

**Minutes of a meeting of the Leisure Services Committee held at the Oakwood Centre
on Tuesday 25 March 2025 at 8:00 pm**

Present: *Councillors D. Smith (Chairman); D. Bragg; Y. Edwards; D. Errawalla;
M. Firmager; K. Gilder; M. Kennedy; P. Singh*

Officers present: *K. Murray, Town Clerk; M. Filmore, Deputy Town Clerk;
E. Whitesmith, Leisure Services Manager*

Also present: *Councillor J. Taylor
Councillors R. Horskins; V. Lewis (Virtual Attendance)
3 members of the public (1 attended virtually)*

53. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Jewell and Lewis. Councillor Lewis attended the meeting virtually.

54. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received from Members.

55. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 JANUARY 2025**

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee meeting of 14 January 2025 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

56. **ACTIONS / FOLLOW UPS**

Members noted the update on the actions and follow ups from previous meetings, as provided in the agenda.

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A request was made to update the town council's website information which references, in an article from 2022, that the council is planning to install a hard standing area for the sports wall in Wheble Park.

57. **BUDGETARY CONTROL**

Members reviewed the Budgetary Control report.

Following clarification that the council's lease for the Reading Road allotment site is currently £9,673 per annum, it was noted that the allotment site is currently subsidised to the sum of around £11k, with this projected to be around £34k in 2025/26 due to changes to the apportioning of staff costs.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 8/25.

59. **WOODFORD PARK LEISURE CENTRE, SPORTS DEVELOPMENT AND ACTIVITIES**

The Leisure Services Manager presented Report No. LS 9/25.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 9/25.

60. **PARKS AND BUILDINGS**

The Town Clerk presented Report No. LS 9/25.

In relation to the duck feed station, the Town Clerk advised Members that the unit is environmentally friendly, being made of recycled materials and solar powered, and that it was free to install, with the council receiving 10% of all purchases. He confirmed the money received would be put into an earmarked reserve for improvements to parks and outside spaces.

With regards to the incidents of vandalism highlighted in the report, the Town Clerk advised Members these had been reported to Thames Valley Police, both as a formal report and through informal discussions with PCSOs. He also confirmed that damage repairs were already underway.

In relation to the lack of netting on the basketball hoop in Woodford Park, the Town Clerk advised Members that ROSPA guidelines with regarding the safety of netting suggest nets are not put on hoops as they can potentially trap fingers. However, it was confirmed that the Amenities Team were investigating potential other options which would be deemed appropriate.

Following a query regarding the misuse of swings in the Woodford Park destination play area, the Town Clerk confirmed there had been a reported incident where a child had been struck by a seat on the tornado swing unit when it was in use. He advised that the swing unit was safe and ROSPA approved, but that the position of the unit was being reviewed with Officers aware its current location might increase the chance of incidents like this. In the interim, seats have been removed from the unit.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 9/25.

61. **3G PITCH STEERING GROUP SUB COMMITTEE**

Members noted Report No. LS 11/25 of the 3G Pitch Steering Group Sub Committee meeting, which was held on 3 March 2025.

In relation to actions which had arisen from the meeting, the Leisure Services Manager advised he had been in contact with the Berks & Bucks FA representative who had determined they did not have a spare Respect banner to replace the damaged banner at the 3G pitch. He also confirmed that the council was already receiving a greater discount on equipment than the Berks & Bucks FA were receiving.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 11/25.
- ◆ To approve the 2025/26 3G Pitch Management & Development Plan.

Voting: For: 7 Against: 0 Abstain: 0 No Vote: 1

62. **YOUTH SERVICES**

62.1 Members considered the draft revision to the Council's Strategy for Youth Service.

RECOMMENDED

- ◆ That the Strategy & Resources Committee recommend to Full council the approval of the draft Strategy for Youth 2025-2030.

Voting: For: 7 Against: 0 Abstain: 0 No Vote: 1

- 62.2 In relation to the Town Council's invitation to providers to quote for the council's Youth Service provision for 2025/26, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed he had received two responses. One provider was not in a position to assist at this time, whilst a meeting was being arranged with another to discuss the opportunity.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To extend the end date of the Youth Support Service Task & Finish Working Group to 10 September 2025.

