

COUNCIL MEETING - 13 OCTOBER 2009

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

QUESTION NO. 1

Tony Warrell to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture and Sport:

Waterside Lifebuoys

Will the Council give thought to health and safety at Waterloo Meadow Children's Centre and Chestnut Walk and provide the necessary 'life buoys'?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Culture and Sport):

Riverside safety is extremely important to us and, when looking at health and safety at our watersides, we refer closely to Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) guidance. Coincidentally we are about to audit the waterways and re-conduct risk assessments along their length.

In respect of the two specific locations in your question:

Waterloo Meadows Children Centre Life Buoy Provision

For lifebuoys to be effective both the rescuer and the person being rescued need to be skilled enough to throw the ring close to the victim and able to grasp the ring respectively. The main emphasis of safety is based upon prevention and ease of getting out should you fall in. Life buoys only play a minor role in water safety.

The river banks near to the children centre slopes gently into the river and much of it is covered in thick vegetation. This makes it unlikely that the river could be entered by accident. In addition to this because the children's centre is used primarily by young children it is less likely that they would be able to grasp the life buoy. For these reasons we have not installed a life buoy at Waterloo Meadows.

Chestnut Walk Life Buoy Provision

The majority of people walking from Homebase towards the town centre use the path through the park set back from the river that is separated from the water by railings. From the other direction the tendency is for people to continue to walk along the wide tarmac path rather than down the steps to the river.

The towpath is used by those boaters that use the moorings, they represent a limited number of people who live around water and so are aware of the dangers. Many boats also carry poles or other equipment which can be used to rescue people. For these reasons Chestnut has not been identified as a priority to be provided with lifebuoys.

Additional Information

The following is an extract from the ROSPA website regarding the provision of life buoys.

What public rescue equipment should I use at my site and where should I place it?

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The effectiveness of public rescue equipment is dependent on a number of factors and circumstances. It must be part of a whole strategy for drowning prevention, and is not a solution in itself. For PRE to be useful the following must occur:

- the victim has to be seen
- they must be recognised as being in difficulty
- they must remain afloat until rescue arrives
- appropriate rescue equipment must be to hand, and in operational condition
- the rescuer must have the ability, judgement and skill to use the equipment, and to effect a rescue
- the weather conditions must be favourable
- the victim must be able to co-operate, i.e. grasp a rescue device

An assessment of the area and its users should provide the basis for the use of PRE at any given site.

At what intervals should I place life rings around a water hazard?

You should only decide to install public rescue equipment after you have conducted a risk assessment. Rescue equipment should play only a minor role in a water safety strategy, with greater emphasis on prevention. However once you have decided to install lifebuoys it should be:

- Clearly positioned and in colours of red or yellow
- At a maximum height of 1.7m above the ground
- Regularly inspected and replaced where necessary

Placing and spacing will depend on the identified risk, look for the places where people congregate or where people are likely to fall in. Generally spacing of equipment at 100 metres is acceptable under normal conditions, so that a potential rescuer is not more than 50 metres from the equipment.

The very regular theft of life rings means that often life ring stations are empty. When this occurs the site will be less safe than had no station been provided in the first place. A rescuer may leave a casualty to find no ring and on return have missed an opportunity to effect a reaching rescue or the casualty may have been swept into greater danger.

QUESTION NO. 2

A Lockey to ask the Lead Councillor for Planning and Transport:

Cycle Lanes

How many extra metres of cycle lanes (not shared with buses or taxis) have the Council constructed since May 1987?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Planning and Transport):

I thank Mr Lockey for his questions.

Reading Borough Council has increased the amount and availability of cycling facilities throughout the period of the previous and present two Local Transport Plans (2001-2011). We have consistently looked to improve and not remove facilities, through

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provision of mixed use (e.g. bus and cycle) as well as single use facilities. Between 2001 and 2006, stretches of cycle facilities were recorded in the Reading's first Local Transport Plan delivery reports as cycle lanes or cycle tracks, which together include on-carriageway, shared foot/cycle paths along roads or other paths elsewhere (e.g. through parks, towpaths, etc when they are specifically resurfaced for cycleways). These delivery reports, which include descriptions of schemes, are available on request.

Our current approved policy (Cycling Strategy 2008 updated from 2001) for cycle infrastructure provision is to accord priority to facilities along routes in the following order based on Department for Transport guidance:

1. Traffic reduction
2. Speed reduction
3. Junction treatment, hazard site treatment, traffic management
4. Redistribution of carriageway (bus lanes, widened nearside lanes, etc.)
5. Cycle lanes, segregated cycle tracks constructed by reallocation of road space, cycle tracks away from roads, and
6. Conversion of footways/footpaths to unsegregated, shared-use cycle tracks alongside the carriageway.

In terms of facilities constructed, there are no records of this available before 2001.

Our delivery reports for 2007 and 2008, also available on request, show that we have continued to progress our Cycling Strategy. Further cycle facilities have been added, but there was no requirement to summarise facilities in terms of length. All our facilities, which amount to many kilometres of paths, lanes, quiet roads, are detailed in the Cycling in Reading Route map and facilities guide. The map will be updated on a regular basis as new facilities are implemented.

QUESTION NO. 3

Question withdrawn at the meeting.

QUESTION NO. 4

Richard Royal to ask the Lead Councillor for Environment and Sustainability:

Public Requests to Streetcare

Can the Lead Councillor for Environment and Sustainability explain the process by which the Streetcare Team respond to public requests (for example to clean graffiti) via its online reporting mechanism and provide the average response time for such a request?

REPLY by Councillor Gittings (Lead Councillor for Environment and Sustainability):

The RBC Call Centre log all webforms between the hours of 10am and 4pm, and the Streetcare back office staff download these the following morning and issue them to the supervisors. If a webform comes in after 4pm it is not logged until the following morning, which means it could possibly be 24 hours before they are passed to the relevant supervisor.

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All notifications of graffiti that are of a racist or obscene nature are reported through to the supervisor immediately and then passed to operational staff for action. These are always attended to as a matter of urgency.

QUESTION NO. 5

Marian Livingston to ask the Leader of the Council:

Housing and Council Tax Benefit Changes

Could the Leader of the Council please outline the changes in Housing and Council Tax Benefit which are going to come into effect next month, and their implications both for families with children and for pensioners?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

There are two main changes that are going to take place on 2 November 2009.

- The main change is that Child Benefit will no longer be taken into account as an income in the calculation of Housing and Council Tax Benefit. Importantly, this change is not replicated in tax credits or other benefits so there is a real gain within the calculation that is not diluted by the effect of an increase from another benefit.
- If a person is not already receiving full HB/CTB, their benefit can be increased up to the following amounts, depending on the level of shortfall in their existing HB/CTB awards.

	<u>Increase in HB</u>	<u>Increase in CTB</u>
1 child	£13 p/w	£4 p/w
2 children	£21.58 p/w	£6.64 p/w
3 children	£30.16 p/w	£9.28 p/w
4 children	£38.74 p/w	£11.92 p/w
5 children	£47.32 p/w	£14.56 p/w
6 children	£55.90 p/w	£17.20 p/w

Those people already on benefit will automatically have their benefit recalculated.

An explanatory letter has been sent out this week prior to the change taking place. The benefit section is undertaking a take-up campaign to identify families not currently claiming who could benefit from this change.

- The other change taking place is the rise in the lower capital limit for pensioners who have savings from £6,000 to £10,000. This means that any pensioner over 60 will be allowed up to £10,000 in capital before their benefit is affected. The cut off point of £16,000 is not changed
- Any pensioner over 60 who has less than £10,000 will have no tariff income included in their calculation. Tariff income above £10,000 is £1.00 for every £500 up to the cut off of £16,000 when no benefit is payable.
- The maximum amount of tariff income that can be taken into account in the calculation will therefore reduce to £12.00 from £20.00 per week.

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Current HB/CTB cases where Pension Credits are not in payment will be recalculated automatically by the benefit team from 2 November 2009, any changes to Pension Credit cases will be notified to us by The Pension Service and recalculated.

