrepresented groups, reflecting the demographics of Reading.

The Committee discussed the presentation and took the opportunity to ask further questions of GLL.

AGREED:

- (1) That the report and the presentation by GLL in respect of the operation of the leisure contract be noted;**
- (2) That the following be noted:**
 - (a) The opening of the new swimming pools at Rivermead Leisure Centre in June 2024;**

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- (b) The successful refurbishment of changing rooms, pool tank, reception area plus relocation of Reading Football Club Community Trust to South Reading Leisure Centre;
- (c) That the new and improved leisure facilities welcomed over 1,000,000 visitors in 2024;

(3) That the priorities for 2025-26 as set out in the report be endorsed.

6. RBC LANDLORD SERVICES PERFORMANCE REPORT - YEAR END UPDATE 2024-25

The Committee received an update on the Housing Landlord Service performance and key achievements during the 2025-25 financial year. The report provided assurance that Reading's Housing Landlord Services was delivering the strategic objective of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 to deliver improved outcomes for current and future tenants of social housing against the following five consumer standards:

- Neighbourhood and Community Standard
- Safety and Quality Standard
- Tenancy Standard
- Transparency, Influence and Accountability (including Tenant Satisfaction Measures)
- Consumer standards code of practice

The report also set out details of key achievements during 2023-24, tenant complaints, the tenant satisfaction survey and tenant satisfaction measures, and the Service Improvement Plan.

The Committee noted that following the outcome of the Council's Regulator of Social Housing Inspection published in April 2025 the service was updating its existing improvement plan entitled 'Building Communities, Empowering Lives Improvement Plan' to fully address the findings of the inspection process and agree priority areas for rapid improvement with the Regulator. The service was meeting with the Regulator of Social Housing throughout June and July to finalise the priorities, agree milestones and realistic timescales to ensure sustainable improvements are made. Thereafter the service would engage in monthly meetings with the Regulator to monitor progress and report to the Committee on an ongoing basis.

The Committee also noted that it would be helpful for a cross-party working group to be set up that would allow all Committee members to understand the issues faced by the service and the actions being taken to address those issues.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Year End position for the Housing Landlord Service Performance for 2024-25 be noted;
- (2) That the Chair of the Committee and the Executive Director of Communities and Adult Social Care investigate the feasibility of setting up a cross-party working group to understand the issues facing the Housing Landlord Service and the actions being taken to resolve those issues.

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7. RBC TENANCY AGREEMENT

The Committee considered a report that set out proposed changes to the Council's current tenancy agreement, which had last been updated in 2016 and was due for renewal in light of legal changes, sector-wide learning and best practice gathered from other Local Authorities.

The report explained that the Council had taken a collaborative approach with tenants, to ensure that all key aspects of the Landlord functions were appropriately covered in the Agreement with all aspects in one place for the ease of Tenants. The proposed changes aimed to better protect tenants and reflected modern expectations and responsibilities, particularly in areas such as Damp and Mould, tenancy fraud and gang-related activity. The majority of the new requirements and responsibilities would fall on the Council as a Landlord, rather than the tenants themselves.

The following documents were attached to the report:

Appendix 1: Summary of changes;
Appendix 2: Preliminary Notice of Variation;
Appendix 3: New Tenancy Agreement.

Resolved: **That the Tenancy Agreement attached at Appendix 3 to the report be approved for implementation with tenants on 15 September 2025.**

8. TENANT ACCESSIBILITY POLICY 2025

The Committee received a report requesting approval for the implementation of a Council-wide Tenant Accessibility Policy in response to the new Consumer Standards introduced by the Regulator for Social Housing set out in the Transparency, Influence & Accountability Standard. The Tenant Accessibility Policy was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the Tenant Accessibility Policy aimed to ensure that tenants had equal access to the Council's services and that their diverse needs were addressed. The Policy was designed to ensure that all tenants, regardless of their background, abilities, or personal circumstances, had equal and meaningful access to the Council's Housing and Landlord services, recognised the diversity of the community and affirmed the Council's commitment to inclusivity by actively identifying and addressing barriers that might prevent individuals from engaging with services. The report noted that accessibility was not limited to physical access, but encompassed communication, digital inclusion, cultural sensitivity, and the adaptability of services to meet a wide range of needs. The Policy aimed to create an environment where every tenant felt seen, heard, and supported by providing information in multiple formats and languages, offering support for tenants with disabilities and designing services that were intuitive and user-friendly.

