

## COUNCIL MEETING - 28 JUNE 2016

### AGENDA ITEM 6

1. WITHDRAWN

2. Councillor Steele to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:  
Potholes in the Borough's Roads

In 2013 the council received 76 claims from people amounting to a total of £95,605 for damage caused to their vehicles and to themselves as a result of potholes in the Borough's roads. In subsequent years have the number of claims and amounts increased or decreased ?

**RESPONSE** by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Cllr Steele for his question.

The number of claims received for the subsequent calendar years 2014 & 2015 has decreased.

In 2014 the Council received a total of 22 claims of which 3 were settled. A further 2 cases remain open at this point in time with a payment including a reserve for the outstanding claims totalling £ 26,828.25.

In 2015 the Council received a total of 17 claims of which 1 was settled. A further 2 cases remain open at this point in time with a payment including a reserve for the outstanding claims totalling £ 11,996.45.

The figures quoted above include amounts already paid and funds reserved on the open claims that may or may not be paid subject to liability and quantum.

The majority of claims are for vehicle damage only and are settled with no payment having been made (i.e. the Council is not legally liable).

Claims involving personal injury are few but tend to be more costly.

Most claims are reported soon after the incident has occurred, so the numbers of claims reported for each of the calendar years is unlikely to increase, although there is that potential for 2015. That said, the claims trend is clearly down.

Weather conditions do have an effect on the number of claims, but the downward trend is arguably a result of the Council's considerable efforts and investment into maintenance and repair regimes put in place to deal with the extreme cold weather of 2011 & 2012 and the extreme wet weather during 2013 and early 2014.

3. Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Health:  
Cuts to Council Walking Programme

Walking can improve your health, your happiness and it gives you the chance to explore the outdoors, but walking in Reading is under threat.

I was disappointed to learn that the council won't be continuing to fund the walks programme coordinator. Currently the Council coordinates around 10 walks, with about 500 active walkers on the books. Last time we lost the coordinator position the programme collapsed

down to around three walks. Without continuing support from the Council I fear that the same will happen again.

Can the Lead Councillor confirm what options the Council has explored to continue funding a coordinator and what the Council is doing differently this time to ensure that the programme does not collapse and worsen health in the town ?

**RESPONSE** by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health.

I am pleased that Cllr White recognises the well evidenced benefits of walking to health and well-being but his assertion that walking in Reading is under threat is both misguided and irresponsible.

The walks programme co-ordinator post is funded until August and we are currently evaluating and reviewing the work done to date in order to inform future provision. Of course in so doing we do need to take into account the almost impossible financial position facing the Council as a result of the current government's severe budget cuts. As well as the estimated £100 million cut from the council's annual budget between 2010 and 2019 government we are also grappling with approximately 10% cuts to our Public Health budget from 2015/16 to 2017/18 with, unless there is a change of government, more reckless cuts likely to come.

In a very clear example of the Council working collaboratively to benefit Reading's residents, the Walks Programme Co-ordinator post was established for an 18 month period beginning in 2015 by combining funding from the Council's Transport, Leisure and Well-being (Public Health) services. The walks programme has been ongoing for more than five years and has been community driven and led throughout this time by volunteers and local groups. Periodically, the Council has had a coordinator in place to help drive up participation and train extra walk leaders to further strengthen the programme as we have done over the last 18 months. The walks themselves are designed to be sustainable and 'owned' by the community once established.

The Transport funding for the post was part of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) that the Council successfully bid for from government. This funding was finite and time limited and is now no longer available which is why we were always going to review options at this time and consider how we can further strengthen our work to support local people increase walking and cycling and the promotion of the health benefits and enjoyment that this brings. As part of this the Council is awaiting guidance on the government's new Access Fund (which replaces LSTF) to promote all forms of active travel including walking. This funding, if the Council is successful, is expected to be available from April 2017 and we will ensure that the current walk programme is sustained in the interim.