QUESTION NO. 6

Matt Rodda to ask the Lead Councillor for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Major Works in Schools

Could you please provide a schedule of all publicly funded schools within Reading Borough (including community, voluntary and foundation schools and the John Madejski Academy) showing major works (new classrooms and the like) undertaken since Reading became a unitary authority, or now committed, and the approximate spend in each case?

REPLY by Councillor Hartley (Lead Councillor for Education and Lifelong Learning):

Enclosed is a spreadsheet detailing capital projects with a value over £25,000 for the publicly funded schools within Reading Borough Council since 1998. Where a project has spanned more than one year, the total amount spent is shown against one year, generally the year of completion. This has resulted in some years showing an increased spend whilst reducing the prior year's figure, in comparison to the Council's actual capital spend. The total money invested by Reading Borough Council since becoming a Unitary authority is over £74million.

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	improvements												
Kendrick School	Roof, ramps, boundary wall				178								
Kendrick School	Repalce art Room roof							35					
Kendrick School	Replace CDT Building						30						
Kendrick School	New Sixth form and Science lab												4500
Manor Primary	New Teaching Area		39										
Manor Primary	Window replacement							250					
Micklands Primary	Demolition HORSAs and new build		450										
Micklands Primary	New Modular unit						85						
Micklands Primary	External lighting, entry doors, completion new build					86							
Moorlands Primary	Telephone upgrade		54										
Moorlands Primary	External redecoration							55					
Moorlands Primary	Replacement windows							50					
New Christ Church CE Primary	Major Refurbishment			135									
New Christ Church CE Primary	Modular classroom											86	
New Town Primary	Ceiling insulation and emergency lighting					28							
New Town Primary	External decorations/refurbishment							68					
New Town Primary	New Roof								919				
Norcot Nursery	Replacement Building		208										
Norcot Nursery	Windows Replacement					35							
Norcot Nursery	Childrens Centre								65				
Norcot Nursery	New Early Years Building												950
Oxford Road Primary	Personal security system		25										
Oxford Road Primary	Roof repairs/redecorate lobby					44							
Oxford Road Primary	Windows Replacement								150	250			
Prospect College	DDA access work								177				
Prospect College	Modular unit					160							

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Prospect College	Expansion works				3000	3000							
Prospect College	New Voc Skills Centre											3500	
Ranikhet Primary	Electrical and improvement to contrasts			25									
Ranikhet Primary	New Flat Roof and replacement of windows, doors								328				
Ranikhet primary	Classroom Remodelling												95
Reading Girls	Doors, staircases and other improvements			58									
Reading Girls	Science block												
Reading Girls	Roofing, Cladding					250	150			40			
Reading Girls	Curtain walling, heating, rewiring and roof repairs										394		
Reading Girls	New Voc Skills Centre											5200	
Reading Girls	New BESD Unit												500
Reading School	Rollalong Classroom												150
Redlands Primary	Refurbishment of toilets								40				
Redlands Primary	Refurbishment of Equality Services Building											300	
Southcote Primary	Window Replacement										178		
St Anne's RC Primary	Additional Teaching space	73											
St Anne's RC Primary	Changing Room Facilities												305
St Johns CE Primary	New teaching area		98										
St Mary's & All Saints	New Classroom			72									
St Michaels Primary	Window replacement								30				
St Michaels Primary	Reburbishment - radiators, lighting				28								
Surestart Childrens Centres	Coley, Katesgrove and Caversham									270	756		2300
Thamesbridge	New build	2301											
Thameside Primary	New Roof [2 projects]									250			247

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The Avenue [new]	New SEN School											19000	
The Avenue [old]	Replacement windows		75										
The Avenue [old]	Science facilities								200				
The Hill Primary	New reception class, library						75						
The Holy Brook Special School	Windows		30										
The Holy Brook Special School	Single storey extensions						79		450				500
The Ridgeway Primary	Boiler Room wall and toilets			48									
The Ridgeway Primary	Completion of Boiler room project				62								
The Ridgeway Primary	Replacement windows, doors							83					
Upcroft Primary	Windows				60								
Upcroft Primary	Replacement fencing and other refurbishments							30					
Whitley Park Infants	New Heating system	56											
Whitley Park Infants	Demolition of Art block/minor remodelling								200				
Whitley Park Infants	Demolition of old dining hall/landscaping											125	
Whitley Park Junior	Replacement of windows/refurbishment							48					
Whitley Park Junior	New Dining Hall										735		
Wilson Primary	New Kitchen			50									
Wilson Primary	Secure playground, medical suite, emergency roof							90					
		2605	1187	4178	3957	4137	622	1547	1930	2742	7963	30023	13513

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QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER NO 10

QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor Merriott to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture and Sport:

Demand for Allotments

Could the lead councillor please outline to the council what action has been taken to meet the rising demand for allotments in Reading since 2005?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Culture and Sport):

Since 2005 there has been a significant rise in demand for allotments. The increase in allotment tenancies over the last 4 years from 2005 is as follows:

In August 2005 the Council let a total of 681 plots.

In August 2006 this grew by 14 % to a total of 774 plots.

In August 2007 this grew by a further 29 % to a total of 1001 plots.

In August 2008 this decreased by less than 1 % to a total of *997 plots.

*due to the closure of Cow lane.

In August 2009 this grew by 29 % to a total of 1288 plots.

This is a total increase in tenancies of 607 or 89 % over the 5 years.

Over the same period the increase in waiting list applications is as follows:

In August 2005 there were 248 people on the allotment waiting list.

In August 2006 this grew by 4 % to 259 people.

In August 2007 this grew by 53 % to 395 people.

In August 2008 this grew by 57 % to 620 people.

In August 2009 this grew by 9 % up to the end of August to 674 people.

There is a total increase in waiting list applications of 426 or 172%.

It should be noted that residents can be on the waiting list for a number of sites and can also be waiting as they seek to move from one site to another.

Actions taken to accommodate the rise in demand are:

1. Marginal areas on existing allotments sites have been cleared, rotovated and brought back into use to create 173 additional plots.
2. When plots fall vacant, if they are sufficiently large, they are split to accommodate additional allotment holders.
3. Follow-up of uncultivated or weedy plots has been tightened up.
4. Waiting lists are regularly reviewed.
5. Allotments policy is currently being revised, including a restriction on the number of plots an individual/household may have.
6. New sites for additional plots are currently being considered.

The rise in demand for allotments over the last few years, following many years of decline, has meant we now have many more allotments in use which is excellent news when one considers the health and environmental benefits. However, as a tightly

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bounded urban council we do face considerable challenges in meeting that rising demand although I hope council joins me in congratulating council staff in the action taken to increase the number of plots in use by 89% over 5 years

QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor Singleton-White to ask the Leader of the Council:

Tackling the Economic Downturn Summits

Can the Leader of the Council update me on initiatives and benefits arising from the three "summit" meetings regarding the downturn in the economy?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

An initial report to Cabinet on 1 December 2008 set out some of the practical ways in which councils and their partners could begin to support local people and following the 'Credit Crunch' summit in November 2008, a steering group was set up involving a range of partners from the public sector, the voluntary sector and businesses and a further three summits attended by a wide range of partners have been held including one today. The latest summit focused on the impact of the downturn on young people was held this afternoon.

It was agreed that a package of support should be developed around the themes of individuals, communities and businesses. This package aimed to provide a good framework to take forward further discussions, developing and providing services, making links across agencies and engaging others such as the banking institutions.

I would like to draw out some of the initiatives and actions taken as a result:

This has included the development of an apprenticeship scheme aimed at 16-18 year olds aiming to achieve 50 places this year with 13 already committed to by the Council and more in the pipeline.

A commitment by the Council to work towards paying small businesses within 20 days (rather than 30 days) which has now been extended to all businesses.

Special events for businesses run by Reading UK CIC including advice on accessing finance.

Specific additional funding has been directed towards the Credit Union, Citizens Advice Bureau and Welfare Rights Unit recognising the key roles of these organisations.