Resolved:

(1) That the Tenant Accessibility Policy 2025 be approved for implementation across the Council as outlined in Appendix 1;

(2) That the ambition to work with external partners and contractors, including the commissioned PFI, in supporting the Council's tenants to adopt the principles of the Policy be endorsed.

9. PROPOSAL TO IMPLEMENT A BOROUGH-WIDE PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER

The Committee considered a report setting out the case to introduce a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in Reading, the lessons learnt from the previous PSPO that had been introduced in 2018 and the statutory requirements of the process to implement a PSPO, including conducting a public consultation. Colin Hudson, Thames Valley Police, attended the meeting alongside officers to present the report.

The report explained that Reading's last PSPO, which had been introduced in 2018, had lapsed in 2021 due to limited enforcement of the Order and inconsistent recording of its use and of incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) relating to the Order. Feedback from Partners had determined, some of the conditions were seen as being too broad and too subjective, for example, use of the term 'aggressive begging'. As well as limited enforcement, the lack of a formal monitoring mechanism and means to record its use, had also meant that where the PSPO was being used, there was no data to evidence its use and to support considering renewing some of the conditions and as a result, the Order had come to an end.

The report further explained that ASB in the public realm continued to be an issue. Over the last 12 months, issues had repeatedly been raised around on-street begging, street drinking and the anti-social use of e-scooters and e-bikes and it had been suggested by Officers from Thames Valley Police that a PSPO could be an additional tool to support the efforts to deal with these issues. Alongside this, the Council's Public Protection Service has also indicated that using a PSPO for dealing with Dog Control and Dog Fouling, as previously used in the last PSPO, would provide the Animal Warden with the means to take action against individuals when carrying out proactive work in the community.

The report proposed that there be one PSPO that would cover the whole Borough. It had been noted that when targeted action had been taken to address begging and street drinking in the town centre, there has been evidence that the issues had been displaced into other neighbourhoods, further impacting issues that already existed. The anti-social use of e-scooters and e-bikes were boroughwide issues, and dog control and dog fouling impacted parks and open spaces across the town. It was proposed that this Order would be for the maximum period of three years, although this could be varied or extended, following public consultation, during the time the Order was in place.

The Committee discussed the proposal and expressed concern regarding the lack of clarity around the police powers in respect of legal and illegal e-bikes, and the circumstances in which they might be used. There was a corresponding lack of clarity around the definitions of anti-social behaviour around e-bikes and e-scooters.

Resolved:

(1) That the proposal for a Public Spaces Protection Order in Reading be noted;

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- (2) That a public consultation be undertaken on the proposal to implement a Public Spaces Protection Order in Reading;**
- (3) That officers, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee, the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety and Thames Valley Police, be authorised to amend the consultation documents to provide further clarity around definitions of and police powers regarding e-bikes and anti-social behaviour before the consultation began;**
- (4) That following the consultation a report be brought back to the Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee on 12 November 2025, detailing consultation feedback with recommendations on implementing any new restrictions or amendments.**

10. ANNUAL REPORT (EXECUTIVE SUMMARY) - READING COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

The Committee received a report providing an overview of the work of Reading's Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to address the priorities identified in Reading's Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy 2023-2026. The report explained that this was the first update that had been produced by the CSP, and it covered the considerable work that had been undertaken over the last two years to tackle the CSP's Strategic Priorities. There would be annual reports to the Committee going forward. The Reading Community Safety Partnership Performance Framework was attached to the report at Appendix 1. The report set out several key highlights, including:

- An increase in the number of residents who told us they felt safe,
- Expanded provision and service offers to the public
- Increased involvement of the public, including children, in local meetings and problem solving
- High impact community events linked to crime reduction.

The report explained that over the last five years there had been a 10.82% increase in crime. However, crime had started to fall steadily in 2022 and there had been a reduction in overall crime – down 1.58% in 2023, and 6.05% in 2024. Reading had performed better than its statistical neighbours, ranking the 4th lowest rate of offences out of 14 comparable Community Safety Partnerships.

