

POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 13 APRIL 2026

Present: Councillor Terry (Chair);

Councillors Leng (Vice-Chair), Barnett-Ward, Eden, Emberson, Ennis, Gittings, Griffith, Rowland, R Singh, Thompson, White and Yeo

68. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Emberson declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 74.

69. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2026 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

70. PUBLIC PETITIONS AND QUESTIONS

There were no petitions submitted.

A question on the following matter was submitted by a member of the public:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Tony Page	Proposal for Naming Sir John Madejski Way	Cllr Ennis

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

71. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Questions on the following matters were submitted by Councillors:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
1.	Cllr R Singh	Homelessness Strategy	Cllr Yeo
2.	Cllr R Singh	Rough Sleeping	Cllr Yeo
3.	Cllr R Singh	Thames Valley School Satellite Provision Site	Cllr Eden
4.	Cllr Thompson	Homes for Reading	Cllr Terry

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

72. THE HEXAGON

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The Committee considered a report which set out the details of funding applied to the Arts Council England's (ACE) Creative Foundations Fund for £2,068,000 of grant funding, with match funding of £230,500 being provided by the Council (consisting of: £109,000 in-kind contribution, £71,500 fundraising and £50,000 capital funding). The funding would be for improvements to the Hexagon Theatre seating, drainage, fire stopping and fire door remedial works.

If successful the Director of Culture, Leisure and Skills would accept the grant offer and, the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Director of Legal and Governance and the Director of Finance would progress the procurement and enter into the necessary contracts to carry out the works.

In the event of the Arts Council England (ACE) bid being unsuccessful, a capital supplementary budget of £564,000 was requested to replace the stall and arena seating in the Hexagon Theatre's main auditorium and for the costs of this investment to be met through revenue savings of £18,800 per year. The drainage, fire stopping and fire door remedial work would remain unfunded and either required funding through existing budgets or required a Capital Bid submitted via the usual budget setting process.

Resolved –

- (1) That if the Arts Council England bid was successful for £2,068,000 of grant funding with match funding of £230,500, the grants spend be approved and the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Director of Legal & Democratic Services and the Director of Finance be authorised to enter into all necessary contracts to deliver the outputs of the bid;**
- (2) That if the Arts Council England grant was unsuccessful, that spend for £564,000 be approved to replace the arena and stall seating at the Hexagon and the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Director of Legal & Democratic Services and the Director of Finance be authorised to enter into all necessary contracts to supply and install new arena and stall seating in the Hexagon main auditorium.**

73.

ARMED FORCES COVENANT

The Committee considered a report that set out options around the further development of the Armed Forces Covenant, principally its re-signing, which was currently being encouraged by Ministry of Defence (MoD) following the updating of the original covenant in 2018. Alongside there was also a proposal to apply for the Employer Recognition Scheme silver award as the Council was a key local employer, already met most of the criteria and for which re-signing was a requirement.

Following a suggestion officers would investigate hosting a Reserve recruiting event in the new library.

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Resolved –

- (1) That the Armed Forces Covenant, with associated pledges be re-signed;
- (2) That an application for the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme silver award, be approved.

74. HOUSING STANDARDS ENFORCEMENT POLICIES

The Committee considered a report on an updated set of policies to align with new legislative framework set by the Government. The updated policies were attached the report and included:

- Appendix 1 - Housing Standards Enforcement Policy
- Appendix 2 - Housing Standards Civil Penalty Procedure
- Appendix 3 - Statement of Principles for a penalty under Part 4 of The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015
- Appendix 4 - Statement of Principles for a penalty for a breach of minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES) with respect to domestic privately rented property
- Appendix 5 - Relevant Lettings Agency Legislation Civil Penalty Procedure

The report explained that the Council as Local Housing Authority and Weights and Measures Authority had a range of enforcement powers relating to housing standards and consumer redress, including in relation to the private rented sector. Enforcement powers included powers to require work, prohibit use and the issue of financial penalties for breaches of legislation.

The Renters' Rights Act 2025 introduced a significantly expanded civil penalty framework and placed new duties on the Council to enforce a broader range of landlord obligations. The Government was also introducing a range of updates to statutory guidance relating to some of the Council's existing enforcement powers. To meet these requirements, the Council had to ensure its relevant policies were fully aligned with the new legislative framework. The substantial changes would be made from 1 May 2026 and updating the Council's policies was essential to ensure that the statutory obligations could be met.

The report noted that the policies were intended to promote greater consistency, transparency and robustness in local authority enforcement approaches, while allowing for appropriate local discretion. Aligning the Council's policies with the nationally recognised framework supported a consistent and defensible approach to enforcement, reduced the risk of unfavourable outcomes to legal challenge and strengthened the Council's ability to meet its statutory duties under the Renters' Rights Act.

Following a question regarding awareness of the policies, it was noted that landlords had been contacted, the website had been updated, there had been a Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government campaign and officers were working on further ways to publicise the scheme for residents and staff. It was difficult to know the resourcing needed at this early stage, however, officers were receiving training to support on any future capacity needed and this would be monitored.