A one-off payment of £85,000 to support the Reading Credit Union's business plan was endorsed at Cabinet in February 2009. The Council also provides marketing and promotion support to RCU via the Communications team. This arrangement was made in the context of their successful People's Millions bid

The Reading CAB was awarded an additional £12,500 in 2009/10 and an SLA was offered on the following basis to increase service provision:

a) A new benefit drop in each Wednesday between 2pm and 3.30pm

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- b) Additional telephone advice each Wednesday between 4pm and 6.30pm
- c) Additional pre-booked appointments each Tuesday between 3pm and 5.30pm

In the first quarter of 2009/10 April to June, the CAB provided monitoring info reporting as follows"

Total clients advised in the extra hours	120
Initial Phone calls from clients	85
Appointments at outreach	16
Appointments in bureau	82

Meanwhile the WRU also received a similar level of funding and has been able to employ an extra member of staff for their reception. This has allowed them increase the front office triage available to 36 hours, and another 36 hours of phone help.

One of the less tangible benefits has been the development of much stronger partnership working in Reading. Through the steering group and the summits held, new relationships have been forged and changes have made to ways of working that will be sustained beyond the recession. In particular much closer working with Job Centre Plus and the local authority has resulted directly. The work in Reading was recently highlighted in a recent Audit Commission report on the work being done nationally, 'When it comes to the Crunch'.

For reference:

A range of measures to assess the impact of the local package of support has been identified and is set out in the table below:

Reading's measures of local package of support (since launch February 2009)

Measure	Result
People	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of referrals to the mortgage rescue plan 	34 applications 0 eligible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % Increase in benefit take up 	16% increase, Housing and Council Tax Benefit Caseload.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of school savers schemes established • Number of loans given out 	4 schools joined (further 8 potential) 24 loans (since June 2009)
Communities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average number monthly volunteers registered • Average number unemployed (Reading Voluntary Action) 	218 registered(monthly average) 57 unemployed (monthly average)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number joining 'Your Reading' Passport scheme 	Total Members 6% increase to 45,072 Concessionary 37% increase to 10,277
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of heat seeker 	536 installed or booked cavity wall or loft (Householders save at least 30% on their heating

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applications/take ups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of free of charge installations in priority households (where a member is on income related benefits or over 70 years of age). 	bill) 235 free of charge installs in 'priority' households
Businesses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Apprenticeship placements 	13 committed to RBC, with 50 to be established in total this year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of businesses paid within 20 days 	83% paid within 20 days
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers registered at Job Club • % finding employment 	21 people registered to attend the Executive Job Club, 20% have started work.

QUESTION NO. 3

Councillor Hanley to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture and Sport:

Use of Sports Facilities and Free Swimming

Can the Lead Councilor tell me how successful the Council has been in encouraging greater use of its sports facilities over the last few years, and does the Council have any specific information on the take up of free swimming for the over 60s and free swimming for under 16s during school holidays?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Culture and Sport):

I am pleased to be able to let Council know that the Reading Sport and Leisure centres of Central, Highdown, Meadway, Arthur Hill and Palmer Park recorded an overall increase in total usage of 6% in 2008/09 compared to the previous year.

This increase in use is mainly the result of the Council's investment programme in our centres and in fitness and gym facilities in particular such as at Palmer Park, Arthur Hill and the Meadway. This strategy is clearly bearing fruit in providing the improved fitness facilities local people want and increased custom and therefore income for our centres.

In addition to this Greenwich Leisure's Annual report to the Culture & Sport Scrutiny Panel in March of this year showed that Rivermead had an increase in total attendance numbers of 6% in 2008 (January to December) against the previous year.

Put together this equates to almost 57,500 additional visits to the sports centres.

The government initiative to provide free swimming for the over 60s was launched across the sports centres in April of this year. The scheme is funded by the government until April 2011. Figures for the first quarter show that when compared to last year, the number of additional over 60s swims has increased by approximately 70%.

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About three years ago the Council took the decision to offer free swimming during school holidays to anyone under 16 and holding a Your Reading Passport. This applied at all the sports centres except Rivermead. Since its launch there has been a steady increase in uptake. Figures for last year show that across the council operated centres there was an increase of over 27% when compared to the previous year.

At its last meeting on 28th September, Cabinet took the decision to extend the free swimming initiative to include 16s and under as well as the Over 60s. This followed an increase in the funding available from the government. Free swimming is now available to anyone aged 16 or under at AcademySport Leisure Centre, Arthur Hill, Central Pool, Highdown Sports Centre or Meadway Sports Centre during public swimming sessions.

QUESTION NO. 4

Councillor P Jones to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:

Use and Benefits of CLG Funding

Following the £1.6m from the Department for Communities and Local Government, can the Lead Councillor for Housing outline the programme in place and what benefits it will bring to RBC's tenants, the Reading economy and Reading young people?

REPLY by Councillor Edwards (Lead Councillor for Housing):

The £1.6million is improving around 1,000 homes, updating bathrooms, kitchens, central heating systems, and insulation and adapting homes for people with disabilities.

Works are well underway and due to be completed by April

- £270,000 is invested in wiring and electric checks
- £600,000 is being spent on improving and installing kitchens and bathrooms, providing an additional 230 bathrooms and 58 more kitchens taking the money spent on kitchens and bathrooms this year to more than £3million.
- An extra £240,000 is being invested in new central heating and boilers.
- £194,000 is being spent on safety work - checking asbestos and fire precaution work.
- Disabled people will see an additional £256,000 spent on adaptations to make it easier for them to live in their home
- An extra £40,000 is funding insulation schemes. I'm delighted to say that this insulation funding has been reinforced with extra funding of £61,000 we have won from Eon and from £75,000 new funding again from the Homes and Community Agency.

The benefit for Reading tenants is that key work has been brought forward and is being done now. Homes are warmer and safer, and more modern. The economy can only strengthen from the additional employment generated from approximately 23 new jobs,

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including electricians, plumbers, carpenters and builders. I'm particularly pleased that this work has opened up the chance to create new local apprenticeships, training that should lead to permanent future employment for these young people.

QUESTION NO. 5

Councillor Ayub to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:

Increase in Housing Participation

Can the Lead Councillor for Housing show how the increase in tenant participation from:

- RBC tenants;
- Private tenants; and
- Housing Association tenants;

has made an impact on housing and housing environs issues?

REPLY by Councillor Edwards (Lead Councillor for Housing):

Reading Borough Council launched its first Tenant Compact (agreement) in 1999, which set out how tenants could be involved in the decisions made concerning their homes and local estates. Regular reports on progress go the Chance For Change monitoring group each quarter and an annual report is submitted to Housing & Community Care Scrutiny Panel each year.

Reading has had a long history of tenant participation and the introduction of the Tenant Compact Framework has continued to strengthen the opportunities for tenants to get involved in the decision making process. Chance for Change is aimed primarily at RBC council tenants who have the right to say how their homes and estates are managed.

Although the agreement is between RBC and its tenants, the agreement also recognises that most of our traditional council estates are now made up of a mixture of tenures including homeowners, private tenants and other Registered social landlords. Opportunities for involvement at estate level recognise that these other stakeholders should have the opportunity to voice their views too. For example extensive consultation has recently been carried out on the Hexham road estate in order to identify issues of concern and develop an action plan to address these issues.

There are numerous examples of how tenant involvement has made an impact on housing and housing environ issues but a few highlights include:

- Tenant Improvement fund - this is a budget that is held specifically for tenants to identify small-scale improvements in their area. Applications for projects are submitted to a panel of tenants who, with technical assistance from Housing, consider each proposal and identify if it's suitable. 74 projects were submitted, considered and consulted on last year. This year applications have been granted for environmental improvements to communal spaces such as provision of water butts, tables and benches, communal garden improvements and provision of play equipment, security improvements such as gating off rear access, and fencing off

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cut throughs, installation of security lights and storage for mobility scooters, as well as improving information through provision of notice boards.