4. Councillor Josh Williams to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services:

#### **Benefits of Sport**

The benefits of sport and exercise are well known. Sport can, and does, make a profound and positive impact on individuals, communities and wider society. According to Sport England, physical activity, including sport, is linked to a reduced risk of over 20 illnesses, including cardiovascular disease and some cancers. Taking part in regular sport can save between £1,750 and £6,900 in healthcare costs per person.

Reading has no sports development officer, or public sports development forum. Can the Lead Councillor for Sport tell us why that is and what he is doing to address this ?

How does the Lead Councillor think that we can best work together to support our residents and their teams, clubs, and individual athletes at all levels of sport and exercise ?

**RESPONSE** by Councillor Gittings Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services.

Thank you Cllr Williams and I'm glad that you recognise the very well evidenced benefits of sports and physical activity for health and well-being.

There is currently no position within Reading Borough Council with the job title of "Sports Development Officer". However, this area of work is overseen by the Programming Team within the Leisure and Recreation Service. The current job title that focuses on this area of work is "Health & Activity Development Officer". This approach, acknowledging the benefits of physical activity as well as participation in more formal sport, has been recognised by Sport England in their most recent strategy where the broader role of the third sector and local authorities is seen to deliver many benefits alongside the traditional sports development activity undertaken by the National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of Sports (funded by Sports England).

The team oversees programming at Reading Sport & Leisure sites and a range of outdoor facilities and open-spaces across Reading offering access to low/no cost programmes throughout the year such as:

- Membership Offers
- Aqua Academy & Free Swim Initiatives
- Health initiatives and walking programmes
- Workplace Health Initiatives
- GP Referral Schemes
- Timetabled classes, sessions and activities catering for all ages and abilities

In delivering these programmes the team works with many services across the Council including public health, transport, education and social care.

Community events and activity in the parks and open spaces are also booked through and overseen by this team with over 400 days of community event activity taking place in the parks and open spaces on an annual basis. The service works extensively with community clubs and organisations and undertakes outreach work to deliver targeted community health and leisure programmes in partnership with third sector organisations and the local County Sports Partnership 'Get Berkshire Active' (GBA).

This work is complemented by the Council's highly regarded Play Service that focuses on work with younger children and has a range of benefits including embedding physical activity as a routine part of daily activities from a young age.

The Council has also been working with Get Berkshire Active (GBA) to establish a new sports forum, or Sport and Physical Activity Partnership, on the back of a series of 'Inspire' participation events to raise profile and encourage participation (funding for this programme having been secured by GBA from Sport England). This Inspire programme has been very successful and we continue to work with GBA on formalising the new forum. In this regard Sport England have produced a new strategy that we can integrate with this work going forward, including potential funding opportunities for local groups.

As I hope is evident from the above the Council's approach is one of partnership and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders and has established excellent working relationships with Sport England, NGBs, the County Sports Partnership, local sports clubs and communities.

5. Councillor Ballsdon to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:  
Idling Taxi Engines

In light of the potential harm caused by diesel engines to the environment please confirm what the Council's rules are relating to idling taxi engines at licensed taxi ranks in Reading ?

**RESPONSE** by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Cllr Ballsdon for her question.

The Council does not currently have any rules in place specifically to manage idling taxi engines on licensed ranks in Reading as, I am advised, it is unlawful to place conditions such as this on a driver's licence.

The Road Traffic (Vehicle Emissions) (Fixed Penalty) (England) Regulations 2002 makes it an offence to idle engines unnecessarily when stationary. A driver failing to turn an engine off after being asked to do so by an authorised officer can be issued with a fixed penalty notice. This applies equally to buses, taxis and private cars. A number of local authorities, predominantly in London, have adopted these powers and the Council is currently reviewing the effectiveness of this as an enforcement tool.

Consideration is being given to a number of actions to tackle the issue of idling across the Borough, which includes:

- Engaging the licensed taxi trade to review whether a voluntary approach to idling could be agreed.
- Campaigns and enforcement approaches, and the Council enforcement staff periodically conduct education exercises with drivers.

Officers will be providing me and Cllr Gittings with a briefing on options in due course.