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Resolved –

- (1) That the Housing Standards Enforcement Policy be adopted;
- (2) That the Private Rented Sector Civil Penalty Procedure be adopted;
- (3) That the Statement of Principles for a penalty under Part 4 of The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 be adopted;
- (4) That the Statement of Principles for a penalty for a breach of minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES) with respect to domestic privately rented property be approved;
- (5) That the Relevant Lettings Agency Legislation Civil Penalty Procedure be approved;
- (6) That it be noted that stakeholder consultation would take place on the proposals;
- (7) That the Director of Planning Transport and Public Protection, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing and Director of Legal & Democratic Services be authorised, to make future minor amendments to the policies where necessary to reflect changes in the law or to correct inaccuracies.

75. BLOCK PLANNED MAINTENANCE - 2026 - 2034

The Committee considered a report seeking approval to procure and award a cyclical planned maintenance contract for housing stock block properties. This would cover external and communal works over an up to eight-year programme (2026–2034) managed by Housing Repairs and Property Services. The most advantageous route to market was a call off via a compliant framework enabling robust supplier field, a supported market engagement and expression of interest process. The intended contract was a Measured Term Contract designed for the construction industry, utilising the National Housing Federation Schedule of Rates which was industry standard and widely used in sourcing Housing Repairs and Property Services contracts managed by the service area.

The estimated annual value of the contract was £550,000 (£660,000 inc. VAT), funded from the Housing Revenue Account, based on the planned works budget annually approved at the Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee in each financial year.

It was noted that planned cyclical external maintenance was essential for local authorities to protect building condition, prevent health and safety risks, ensure legal compliance, reduce long-term costs, and support positive regulatory outcomes. It formed a cornerstone of good asset management and was central to meeting the Regulator for Social Housing's standards around safe, decent, well-maintained homes. In addition, it was a factor in meeting Decent Homes Standards and was referenced in the Housing Ombudsmen's

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Complaint Handling Code: failing to maintain external elements often leads to service failure and findings of maladministration.

The report explained that there were 284 Housing-owned blocks of flats and the contract would not include housing/bungalows outside of blocks, which was managed and maintained by the direct service organisation (DSO) in collaboration with the existing contract for voids and planned works which had been let in 2025. The contract would also not include three Wensley Road tower blocks, or four Granville Road blocks for which planning would commence for a standalone programme of works to meet the Building Safety Regulator requirements. Once all works had been completed according to the (BSR) requirements on these seven blocks, they would be incorporated back into the cyclical external maintenance programmes and treated as service area business as usual stock.

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 Director of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to:**
 - a) Procure and enter a contract with the successful tenderer(s) for the Block Maintenance contract to be provided. The contract to be for up to eight years (four-year initial term with extension provisions) with a total maximum value of £4.4m for the eight-year duration;**
 - b) 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.**

76. LAND AT MINSTER QUARTER CENTRAL

Further to Minute 44 of the Policy Committee meeting in January 2024, the Committee consider a report to proceed with the disposal of open space land by long leases to McLaren (Minster Quarter) Limited.

The report explained that in January 2024 the Committee agreed to select McLaren Living Ltd as preferred bidder for Minster Quarter Central and also authorised officers to proceed with the necessary statutory steps, under s.123(2A) of the Local Government Act 1972, to advertise the disposal of the open spaces for two consecutive weeks and consider any objections to the disposal of such open space land forming part of the site.

The statutory notices of the proposed disposal were published on 26 February 2026 and 5 March 2026 and a notice was also available to view on the Council's website. No objections were received.

The January 2024 Policy Committee report confirmed the Council's strategy for Minster Quarter Central and the requirement for land assembly, including disposal of certain open space areas forming part of the development site necessary to facilitate the redevelopment.

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This disposal aligned with the Minster Quarter Area Development Framework (SPD) and the Local Plan allocation (CR12e).

The report explained the two options available to the Council in relation to disposal of the parts of the open spaces comprised in the Minster Quarter Central site:

- (a) Option 1 – Proceed with the disposal. This enabled delivery of the proposed regeneration scheme approved by Policy Committee in January 2024.
- (b) Option 2 – Do not proceed. This option would frustrate the January 2024 decision and stall delivery of Minster Quarter Central regeneration.

Officers recommended with proceeding with Option 1 as the statutory requirements had been met with no objections and disposal was required to deliver the approved regeneration scheme.

Resolved –

- (1) That having considered the outcome of the statutory advertising and with no objections received, the disposal of the open space land by way of the grant of long leases to McLaren Living Ltd to facilitate delivery of the Minster Quarter Central regeneration scheme, consistent with the January 2024 Policy Committee decision be approved.**
- (2) That the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with Director of Legal and Democratic Services, Director of Finance, Director for Asset and Property Management and, Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council be authorised to finalise and complete all legal documentation required to give effect to the disposal.**

77. 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 78 below as it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in the Paragraph 3 specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to that Act.

78. LAND AT MINSTER QUARTER CENTRAL

The Committee received a confidential report and appendices on the disposal of open space land by long leases to McLaren (Minster Quarter) Limited. (Minute 76 above refers). The report and appendices contained exempt information and were therefore submitted separately from the main report which had been considered in the public session.

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.30 pm)