- Tenants are now regularly involved in the services in their local area through work with the Planned Maintenance Working Group. 'Granville Road Flooring' consultation in October identified options for local buildings. At the 'OAP Decorations' Focus Group in January, tenants gave their views on a variety of options for the service.
- Participation continues to provide enhanced Value for Money through tenants' oversight of a range of Service Level Agreements including OAP Grass and Hedge cutting, Street Cleaning. SLAs allow tenants input and choice on cash investment.
- A Special JCC Block Cleaning Meeting on 26 May and subsequent work with the building cleaning Service Level Agreement group has developed a number of service improvements such as introducing NVQ training for all cleaning staff, developing meaningful cleaning specifications (currently being trailed in 3 blocks) and highlighting inconsistencies in the service to develop a fair cleaning service for all.
- On the 4th June tenants attended a focus Group to review the Bennet Road Call Centre. Following their feedback the external assessor has recommended RBC are awarded the Customer Service Excellence Standard and the Contact Centre Association Global Standard
- Tenants have attended Board meeting for Council's new Housing ICT system (Information Communication Technology).
- The PFI Tenant Agreement Action Plan has enabled Affinity to involve residents in the recruitment of staff, development of interactive website, Affinity Newsletters, estate walkabouts. It has also enhanced partnership working between residents and agencies in the area to improve service delivery.
- The JCC has considered and provided guidance on a wide range of policy issues and initiatives e.g. Garage policy consultation, Under-occupiers project, etc.
- In 2008 tenants were involved in the annual monitoring of the retention Business Case and Decent Homes Standard progress.

More experienced tenants from the Sounding board and RFTRA have also contributed to influencing and shaping national policy including submitting a formal response to consultation by Communities and Local Government on the Housing And Regeneration Act in 2007.

Work is also underway to consult and engage with private tenants currently housed in private sector properties on the Deposit Guarantee scheme. In addition officers are investigating the possibility of putting in place a Citizens Panel made up of households living within the private sector who can be consulted with on a regular basis to help improve services.

QUESTION NO. 6

Councillor Ruhemann to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:

Decent Homes

Could the Lead Councillor advise the Council as to the progress of Decent Homes in Reading and the benefits for tenants of the work that has been done?

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REPLY by Councillor Edwards (Lead Councillor for Housing):

Long before decent homes targets were thought about we were already making strong progress, improving the council housing stock.

- We had invested in improved doors and windows and fitted modern heating systems and added insulation.
- And we got funding for the vast majority of our pre-war homes to be totally updated to a much higher standard than decent homes through our PFI initiative
- And we have established excellent partner initiatives such as the regeneration at Dee park

The 2004 stock survey confirmed that the external fabric of our housing stock was in good condition and typically pointed to improvements needed within properties.

Progress on Decent Homes targets is excellent. In the last three years, for the 6100 properties we maintain we have fitted 1458 kitchens, 1296 heating systems, carried out 569 rewires, fitted 1017 bathrooms and brought over 1000 homes back into meeting decent homes standards.

The current October position is that 500 properties are failing to meet the decent homes standard. I can confirm we are on target to meet the Government deadline of making all council homes decent by 31st March 2011 as planned.

QUESTION NO. 7

Councillor T Harris to ask the Lead Councillor for Environment and Sustainability:

Recycling Charges

Could the Lead Councillor for the Environment please inform me whether small businesses within the Reading area, that make the effort to drive to the civic amenity site, to recycle, have to pay more than putting all their rubbish in landfill?

REPLY by Councillor Gittings (Lead Councillor for Environment and Sustainability):

The charging system for the trade service at Smallmead, and Longshot Lane in Bracknell, is based on an assumed minimum tonnage. The minimum tonnage charge for recycling is 0.25t (a quarter tonne) and the minimum tonnage charge for disposal is 0.5t (half a tonne).

Experience at both sites is that recycling is not something which many traders have foremost in their minds when loading their vans or at the point of disposal. The councils and the contractor are working to change that and seek outlets for recycling waste deposited by traders - as one example, we are hoping that we will soon be able to recycle carpet (a common trade delivery). As further outlets are found, it may be possible to consider increasing incentives for recycling.

To be clear, there is no charge for householders depositing their own household waste at the Household Waste Recycling Centre.

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N.B. The facility is no longer called a Civic Amenity Site, it is a Household Waste Recycling Centre. In addition, the HWRC element is for householders only. There is a separate facility for traders within the same development.

QUESTION NO. 8

Councillor T Harris to ask the Lead Councillor for Environment and Sustainability:

Recycling Charges

If the civic amenity site charges companies to recycle, can I ask how much revenue the Council generates through this activity?

REPLY by Councillor Gittings (Lead Councillor for Environment and Sustainability):

The council does not charge for businesses to use the Household Waste Recycling Centre. We do discourage the use of that facility because, in accordance with the Environmental Protection Act, it is intended for the disposal of household waste and not waste derived in the course of someone's business or trade.

A separate part of the facility at Smallmead, does however include a place for local traders to deposit their waste in accordance with the Environmental Protection Act.

According to the PFI contract, our private sector partner is entitled to utilise current spare capacity at the facility to receive trade waste, at a charge. In return for allowing the publicly-funded facility in this way, the councils (Bracknell Forest, Reading and Wokingham) are paid a 'royalty' payment of £2 p/t. In 2008/09 the 'royalty' paid to the three councils amounted to £86,942.

QUESTION NO. 9

Councillor T Harris to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:

Number of Homeless People

Can the Lead Councillor please let me know the number of homeless people that there are currently within the Borough? Could she please also let me know when and how this was last measured?

REPLY by Councillor Edwards (Lead Councillor for Housing):

There are currently 79 households in temporary accommodation. These households are those that the Council has a statutory duty to assist under the homelessness legislation. Due to the level of homeless prevention work carried out within the housing service these are the lowest numbers we have had since the homelessness legislation was amended in 2002.

In relation to rough sleeping the last head count on the 25 September was 13. The Street Population Outreach Team is commissioned by the Housing Service to assist rough sleepers in to accommodation, substance misuse and health services. The headcount is carried out weekly. Of the 13 counted, 7 are from Eastern Europe and have no recourse to public funds and therefore cannot be assisted with accommodation. The outreach

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team have a fund to obtain tools and clothing to assist them into work or to return to their country of origin. At the present time none of this number wish to accept this assistance. Of the other 6 one has been accommodated, one has been taken into police custody, 2 are from outside Reading and the team are working to assist them to return to the areas they came from. The remaining 2 are unwilling to engage with the team at the current time and wish to remain rough sleeping, the team will continue to try and engage them into accepting assistance.

QUESTION NO. 10

Councillor Stainthorp to ask the Leader of the Council:

Civic Offices

Could the Leader of the Council update us on the latest situation with regard to the relocation of the Civic Offices?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

In November last year a special Full Council meeting was held to discuss proposals for new Civic Offices in the light of the challenging economic conditions. That meeting agreed not to bring forward the capital project in the current financial climate and resolved:

- 1 That Council agrees that the options of doing nothing, or of refurbishing the existing Civic Offices building, not be pursued for the following reasons:
 - i. Doing nothing would expose the Council to untenable health and safety and service failure risks
 - ii. Refurbishment would not save money, nor would it deliver an asbestos free building, which has the exemplary standards of sustainability and accessibility that the Council aspires to.
- 2 That Council agrees to adopt the following twin-track approach to the re-provision of the Civic headquarters:
 - i. Continue to work up a new scheme on Council-owned land in Hosier Street, as a variation to the scheme as approved by Planning Committee on 16 July 2008 as set out in the Options Reports Part 1 and Part 2I.
 - ii. Pursue a competitive process to invite bids from third parties for the re-provision of a new Civic Offices as part of a wider regeneration plan in the centre of Reading, and that the wider plan will take into consideration all feasible accommodation and commercial options for providing the Civic Office functions and will also include, but not be limited to, the provision of theatre and library facilities.
- 3 That the Civic Board be authorised to oversee both processes, including determining the specification and timescale for the competitive process; and to recommend a preferred scheme to Council following the completion of 2i and 2ii as outlined above.