The report also explained that it was important to understand how residents felt about crime and safety. The CSP had relied on regular Community Safety Surveys, which allowed the CSP to better understand public perceptions of crime and safety, which could then help local partnership organisations to deliver better services to residents. The 2024 survey had been completed by 957 residents (up from 606 in 2023) and when asked 'Do you think Reading is a safe place?' 50.1% of respondents felt safe in Reading in 2024, compared to 44.8% in 2023, a 5.2% improvement over 12 months. However, when asked if crime has increased in their neighbourhood 50.0% of residents reported an increase in 2024, compared to 46.53% of residents in 2023. This was a 3.47% increase, which highlighted that feelings of safety do not necessarily align with perceptions or experience of crime. Similarly, resident's perceptions of anti-social behaviour in the last 12 months had increased by 4.27% from 53.65% in 2023 to 57.9% in 2024.

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The report set out the activities that had been undertaken against the CSP's priorities between April 2023 and March 2025:

- Reducing crime in the top crime-generating neighbourhoods
- Improving the way the Community Safety Partnership worked with communities to tackle anti-social behaviour and hate crime.
- Reducing community-based drug related activity
- Reducing knife violence, including the carrying of blades and their use in crime.
- Tackling organised crime gangs transporting illegal drugs across Reading's borders, also known as 'county lines' offending
- Improving safety for women in public places and reducing sexually focused crimes and anti-social behaviour
- Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation

The report also detailed those activities for 2025/26 which were scheduled or already underway and were centred on work with children and young people, training on Hate Crime, support for victim-survivors of domestic abuse and vulnerable people, continuing work with residents and work to undertake assessments leading to the new strategies for 2026-2029.

Resolved -

- (1) **That the update on the activities and impact of the Reading Community Safety Partnership (April 2023 to March 2025) be noted;**
- (2) **That the performance of the Reading Community Safety Partnership in reducing crime (April 2023 and March 2025) be noted.**

11. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND HATE INCIDENT POLICY

The Committee received a report which explained that further to the introduction of new Consumer Standards relating to Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and Hate, by the Regulator for Social Housing in 2024, the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy had been reviewed and updated. The updated Policy was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the Policy had retained its focus on providing a clear statement on the Council's approach to dealing with ASB and Hate reported by residents and how it would work with residents and partner agencies to deal with incidents. Whilst the amendments were in the main minor, they strengthened the Council's victim-centred approach to dealing with ASB and Hate incidents and set out a service learning and improvement model which would provide a more robust approach to making sure ASB and Hate was being responded to in line with the associated procedures and leading to an increase in positive outcomes for victims and affected communities.

Resolved: That the updated Anti-Social Behaviour and Hate Policy attached at Appendix 1 to the report be noted.

12. PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY 2021-2036 PROGRESS UPDATE

The Committee considered a report giving an update on the implementation of the Council's Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS), which had been approved by Committee on 10 November 2021 (Minute 26 refers), and which identified expected changes to meet demand for certain pitch-based sports. The Council was committed to endeavour to

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provide sufficient sports pitches, subject to available funding, to accommodate the predicted demand up to 2036 for Football, Cricket, Rugby, Hockey, Lacrosse, Gaelic Football and Australian Rules Football.

The report explained that football was by far the sport played by the greatest number of participants, with circa 284 teams based in Reading, and that football played by female players continued to see the largest growth. Demand for football pitches fluctuated from year to year and small changes were being proposed to the format of youth football. The supply of pitches had been tailored to meet the demand that was being experienced and was expected in the forthcoming season. Space for pitches was retained where current demand was less than anticipated in the longer term. Changes made and progress made in delivering the strategy are identified in Appendix 1 to the report.

The report confirmed that implementation of the Playing Pitch Strategy was being delivered as anticipated, and highlighted the achievements, progress to date and future plans for football, cricket, rugby union, hockey, artificial pitches and provision for Gaelic Football, Australian Rules Football and Lacrosse.

Resolved:

- (1) That the ongoing implementation of the Playing Pitch Strategy leading to year-on-year improvements in provision including converting some adult football pitches to junior pitches at Cintra Park be noted;**
- (2) That the demand for cricket pitches be revisited with the Berkshire Cricket Foundation as squares were reopened over the next three years as demand could change as more local facilities became available;**
- (3) That sports other than cricket and football continue to be accommodated in existing provision in and around Reading.**

(The meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.37 pm).