

COUNCIL MEETING: - 24 FEBRUARY 2009 - MINUTES OF FIRST SESSION

Present: Councillor Beard (Mayor);

Councillors Ayub, Ballsdon, Bayes, Benson, Byrne, Chowdhary, Cumpsty, Duveen, Edwards, Ennis, Epps, Gittings, Goodall, Hanley, C Harris, T Harris, Hartley, Hoskin, Hussain, Janjua, P Jones, Khan, Lovelock, Lockett, Maskell, Merriott, Orton, Page, Pugh, Ralph, Ruhemann, Rynn, Singleton-White, Skeats, Stainthorp, Stanway, Steele, Stevens, Swaine, Tickner, Townend, Warman, Watson and Willis.

Apologies: Councillor T Jones

The Mayor congratulated actress Kate Winslet, who had been born and had grown up in Reading, on her success in winning a number of awards in recent months, including an Academy Award for Best Actress at the 2009 Oscars Ceremony.

67. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2009 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

68. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 9

A Question on the following matter was submitted:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Answer</u>
1.	Kam Juttla	Local Business	Cllr Lovelock

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

69. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 10

Questions on the following matters were submitted:

	<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Answer</u>
1.	Cllr Willis	Armed Forces Day	Cllr Lovelock
2.	Cllr Pugh	Recycling	Cllr Gittings
3.	Cllr Pugh	Kennet & Avon Canal	Cllr Hoskin
4.	Cllr Pugh	Huntley & Palmers Steam Engine	Cllr Hoskin
5.	Cllr Singleton-White	Credit Crunch	Cllr Lovelock

COUNCIL MEETING: - 24 FEBRUARY 2009 - MINUTES OF FIRST SESSION

6.	Cllr Merriott	Building Schools for the Future programme	Cllr Hartley
7.	Cllr Ruhemann	Transport Innovation Fund bid	Cllr Page
8.	Cllr Hanley	Children's Participation in Sport and Exercise	Cllr Hoskin
9.	Cllr P Jones	Reading Credit Union	Cllr Tickner
10.	Cllr Singleton-White	Telecare Facilities	Cllr Orton
11.	Cllr Epps	Travel Expenses	Cllr Lovelock
12.	Cllr Rynn	St Lawrence Churchyard	Cllr Page
13.	Cllr T Harris	GP Surgery Opening Times	Cllr Orton
14.	Cllr T Harris	Provision for Retirement	Cllr Lovelock
15.	Cllr Willis	Staff Remuneration Packages	Cllr Lovelock
16.	Cllr Willis	Staff Bonuses	Cllr Lovelock

As there was insufficient time, pursuant to Standing Order 10(4), written replies to Questions 9-16 above would be provided in accordance with Standing Order 11(3).

(NB - The full text of all of the questions and replies was made available on the Reading Borough Council website).

70. BUDGET 2009/10

The Director of Resources and the Head of Finance submitted a report setting out the budget proposals of the Cabinet for the Council, covering the forecast capital and revenue expenditure and resources for 2009/10, together with the draft General Fund budget and Capital Programme for decision by Councillors. The Medium Term Financial Plan for the period 2010/11 to 2014/15 was also set out in Appendix 8.

A Council Tax increase of 4.24% was required to fund the overall Budget proposed for 2009/10.

Sections 6 and 7 of the report set out the advice of the Director of Resources and Head of Finance on the robustness of the Budget and adequacy of balances and reserves over 2009/10 and the medium term as required by the Local Government Act 2003. Cabinet had been advised that a minimum General Fund balance of £4m should be held over 2009/10 and the medium term, and its proposed budget was consistent with this advice.

The following motion was moved by Councillor Lovelock and seconded by Councillor Page and LOST:

COUNCIL MEETING: - 24 FEBRUARY 2009 - MINUTES OF FIRST SESSION

- “(1) That the General Fund budget as set out on pages B178 to B207 of the report by the Director of Resources and Head of Finance be agreed, and the minimum budget requirement be set at £120,548,000 for 2009/10;
- (2) That the Capital Programme as set out on pages B208 to B215 of the report by the Director of Resources and Head of Finance be agreed;
- (3) That, after considering the advice of the Director of Resources and Head of Finance on the adequacy of balances and reserves and the robustness of the Budget, as set out in Sections 6 and 7 of the report, the level of General Fund Balance to be maintained over the year to 31 March 2010 be set at £4m;
- (4) That the increase in fees and charges set out in Appendix 3 be agreed;
- (5) That the Budget Risk Management Statement in Appendix 5 be agreed.
- (6) That the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy set out in Appendix 7, the Prudential Indicators set out in Annex A of the Strategy and the review of MRP Policy Statement in Annex B be agreed;
- (7) That the Medium Term Financial Plan 2010/11 to 2014/15 set out in Appendix 8 be agreed.”