The Council reaffirmed in December 2008 that doing nothing was not an option and refurbishment of the current Civic Centre will not be pursued.

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Reading Borough Council is continuing the process of investigating a scheme which will not only provide the best possible development, but also the best possible value for money for the Reading taxpayer. The Civic Board agreed, at their meeting on 29 September 2009, that a special Council meeting should be convened on 1 December 2009 to consider progress and the options for taking relocation and the development of the Civic area site forward. A report is on tonight's agenda to confirm the procedural arrangements for the special Council meeting.

QUESTION NO. 11

Councillor Khan to ask the Leader of the Council:

Call Centre Staff Award

Could the Leader of the Council tell us about the recent award won by the Council's Call Centre staff?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

In answering this question can I ask all Councillors to join with me in congratulating the staff concerned for all their hard work in achieving this recognition and that our thanks be passed to all those involved.

As part of the Council's Transformation Programme in delivering customer focused, efficient and effective services, the Council has adopted the Government Customer Service Excellence Standard (CSE) as a developmental tool to drive the Council's Transformation Agenda. The Residents and Customer Steering Group will oversee the embedding of the Standard Council-wide during the 2009 - 2012.

In Phase One of the programme the Call Centre in Bennet Road was assessed against this Customer Service Excellence Standard. The call centre was also assessed against the Contact Centre Association (CCA) Global standard (for Call /Contact Centres only) in June 2009. The Call Centre was successful in achieving accreditation in both CSE and CCA - one of only a few in the country to do so.

The CSE Standard is designed to operate on three distinct levels:

- A driver of continuous improvement
- A skills development tool
- An independent validation of achievement.

The assessment for CSE was made in the following categories:

Customer Insight - developing an in-depth understanding of your customers
The Culture of the Organisation - developing a customer focused organisation
Information and Access - accurate information and accessibility of services
Delivery - Commitment to deliver and meeting service standards
Timeliness and Quality of Service - Appropriate and measurable standards for timeliness of response to customer contact

The assessment for the CCA Global Standard was all of the above:

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Plus - Policies and procedures for security and confidentiality of customer data and use of telephone technology to manage the business.

The Assessor found that the Call Centre had a deep understanding and a commitment to Customer Service Excellence. The commitment was found from Senior Management levels through to operation and front line staff. The CSE standard requires a reassessment against the standard each year and a full assessment every three years.

QUESTION NO. 12

Councillor Townend to ask the Leader of the Council:

Tackling the Economic Slowdown Initiatives

Businesses of all shapes and sizes are impacted by the economic slowdown and this Council has taken a number of important steps to help them. In order to ensure that our actions continue to be as effective as possible in supporting Reading's economy, would the Leader of the Council please give her assessment of the 12 point package launched at the Credit Crunch Summit in February 2009 by addressing, individually for each of the 12 Initiatives, the following:

- a) on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 is very effective), rate the effectiveness of the Initiative in supporting either people, communities, or businesses in helping them to tackle the economic slowdown;
- b) describe the quantifiable result, or measurement criteria used to assess the impact of the Initiative;
- c) describe the tangible and intangible benefits achieved compared to the original objectives or targets of the Initiative;
- d) describe any changes made to the Initiative since the launch resulting from the monitoring of its progress?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

Background

An initial report to Cabinet on 1 December 2008 set out some of the practical ways in which councils and their partners could begin to support local people including:

- tackling the effects of rising unemployment
- helping people stay in their homes
- helping families cope with the higher costs of living, such as rising fuel prices
- increasing the take-up of benefits such as tax credits, housing benefit and council tax benefit
- mitigating the effects of the closure of major employers in the area
- helping businesses and families survive the 'credit crunch' through credit union

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Following the 'Credit Crunch' summit in November 2008, a steering group chaired by me was set up involving a range of partners from the public sector, the voluntary sector and businesses and a further three summits attended by a wide range of partners have been held including one today. The latest summit focused on the impact of the downturn on young people.

It was agreed that a package of support should be developed around the themes of individuals, communities and businesses. This package aimed to provide a good framework to take forward further discussions, developing and providing services, making links across agencies and engaging others such as the banking institutions.

a) on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 is very effective), rate the effectiveness of the initiative in supporting either people, communities, or businesses in helping them to tackle the economic slowdown;

It is difficult to make an objective assessment of the effectiveness of the local package of support as so many other factors - global and national - have impacted on the local economy during the period; examples being the introduction of the national car scrappage scheme and the Enterprise Finance Guarantee Scheme (the Council has involved local businesses in the Summit, two of which have participated in the Scheme). However, a range of measures as set out below provide a reasonable assessment.

b) describe the quantifiable result, or measurement criteria used to assess the impact of the Initiative;

A basket of economic indicators is collected on a monthly basis and used to measure the effects of the economic downturn. These quantitative measures are supported by a monthly unemployment summary.

An additional set of measures has been developed specifically to assess the impact of the local initiatives. The latest overall indicator set is described below in summary.

c) describe the tangible and intangible benefits achieved compared to the original objectives or targets of the Initiative;

One of the indirect benefits has been the development of much stronger partnership working in Reading. Through the steering group and the summits held, new relationships have been forged and changes have made to ways of working that will be sustained beyond the recession. In particular much closer working with Job Centre Plus and the local authority has resulted directly.

As a consequence of the economic downturn specific additional funding has been directed towards the Credit Union, Citizens Advice Bureau and Welfare Rights Unit recognising the key roles of these organisations.

A one-off payment of £85,000 to support the Reading Credit Union's business plan through to anticipated sustainability was endorsed at Cabinet in February 2009. The Council also provides marketing and promotion support to RCU via the Communications team. This arrangement was made in the context of their successful People's Millions bid.

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The Reading CAB was awarded an additional £12,500 in 2009/10 and an SLA was offered on the following basis to increase service provision:

- a) A new benefit drop in each Wednesday between 2pm and 3.30pm
- b) Additional telephone advice each Wednesday between 4pm and 6.30pm
- c) Additional pre-booked appointments each Tuesday between 3pm and 5.30pm

- i.e. an additional 6.5 hours each week of advice time arranged to increase accessibility [drop in /phone/ booked appointments]

In the first quarter of 2009/10 April to June, the CAB provided monitoring info reporting as follows:

Total clients advised in the extra hours	120
Initial Phone calls from clients	85
Appointments at outreach	16
Appointments in bureau	82

Meanwhile the WRU also received a similar level of funding and has been able to employ an extra member of staff for their reception. This has allowed them increase the front office triage available to 36 hours, and another 36 hours of phone help

d) describe any changes made to the Initiative since the launch resulting from the monitoring of its progress?

Discussion at the steering group meetings are usually led by monitoring progress and performance against the indicators and an assessment of the 12 point package.

There have been a number of changes to the initiatives within the 12 point package, many services have further developed the initial offering based on evidence collected or discussed through the credit crunch steering group process.

National Mortgage Rescue Plan - A partnership approach with RBC Housing Options, Reading CAB and Catalyst Housing Group has been developed to implement locally. There have been national changes to the criteria for the scheme, where people in negative equity could access the scheme. However this has not helped to increase eligibility in Reading.

Benefits take up campaign - Child Benefit is now being disregarded as an income in the calculation of HB/CTB, DWP are not undertaking a national campaign to raise awareness so there are now plans to run a local campaign.

Executive Job Club - A Job Club has been set up in response to professionals who felt that their needs were not being served.

Advice and Information for the newly unemployed - Jobcentre Plus have held stakeholder meetings to encourage partners to cascade Jobcentre Plus initiatives to mutual customers.

Promotion of Credit Union - The Credit Union has engaged in a project to use the PCT POD in Broad Street Mall - to promote savings, financial literacy and money management alongside a successful 'Stop Smoking' campaign.

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Promoting Reading - now exploring distribution of *R:UK* at London airport lounges

Local Skills Package - The *Skills for Business* initiative has led to the establishment of a Skills for Business Centre - with effect April 2010 - and has been developed by Reading UK CIC (as the accountable body). A business plan for the Centre is being drafted and the initiative has been the catalyst to forming a sub-regional Skills Providers Forum.