Voting: For: 7 Against: 0 Abstain: 0 No Vote: 1

63. **ALLOTMENTS**

Members considered Report No. LS 12/25 regarding the introduction of allotment deposit payments and a hen / rabbit keeping agreement.

The Town Clerk read out a statement provided in advance of the meeting by a member of the public who is an allotment tenant. In the statement, the tenant stated they felt it was unfair to implement plot and animal keeping deposits as this would disproportionately impact lower income individuals. They also indicated that the National Allotment Association was against the implementation of deposits. They suggested the council needed to reconsider and seek a fairer way to manage the issue unacceptable levels of waste being left on plots at the end of tenancies.

The Town Clerk clarified that, historically, deposit arrangements had been determined by Officers and had not been approved by council. In future, he explained that the intention was for deposit charges to be agreed alongside other charges by council. He confirmed that the intention of the introduction of the deposits was to address the issue of plots being left in poor condition at the end of tenancies and, in part, go towards the cost of clearing such plots, the frequency and cost of which was increasing yearly. Members noted the rental charges for the allotment site were relatively low compared to other local sites.

The Town Clerk also confirmed that Report No. LS 12/25 included the recommendation to introduce a hen and rabbit keeping agreement following the recognition that the Reading Road allotment site is deemed a statutory site, as confirmed recently by Reading Borough Council, and therefore tenants were permitted to keep hens and rabbits on the site in line with the Allotment Act 1950.

Councillor Kennedy proposed, seconded by Councillor Edwards, that the council rejects the concept of introducing deposits for allotment holders and refund those tenants who have been charged since this was introduced for new tenants in January 2025. Members discussed this proposal and the implementation of allotment deposits in general, with varying opinions expressed.

During the discussion, it was noted that the site had increased significantly over the last ten years, from just over 200 plots to around 380 plots, and that inspections had become more difficult. Members noted that the Allotment Tenants Committee undertake these inspections on the Council's behalf and that, after a reduction in capacity two years ago following the death of the previous committee chairman, inspections were now taking place regularly, resulting in an increased number of unworked plots being relinquished in the past year.

Councillor Kennedy restated his proposal and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To reject the proposal.

Voting: For: 2 Against: 4 Abstain: 0 No Vote: 2

The Chairman proposed, seconded by Councillor Gilder, and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To defer the decision on implementing allotment plot deposits until further consultation and feedback from the Tenants Committee has been sought, with a survey of existing tenants undertaken to seek views on alternative methods of resolving the issue of clearing excessive waste from plots, with the deposits which have already been taken held until a final decision is made on the matter.

Voting: For: 4 Against: 1 Abstain: 1 No Vote: 1

Members agreed it would be beneficial to arrange a site visit for all Members. It was also noted that no Councillors were appointed to the Tenants Committee, and it was suggested the Committee be contacted to ask if they would like any Councillors to be appointed. If agreed, it was noted this appointment would need to take place at Full Council.

On the matter of introducing a hen / rabbit keeping agreement, the Chairman proposed, seconded by Councillor Firmager, and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To defer the decision on approving a hen / rabbit keeping agreement to allow more time for Officers to contact other councils with hens and rabbits on their sites to understand the issues presented, and to consider the conditions which would need to be imposed to ensure the keeping of animals is appropriate.

Voting: For: 7 Against: 0 Abstain: 0 No Vote: 1

64. **COMMUNITY HALL AND LEISURE CENTRE DEPOSITS**

Members considered Report No. LS 13/25 regarding the charging of refundable deposits for the hiring of community hall and leisure centre spaces.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 13/25.

RECOMMENDED

- ◆ That the Strategy & Resources Committee approve the deposit rates in relation to the hire of Community Hall and Leisure Centre spaces, as set out in Report No. LS 13/15.

Voting: For: 6 Against: 0 Abstain: 0 No Vote: 2

65. **FRIENDS OF WOODFORD PARK UPDATE**

Members noted the update report from the Friends of Woodford Park, as provided in the agenda.

Members noted that the path to the north of Woodford Park remained an issue, and that the area was wetter than ever.

It was noted that the issue of parking would be reviewed alongside the Woodford Park Leisure Centre refurbishment project.

66. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

There were no future agenda items raised by Members.

67. **PUBLICITY AND WEBSITE**

There were no publicity and website items raised by Members.

The meeting closed at 9:27 pm