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Bayes and seconded by Councillor Epps and LOST:

“In Recommendation (1), delete all words after ‘That’ and insert the following words:

‘the General Fund budget as set out on pages B178 to B207 of the report by the Director of Resources and Head of Finance be agreed, subject to adjustments to the appropriate budget lines, in accordance with the measures in (a) and (b) below:

- (a) Budget Savings
 - (i) Members’ Allowances to be frozen at the 2008/09 level, at a saving of £12k;
 - (ii) Refreshments at Council meetings to be reduced by £8k;
 - (iii) The Marketing & PR budget to be reduced by £150k, to return it to its 2007 level;
 - (iv) Expenditure on agency staff, consultants, management and other running costs to be reduced by £550k, and, as part of budget monitoring procedures, Directorates to indicate to Cabinet how they will implement this;
 - (v) A review of Home-to-School Transport to be undertaken and services procured to achieve savings of £50k, partly in order to retain services introduced between Whitley and Prospect School;

COUNCIL MEETING: - 24 FEBRUARY 2009 - MINUTES OF FIRST SESSION

- (vi) Income from License Fees to be increased by £10k and charges amended to achieve this be reported back to Cabinet;
- (b) Budget Increases
 - (i) The scheme of charging for bulky waste removal to be reformed to reduce charges at a cost of £55k;
 - (ii) A 'Green Hit Squad' to be created to tackle illegal dumping and other environmental crime, at a cost of £100k, to be offset by requesting the University of Reading to part-fund one post;
 - (iii) A sum of £50k from the existing Marketing & PR budget to be invested into an integrated programme of Neighbourhood Policing as part of the Safer Reading communications programme;
 - (iv) A sum of £10k to be invested in 'speed gun' equipment for use in road safety programmes;

In Recommendation (4), delete all words after 'That' and insert the following words:

'subject to the amendments at (a) and (b) above, the increase in fees and charges set out in Appendix 3 be agreed;'

Insert a new Recommendation (5) as follows:

'That the minimum budget requirement be set at £120,387,000 for 2009/10 and Council notes that a Council Tax increase of 3.99% is required to fund the overall budget, and that the forecast General Fund Balance will be £4.4m, £0.4m above the Director of Resources' recommended minimum balance of £4m.'

Renumber existing Recommendations (5) to (7) as (6) to (8).

Insert a new Recommendation (9) as follows:

'That a cross-party Budget Review Group be established for the 2009-2010 financial year, as a Member:Officer working group, to identify and examine budget items carrying a significant medium-term risk in terms of both the Council's revenue budgets and forward Capital Programme and to make recommendations to Cabinet or full Council as appropriate in terms of the Council's budget framework and the adequacy of balances and reserves; and that the following Councillors be appointed to the Group on the ratio set out below:

Labour (2)
Conservative (2)
Lib.Dem (1)' "

No further amendments having been proposed, the Meeting was suspended at 8.46pm to enable further Councillor discussions to take place.

COUNCIL MEETING: - 24 FEBRUARY 2009 - MINUTES OF FIRST SESSION

The Meeting reconvened at 10.23pm. No further amendments having been moved, it was moved by Councillor Lovelock and seconded by Councillor Page:

Resolved:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 26, Standing Order 5(2) be suspended to enable further discussion on Items 70 and 71 to be deferred until after consideration of Items 72-75 below.

71. COUNCIL TAX 2009-10

See Resolution at Item 70 above.

72. APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES, SCRUTINY PANELS AND EDUCATION BODIES

Pursuant to Notice the following motion was moved by Councillor Cumpsty and seconded by Councillor Steele and CARRIED.

Resolved:

That the following amendments be made to the composition of Committees, Scrutiny Panels and Education bodies for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2008/09:

BODY	DELETE	ADD
Planning Applications Committee	Councillor Chowdhary	Councillor Lockett
Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel	Councillor Ballsdon	Councillor Chowdhary
Parenting Panel	Councillor Ballsdon	Councillor Chowdhary

73. GRANT AID

Pursuant to Notice a motion was moved by Councillor Benson and seconded by Councillor Bayes.

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Tickner and seconded by Councillor Hoskin and CARRIED:

"In the first paragraph, delete all words after 'exceeds' and insert the following words:

'£2.5m with additional help in kind worth £.5m in the coming Council year.'

Delete the third and fourth paragraphs.

In the final paragraph, delete all words after 'Corporate, Community and External Affairs Scrutiny Panel' and insert the following words:

COUNCIL MEETING: - 24 FEBRUARY 2009 - MINUTES OF FIRST SESSION

'to review the grants process and make recommendations, where necessary, to improve its transparency, effectiveness and impact in supporting the voluntary sector.' "

The amended substantive motion was then put to the vote and CARRIED as follows:

Resolved:

This Council:

- recognises the importance of the voluntary sector in Reading, and a generous and flexible provision of grant aid in achieving the strategic aims of the Council; believes that it is important to demonstrate value for money from grant aid, given that the sum involved exceeds £2.5m with additional help in kind worth £.5m in the coming Council year;
- notes that under the current system Lead Councillors decide whether or not individual grant applications should be supported at Cabinet and Cabinet makes the decision about whether or not to support an individual grant;
- asks the Council's Corporate, Community and External Affairs Scrutiny Panel to review the grants process and make recommendations, where necessary, to improve its transparency, effectiveness and impact in supporting the voluntary sector.