Skills for Business forms part of a campaign by Reading UK CIC that also includes *Support for Business* and a first *Stimulus for Business* event in November.

Pay businesses within 20 days - Extended to cover all businesses rather limited to small business. Periodic monitoring has been introduced to identify problems and develop solutions to support achieving 100% on 20 day target.

Reading's measures of local package of support (since launch February 2009)

Measure	Result
People	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of referrals to the mortgage rescue plan 	34 applications 0 eligible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % Increase in benefit take up 	16% increase, Housing and Council Tax Benefit Caseload.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of school savers schemes established Number of loans given out 	4 schools joined (further 8 potential) 24 loans (since June 2009)
Communities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average number monthly volunteers registered Average number unemployed (Reading Voluntary Action)	218 registered (monthly average) 57 unemployed (monthly average)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number joining 'Your Reading' Passport scheme 	Total Members 6% increase to 45,072 Concessionary 37% increase to 10,277
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of heat seeker applications/take ups Number of free of charge installations in priority households (where a member is on income related benefits or over 70 years of age).	536 installed or booked cavity wall or loft (Householders save at least 30% on their heating bill) 235 free of charge installs in 'priority' households

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Businesses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No Apprenticeship placements	13 committed to RBC, with 50 to be established in total this year
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• % of businesses paid within 20 days	83% paid within 20 days
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Numbers registered at Job Club• % finding employment	21 people registered to attend the Executive Job Club, 20% have started work.

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Economic Downturn Steering Group - Summary of Indicators

Indicator	Nov-08	Dec-08	Jan-09	Feb-09	Mar-09	Apr-09	May-09	Jun-09	Jul-09	Aug-09	Sep-09
Mortgage Repossessions orders issued (made)	N/A	863 (702) Yr 2008	N/A	N/A	CC 127 (101) LA 55 (45)	N/A	N/A	CC 155 (105) LA 55 (40)	N/A	N/A	Due Nov
Landlord Repossession orders issued (made)	N/A	1061 (792) Yr 2008	N/A	N/A	CC 277 (243) LA 100 (95)	N/A	N/A	CC 245 (205) LA 130 (90)	N/A	N/A	Due Nov
School Meal Uptake	20%	24%	22%	19%	22%	20%	21%	22%	21%	-	
Young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs)	-	8.3%	8.5%	9.2	8.6	8.5	9.5	10	11.8	12.8	
Jobseekers Allowance Claimants	2.4%	2.6%	2.8%	3.5%	3.9%	4.3%	4.3%	4.3%	4.5%	4.6%	
Jobcentre Plus Vacancies	1,321	1,203	498	604	606	663	790	888	1029	1162	
Benefit Application Forms given due to Redundancy or Loss of Work Hours.	-	-	-	-	-	-	56	26	15	8	
New Directions - Average daily enquiries	31	27	73	67	68.45	86.9	66.4	-	-	17.65	20.15
New Directions - Average daily members signing in	54	51	61	62	63.9	61.25	55.3	-	-	57.5	61.45
Citizens Advice Bureau - County Court clients seen	22	6	13	18	14	16	11	22	14	8	
Citizens Advice Bureau - Callers using Reading CAB	871	606	1147	978	1221	1032	874	1223	1052	to follow	
Reading Voluntary Action - Registrations (unemployed)	-	-	-	-	254 (79)	191 (44)	198 (50)	253 (60)	253 (63)	191 (47)	

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Property Prices - Land Registry	284.3	278.4	271.8	269.7	265.9	261.4	261.5	263	267.1	271.1	
Housing Benefit / Council Tax Benefit Caseload	12517	12637	12702	12831	12999	13111	13426	13579	13732	13891	13995
Retail Void Rate	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10.78%	N/A	N/A

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QUESTION NO. 13

Councillor Ballsdon to ask the Leader of the Council:

St George's Day

Would the Leader of the Council outline the Council's celebratory plans for St George's Day?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

We are still finalising activities for St George's Day 2010. We will be repeating the celebratory English Breakfast at the Hexagon, which was very successful last year. A donation from this event will be made to the Mayor's Charities.

The Mayor of Reading will be hosting a Charity Dinner on the evening of the 23rd April at the Hilton Hotel.

As every other year the St George's Cross Flag will fly from the Civic Centre.

QUESTION NO. 14

Councillor Willis to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture and Sport:

Outdoor Works of Art and Monuments

Could the Lead Councillor provide me with a list of the number and location of outdoor Council-owned public works of art or historical monuments, the budget for their maintenance and cleaning, and the frequency of inspection?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Culture and Sport):

The details of the outdoor public art or historical monuments are detailed below:

The maintenance and the cleaning are carried out as required. The exceptions are:

- Lyon Square - inspection is bi-monthly
- Broad St. West Seating - inspection is weekly
- Central Club mural - Annual inspection
- Oscar Wilde Memorial Commission - Inspection is monthly

The costs of maintenance and cleaning are met from wider departmental budgets and are not specifically allocated.

Title	Artist	Date	Location
Plaque to Hugh de Boves	W.S.Frith		Chapter House, Reading Abbey Ruins
Plaque - Sumer is icumen in	W. Ravenscroft		Chapter House, Reading Abbey Ruins
Plaque -Hugh	W.S.Frith		Chapter House, Reading

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Title	Artist	Date	Location
Faringdon's execution			Abbey Ruins
Sculptural freize	Charles May		Town Hall facade
Small figure of Queen Victoria	Charles May		Town Hall façade
Gargoyles			Abbey Gateway
Rustic Fountain	Unknown		Forbury Gardens
1 st Marquess of Reading (Rufus Isaacs)	Charles Sargeant Jagger		Eldon Square Gardens
Plaque - Mary Mitford			39 London Road
Plaque- Laurentius Braag			Outer wall of St. Mary's Church
Plaque - Goldwin Smith			15 Friar Street
Plaque Fox Talbot			8 Russell Terrace
Christchurch stone			Redlands Road
Obelisk	Designed : Sir John Soane	1804	Market Place
Drinking fountain	Designed: Poulton and Woodman	1860	South wall of St Laurence's Church
Jubilee Fountain	G.W.Webb	1887	The Butts
George Palmer	George Blackall Simonds	1891	Palmer Park
Queen Victoria	George Blackall Simonds	1897	Town Hall Square
King Edward VII	George E. Wade	1902	Station Square roundabout
Memorial Cross to Henry I	W. Ravenscroft	1909	Forbury
2 Commemorative tablets		1923	Reading Bridge
Commemorative tablet - 4 Plaques		1926	Caversham Bridge
Horse troughs			St Mary's Butts Nr Central Pool Nr Arthur Newbury Park Scours Lane
Inscribed table		c.1937	King's Bridge over Kennet

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Title	Artist	Date	Location
An Archangel	Eric H Kennington	c1953	Geoffrey Field School
Robed Figure	Elizabeth Frink		Abbey Gardens
Cartwheeling Boys	Brian Slack	1981	Outside Civic Centre
Reading Piece 2	Peter Sainty	1982	Kennetside
Girl and the Swan	Lorne McKean	c1984	Arundell House
Adam, Libby and Karen	Liz Mulchinock	c1985	Guardian Royal Exchange Building
West Reading Railway Bridge	William Brown	1988	Oxford Road
Guardian (at the Gates of Sparta)	Eric Stanford	1988	Courtyard of 21 South Street
Central Club Mural	Alan Howard	1989	Central Club
Inner Light	Liliane Lijne	1992	Outside Prudential offices
Oscar Wilde Memorial Commission	Bruce Williams	c2000	Chestnut Walk
The Compleat Angler	Kevin Atherton	c1992	Chocolate Island
Bagged	Jenny Eadon	c1993	Originally King's Meadow Woodland, now in storage
Save our World	Jo Kennedy	c1994	Inside Civic Centre
Broad Street seating	Matthew Fedden	1997	Broad St West
Lyon Square public art scheme	Free Form Arts Trust	1998	Lyon Square, Dee Park Estate
New Century Place	John Ravera	1998	New Century Place
Hexham Road Tree	Bhajan Hunjan	1998	Hexham Road Community Centre
Bridges & Canopy	Whitby Bird & partners	1999	The Oracle
Crystal Beacon	John Gingell	1999	The Oracle
Heritage Trail	Guy Paterson	1999	The Oracle
Holy Brook entrance	Anne Smythe	1999	The Oracle
Link Block windows	Martin Donlin	1999	The Oracle
Riverside floors cape	Simon Read	1999	The Oracle
Water feature	Simon Read	1999	The Oracle
Tree grilles	Jon Mills	1999	The Oracle
Time Piece	Wendy Ramshaw	2000	Entrance foyer to Town Hall
The Gateway	Clare Bigger	2000	Reading International Business Park
Untitled sculpture	Jens-Flemming Sorensen	2000	Abbey Ruins
Oscar Wilde Memorial Commission	Bruce Williams/Paul Muldoon	2000	Chestnut Walk
Banners	Mark Camille Chaimowicz	2003	Broad Street
Operation Owl Club	Adam Dant	2004	Reading Explorer units - various town centre locations
Dwelling	David Ward	2005	Friar Street - various windows

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Title	Artist	Date	Location
Ambulatiuncula sound trail	8 sound artists	2006	Forbury Gardens

QUESTION NO. 15

Councillor Willis to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture and Sport:

War Memorials

Could the Lead Councillor provide me with a list of the number and location of War memorials, the budget for their maintenance and cleaning, and the frequency of inspection?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Culture and Sport):

The details on the War memorials are listed below:

The maintenance and the cleaning are carried out as required. Due to the nature of the memorials and the very public locations, the inspections are carried out when issues are reported. This means that the budgets are not specifically allocated and are made available when required.

Title	Artist	Date	Location
War Memorial WW1	J.H.Benyon	1932	Entrance to Forbury gardens
Maiwand Lion	G.B.Simonds	1886	Forbury Gardens
War Memorial	E.L.Gunston	1932	Forbury
Requiem	E.Sandford	Circa 1992	Outside Civic Office
Colliers Brickworks War Memorial	Made by Colliers company to commemorate their own employees	C1919	Tilehurst (near Prospect Park)
The Tilehurst Triangle			Tilehurst (adjacent to the main shopping area)
Caversham War memorial		Dedicated on 05/05/1928	Christchurch Meadows

QUESTION NO. 16

Councillor Willis to ask the Lead Councillor for Planning and Transport:

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Motorcycle Parking

Could the Lead Councillor for Planning and Transport inform me how many motorcycle parking spaces there are in the Borough and where they are located? What plans are there to expand provision?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Planning and Transport):

There are 52 parking spaces in the Borough.

These are the existing motorcycle parking bays in the Borough:

1. Greyfriars Road (4 parking spaces)
2. St. Marys Butts (12 parking spaces)
3. Blagrove Street (11 parking spaces)
4. Kings Road (8 parking spaces)
5. Oxford Road (2 parking spaces -one on the IDR bridge, one outside the motorcycle shop 257)
6. Oxford Rd on IDR overbridge (15 parking spaces)

We are reviewing motor cycle parking provision as part of the town centre re-organisation and will be consulting with relevant groups on extending the number of spaces.

QUESTION NO. 17

Councillor Bayes to ask the Lead Councillor for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Free School Meals

What is the current number of children receiving free school meals in the Borough? What percentage of children does this represent and how does it compare to previous years?

REPLY by Councillor Hartley (Lead Councillor for Education and Lifelong Learning):

The following information has been taken from the Schools' Census data which is an annual snapshot in time. The most recent data we have is for May 2009 while annual trend data is based on data collected in January each year. This answer is based on the January figures to provide the comparison requested.

The number of pupils eligible for FSM in all RBC schools in January 2009 was 2483 which represented 15.7% of number of children on roll in the schools.

In comparison, in January 2007 there were 2418 pupils eligible for FSM in all RC schools which represented 15.6% of the number of children on roll in the schools.

The following table shows the January figures and 2009 demonstrated that despite a further increase in numbers of pupils eligible for FSM of 29 there was a decrease in percentage on role because the overall school population is growing at a faster rate.

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Year No.	No. Eligible for FSM	Percentage against no. of Pupils	Variance in no. on previous year	Variance %
2007	2418	15.6%	n/a	n/a
2008	2454	15.8%	+36	+0.2%
2009	2483	15.7%	+29	-0.1%

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Year on Year, over the last three years, for all Reading schools (Primary, Secondary, Special and Nursery) there were:

All Schools in Reading

2007 - 2418 pupils eligible for FSM equating to 15.6% of numbers on roll (NOR).

2008 showed an increase in numbers eligible on the previous year of 36. This equated to an increase of 0.02% against NOR going from 15.6% in 2007 to 15.8%.

2009 showed a decrease in number of 29 which also showed a decrease in percentage by 0.1% going from 15.8% in 2008 to 15.7% in 2009.

Year	No. eligible for FSM	Percentage against number of pupils	Variance in numbers on previous year	Variance %age
2007	2418	15.6%	n/a	n/a
2008	2454	15.8%	+36	+0.2%
2009	2483	15.7%	+29	-0.1%

Primary Schools in Reading

2007 - 1695 pupils eligible for FSM equating to 18.2% of NOR.

2008 - showed an increase of 26 in number with the percentage remaining the same at 18.2%.

2009 - showed an increase in numbers of 44 with a decrease in the percentage by -0.2%, dropping from 18.2% in 2008 to 18.0%.

Year	No. eligible for FSM	Percentage against number of pupils	Variance in numbers on previous year	Variance %age
2007	1695	18.2%	n/a	n/a
2008	1721	18.2%	26	nil
2009	1765	18.0%	44	-0.2%

Secondary Schools in Reading

2007 - 627 pupils eligible for FSM equating to 11.4% of NOR.

2008 - showed an increase in eligibility of 23 with a percentage increase of 0.6%.

2009 - showed a decrease in eligibility of 16 and also a percentage decrease of -0.3% going from 12% to 11.7%.

Year	No. eligible for FSM	Percentage against number of pupils	Variance in numbers on previous year	Variance %age
2007	627	11.4%	n/a	n/a
2008	650	12.0%	23	0.6%
2009	634	11.7%	-16	-0.3%

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Special School in Reading

2007 - 73 eligible for FSM equating to 47.7% of NOR

The Special Schools numbers then dropped each year by 3 and 7 respectively with 2008 showing a decrease of -3.4% and a further drop of -3.1% against NOR in 2009.

Year	No. eligible for FSM	Percentage against number of pupils	Variance in numbers on previous year	Variance %age
2007	73	47.7%	n/a	n/a
2008	70	44.3%	- 3	- 3.4%
2009	63	41.2%	-7	-3.1%

Nursery Schools in Reading (Blagdon Nursery & Childcare Centre)

Blagdon Nursery was the only nursery school where there was an entitlement for FSM.

2007 - 23 pupils equating to 26.4% of NOR

2008 - saw a drop in number by 10 and a percentage drop from 26.4% to 12.1% a difference of -14.3% against NOR.

2009 - saw an increase in number of 8 with a drop in percentage by -7.5% compared to NOR.

Year	No. eligible for FSM	Percentage against number of pupils	Variance in numbers on previous year	Variance %age
2007	23	26.4%	n/a	n/a
2008	13	12.1%	- 10	- 14.3%
2009	21	4.6%	8	-7.5%

QUESTION NO. 18

Councillor Bayes to ask the Lead Councillor for Education and Lifelong Learning:

Building Schools for the Future

What is the current status of the Building Schools for the Future programme in Reading?

REPLY by Councillor Hartley (Lead Councillor for Education and Lifelong Learning):

As per the last Building Schools for the Future Programme Board of the 16th September 2009 the current situation is that Reading – in common with other local authorities in our wave - has not yet been invited to start the programme by Partnership for Schools. Further, we have received a letter from the DCSF

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indicating that no new invites will now be issued in the current financial year. We are continuing to work with headteachers and governors to ensure that opportunities to develop new ways of teaching, fit for the 21st century, are not lost while we seek more clarity on the timing for an opportunity to secure funding for improved school infrastructure.