74. UNIVERSITY OF READING - PROPOSED CLOSURE OF SCHOOL OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Pursuant to Notice a motion was moved by Councillor Bayes and seconded by Councillor Epps.

The following amendment was moved by Councillor P Jones and seconded by Councillor Ennis and CARRIED:

"In the final paragraph, delete the words 'calls on the University of Reading to reconsider these proposals, and to' and insert the following words:

'Instructs the Chief Executive to write on behalf of the Council to the secretary to the University Council, Keith Hodgson, asking him to circulate this Council's deep concern over this proposal and the difficulties that the closure of the School will cause to Reading Borough Council and other Councils in Berkshire and beyond to all members of the University Council prior its meeting on March 20th. It further requests that the Senior Management Board of the University agree to delay the implementation of this decision so that the University can....'

At the end of the motion, add the following words:

- '- Notes that the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families established at the end of last year a Social Work Taskforce chaired by Moira Gibb (Chief Executive of Camden) to reform initial training; to improve the quality of professional practice; and to attract and retain the brightest and

COUNCIL MEETING: - 24 FEBRUARY 2009 - MINUTES OF FIRST SESSION

best people in social work. As a consequence Reading Council believes that it is premature to close a well-regarded social work department until that taskforce has reported.

- Calls on Council Officers to investigate the establishment of an annual programme to train at least 3 social workers to ensure retention of staff and to report back at the earliest opportunity.

This Council further instructs the Chief Executive to circulate the motion to other Berkshire Councils to seek their support in this Council's initiatives.' ”

The amended substantive motion was then put to the vote and CARRIED as follows:

Resolved:

This Council:

- recognises the value of social and health care workers in enhancing the welfare of children, vulnerable young people and adults.
- appreciates the importance of education and continuing training in bringing new workers into the care professions and in ensuring these workers are able to deliver improving, high quality services.
- notes with dismay the proposals by the University of Reading to close the School of Health and Social Care from September 2011.
- notes the key role this School plays in Berkshire, especially, given its high reputation for effective teaching.
- instructs the Chief Executive to write on behalf of the Council to the secretary to the University Council, Keith Hodgson, asking him to circulate this Council's deep concern over this proposal and the difficulties that the closure of the School will cause to Reading Borough Council and other Councils in Berkshire and beyond to all members of the University Council prior its meeting on March 20th. It further requests that the Senior Management Board of the University agree to delay the implementation of this decision so that the University can work with Reading Borough Council and other authorities in Berkshire to investigate ways of keeping the School operating for the benefit of local people.
- notes that the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families established at the end of last year a Social Work Taskforce chaired by Moira Gibb (Chief Executive of Camden) to reform initial training; to improve the quality of professional practice; and to attract and retain the brightest and best people in social work. As a consequence Reading Council believes that it is premature to close a well-regarded social work department until that taskforce has reported.
- calls on Council Officers to investigate the establishment of an annual programme to train at least 3 social workers to ensure retention of staff and to report back at the earliest opportunity.

COUNCIL MEETING: - 24 FEBRUARY 2009 - MINUTES OF FIRST SESSION

This Council further instructs the Chief Executive to circulate the motion to other Berkshire Councils to seek their support in this Council's initiatives.

75. COUNCIL TAX

Pursuant to Notice a motion was moved by Councillor Ralph and seconded by Councillor Benson.

The following amendment was moved by Councillor Lovelock and seconded by Councillor Page and CARRIED:

"Delete the second paragraph and insert the following:

'This Council will ensure that all help and advice, which might be available to those facing financial hardship, is fully investigated.

This Council requests the Head of Communications to draw up a Communication plan, in consultation with all advice agencies in Reading, to ensure that residents are aware of and are able to access that help and advice.' "

The amended substantive motion was then put to the vote and CARRIED as follows:

Resolved:

This Council recognises that any increase in Council Tax will present real difficulties to those reliant on savings impacted by low interest rates, those on low and fixed incomes and to some of our more vulnerable residents.

This Council will ensure that all help and advice, which might be available to those facing financial hardship, is fully investigated.

This Council requests the Head of Communications to draw up a Communication plan, in consultation with all advice agencies in Reading, to ensure that residents are aware of and are able to access that help and advice.

Items 70 and 71 above not having been resolved, it was moved by Councillor Lovelock and seconded by Council Page and CARRIED:

"That pursuant to Standing Order 26, Standing Order 4.4 be waived and the meeting be adjourned until 6.30pm on Wednesday 25 February 2009."

(The meeting was adjourned at 11.05pm).