QUESTION NO. 19

Councillor Benson to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:

Three and Four Bedroom Properties

How many three and four bed houses does the Council currently own and how does this compare with May 1997?

REPLY by Councillor Edwards (Lead Councillor for Housing):

- 2576 3 bed properties
- 125 4 Bed properties
- 6 5 bed or more

This includes properties within the Affinity area but not those properties that are available via Choice Based Lettings and are owned by Housing Associations.

Working in partnership the Council has also provided:

3 beds - 184
4 beds - 52
5 beds 7
6 beds 3

This has increased the numbers of properties available by 246.

The numbers of properties sold are as follows:

1998-99	68
1999-00	104
2000-01	47
2001-02	48
2002-03	50 (estimate)
2003-04	57
2004-05	26
2005-06	9
2006-07	14

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2007-08	10
2008-09	2
	435

If the Councillor requires the numbers in 1997 a trawl will be required of the archives. It has not been possible to pull this information together in time to answer this Council question. Officers estimate that it will take several weeks to remove the files from storage and undertake a manual search.

QUESTION NO. 20

Councillor Benson to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:

Three and Four Bedroom Properties

How many families are currently waiting to transfer in to three/four bed properties managed by RBC?

REPLY by Councillor Edwards (Lead Councillor for Housing):

There are currently 913 people who have registered an interest in 3 or 4 bedroom properties. This is broken down as follows:

4 beds-79 homeseekers /94 transfers
3 beds- 422 homeseekers /318 transfers

It is impossible to break this figure down into those applicants on the register who are seeking RBC property or those who are seeking property provided through a registered Social Landlord. People are not asked to express a preference for landlord when they register - the system works by bidding against a property - not the landlord.

QUESTION NO. 21

Councillor Benson to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:

Three and Four Bedroom Properties

What is the average wait time for families who wish to transfer into three and four bed properties managed by RBC?

REPLY by Councillor Edwards (Lead Councillor for Housing):

The Housing Register enables people to register an interest in bidding for a property managed by RBC or RSL partners. The bidding system is managed via a banding system that reflects the needs of the person/family concerned. It is important to stress that the Register is not a waiting list - it is an expression of interest. The average 'waiting' time is not a good indicator of how swiftly the Council is able to meet housing need as it does not take into account the housing needs of the families concerned.

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Type / Size No. of Lets Shortest wait Average wait

3-bed house	62	18 days	20 months
4-bed	15	7 weeks	22 months
5-bed	0		

QUESTION NO. 22

Councillor Duveen to ask the Lead Councillor for Planning and Transport:

Low Emissions Zone

Will the Lead Councillor for Planning and Transport make a statement to confirm that the only demand management measure to be found in the Council's TIF submission is now a Low Emission Zone, and will he share with the people of Reading and of our neighbouring authorities what further details about the Low Emissions Zone the TIF submission will include?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Planning and Transport):

The Council with its partners is progressing its full TIF Bid. That bid contains the Low Emission Zone. The Low Emission Zone has always been part of the TIF package. At this time, details of the scheme are still being developed and will be shared with the people of Reading and our partners as soon as they are completed.

QUESTION NO. 23

Councillor Swaine to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:

Repossessions and Benefit Claims

Could the Lead Councillor for Housing tell me during the last year (from September 2008) the quarterly figures for:

- 1) The total number of repossessions in the town?
- 2) The numbers claiming:
 - a) Council Tax Relief?
 - b) Housing Benefit?

REPLY by Councillor Edwards (Lead Councillor for Housing):

As the Council is not directly involved in the repossession process (which is of course a Court function) we do not hold comprehensive data for Reading Borough. However, over the course of the last year we have registered the following number of properties each quarter as being exempt from Council tax because they are repossessed. It is not possible to break this figure down into home owners who have had their property repossessed and buy-to-let landlords who have had a property re-possessed.

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Period	Number of Repossession Exemptions Applied
01-Sep-08 - 30-Sep-08	9
01-Oct-08 - 31-Dec-08	32
01-Jan-09 - 31-Mar-09	64
01-Apr-09 - 30-Jun-09	37
01-Jul-09 - 30-Sep-09	24
01-Oct-09 - 07-Oct-09	0

At the last count of the live caseload which was May 2009, the total number of benefit cases was 13,535 of which 2,432 were claiming Council Tax Benefit only. The remaining 11,103 are combined Housing and Council Tax Benefit. The next caseload count will be in November.

QUESTION NO. 24

Councillor Swaine to ask the Leader of the Council:

Windows 2000

Could the Leader of the Council tell me across the whole of the Reading Borough Council managed estate, how many computers are running either Windows 2000 Professional and Windows 2000 Server?

Could she give me a date when she expects the current IT refresh programme to see all the Council's PCs and servers currently running Windows 2000 to be upgraded to a later version of Windows or alternative operating system?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

The Council is currently running 1437 Desktop Windows 2000 and 25 Server Windows 2000 Operating Systems.

Upgrading the estate requires both a level of software and hardware refresh on an ongoing basis as new software versions are released, but this has to be approached within the constraints of increasingly tight budgets. The Council maximises the value of ICT assets before replacement, described in the industry as 'sweating the assets'.

It is the intention however to upgrade both the desktop and server estates as a phased programme of works across 2009/10 and 2010/11 to meet statutory requirements to meet standards for the secure exchange of data between public bodies.

This will move the Council to XP as the Desktop operating system and Windows Server 2003 as the Server operating system funded by the Technology Refresh provision.

QUESTION NO. 25

Councillor Goodall to ask the Lead Councillor for Communities and Neighbourhoods:

Hexham Estate Police Office

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For some time now efforts have been made by the police and the council to site a Police Office within the Hexham estate, could the Lead Councillor comment on progress towards this?

REPLY by Councillor Tickner (Lead Councillor for Communities and Neighbourhoods):

Earlier in 2009 Housing and Thames Valley Police worked jointly to identify a suitable location on Hexham Road estate where a TVP office could be located. A survey of residents on the estate indicated a concern over a lack of police presence and support for a greater TVP presence on the estate.

Housing worked jointly with TVP to identify a one bedroomed property that was located centrally on the estate and with TVP agreement arranged for the tenant to be moved to alternative accommodation. TVP subsequently indicated that they no longer wished to use the property and it was relet to another tenant.

Housing undertook a joint inspection of the estate with TVP to try and locate another site on the estate but a suitable location is yet to be found (the property must, for example, be ground floor)

Housing is committed to working with TVP to establish a local police presence on the estate.

QUESTION NO. 26

Councillor Goodall to ask the Lead Councillor for Environment and Sustainability:

Fly Tipping

Could the Lead Councillor comment on the number of fixed penalty notices which have been given out for fly-tipping?

REPLY by Councillor Gittings (Lead Councillor for Environment and Sustainability):

There is no specific fixed penalty for fly-tipping, however since April 2008 we have issued 154 Section 87 (Litter) Fixed Penalties for small-scale fly-tipping.

Over that same period we have in addition issued 4 Fixed Penalties to businesses for failing to comply with a Section 34 (Duty of Care) Notice, requiring that they supply information about their waste collection arrangements.

QUESTION NO. 27

Councillor Goodall to ask the Lead Councillor for Planning and Transport:

Trees in Addington and Alexandra Road

Could the Lead Councillor comment on the progress to replace the trees which were (or are in the process of being) removed from the Addington/Alexandra road area of Redlands - as a consequence of fungal infection and decay?

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REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Planning and Transport):

The Council is in the process of assessing underground utilities in this area of Reading and considering different tree species to ensure that new trees, when planted, will not damage underground services or suffer any potential damage themselves. This will result in a plan of action to replant and replace trees wherever possible.

I can assure Councillor Goodall that there will be full consultations with local members prior to any final decisions.