

COUNCIL MEETING - 28 FEBRUARY 2018

AGENDA ITEM 6: QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

1. Councillor Pearce to ask the Lead Councillor for Education: Secondary School Places

It was recently reported that Reading Borough Council will have 1,887 more secondary school pupils by 2020 and will need two new secondary schools to accommodate these. Can the Lead Councillor for Education please give us an update on what is happening to ensure future provision?

REPLY by Councillor Jones (Lead Councillor for Education).

The table below shows the projected increase in secondary school pupil numbers between 2018 and 2024 (when the population stabilises).

school year	10 year old population	year 6 cohort (Y-1)	year 7 forecast	Housing Impact (128 pa)	year 7 capacity	surplus / shortfall	extra classes
2017/18	1,959	1,571	1,375	20	1,584	189	
2018/19	2,112	1,690	1,504	20	1,584	60	
2019/20	2,057	1,949	1,754	20	1,584	-190	7
2020/21	2,091	1,892	1,722	20	1,584	-158	
2021/22	2,084	1,958	1,782	20	1,584	-218	1
2022/23	2,101	1,947	1,772	20	1,584	-208	
2023/24	2,239	1,968	1,791	20	1,584	-227	

The table shows the effects of an increase in births in 2009, which reflects the national trend. The projected increase in year 7, taking account of pupil movement in and out of Reading, and to schools in the private sector, is 250 pupils.

The effect of this is that the projected surplus of 60 year 7 places in the 2018/19 school year becomes a deficit of 190 places in 2019/20. There is a slight year 7 population dip in 2020/21, meaning one fewer form of entry will be needed in that year.

This is followed by a further increase, with a total of eight forms of entry are required. Our projections show that an extra eight forms of entry (sufficient to accommodate 240 pupils) will suffice through the 2020s.

The council is currently planning a six form entry school. Several potential site for the school have been identified, and a bid process will shortly be started to identify an academy trust to run it. The other two forms of entry are available at Chiltern Edge school, which has spare capacity and is popular with parents who live in north Reading.

Between the scheduled date for the opening of the new school, agreement has been reached with five local secondary schools to take sufficient extra 'bulge' classes in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years.

2. Councillor Davies to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:
Bus Service Changes

Will the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport update the Council on the recent changes to north of the river bus services introduced by Reading Buses ?

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

I thank Cllr Davies for his question.

Reading Buses' consultation on the future of the pink routes in Caversham was undertaken to address the issues that currently see the Caversham network of buses lose a considerable amount of money per year. Use of services has been in decline in contrast to the rest of the company's bus network that is in growth. The company has supported these loss-making routes as long as possible, but it was clear that action desperately needed to be taken.

Reading Buses attended two public meetings that allowed them to hear concerns from residents face-to-face and they also received well over 600 individual feedback responses. Concerns centred on provision for older customers who may rely on the services more than the average bus user, but may not use the service that frequently. The company listened to this and all other concerns and proposals.

The outcome of this consultation is to retain the current route structure, so all Caversham residents will continue to be served by buses on the same roads as now. However there is still a vital need to make savings and so given opposition to plans to link some routes using Oakley Road to increase service in this area, the only choice remaining is to reduce daytime frequencies in Caversham Heights on pink 22 to a level that is financially sustainable given current levels of use.

Despite needing to reduce losses, Reading Buses remains keen to pursue enhancements where they can be delivered efficiently within existing resources and has also identified a number of new improvements due to the consultation.

There will be minor revisions to timetables in order to better space the times of buses between Caversham Centre and Central Reading, improve train connections at the Northern Interchange and optimise early morning and late evening journey provision.

Caversham Heights Pink 22 is currently the least used service of the Caversham network and so is the service that will see the most changes, including:

- Pink 22 will continue to operate every half hour during weekday morning and evening commuting times, but will be reduced to hourly off peak (after 9am and up to 3pm) and on Saturdays. Appropriately timed school journeys will also be included.
- The lightly used hourly Sunday service will be replaced with a trial service of smaller minibus type buses operating a modified timetable. Alternative buses will also be available to more users thanks to the negotiation of a new joint ticketing arrangement on the recently relaunched Thames Travel 'River Rapids' X39/40 which serves many stops on the nearby main road. Both Reading Buses return and day tickets will be accepted on this half hourly service (hourly on Sundays) between Reading, Caversham

Bridge, St. Peter's Hill, Woodcote Road and Upper Woodcote Road (as far as Shepherd Lane). Information on both the River Rapids and Going Forward Buses' 142 will be included in Reading Buses' publicity to provide one source of bus information for all routes serving the area.

- Pink 22 will continue to serve Albert Road and The Mount and will additionally be enhanced to offer a much requested through link from Caversham Heights and Caversham Centre to the Royal Berkshire Hospital Monday-Saturday, by replacing route 19 to/from Lower Early.

In addition, changes to the other services include:

- Pink 23 and Pink 24 have been joined to produce circular routes that link Caversham Park and Emmer Green - something that was highly requested in the consultation process to allow residents from either area easier access to Doctor's surgeries and schools.
- Pink 25 will remain unchanged, including maintaining the faster 'main road' link along Peppard Road, with some minor timetable changes.
- Pink 27 and Pink 29 will become circular providing more direct journeys between Reading, Caversham Centre and Lower Caversham - with route 27 operating anti-clockwise and route 29 clockwise.

These changes were implemented as part of Reading Buses timetable change on Monday 19th February. Full details of the changes for each route are detailed on the Reading Buses' website.

It is important to note that whilst it has been great to see the strength of support for the Caversham bus services, Reading Buses cannot hide from the fact that these services are in decline and require cost savings and increased customer numbers to secure their long-term future.

The company asks that all those who have been active in feeding back and wanting to keep the buses as they are now help to spread the word about the changes, and support these services by using them.

The revised plans make a marked reduction in cost saving, so only an increase in customers will help secure the long-term future of the bus routes in Caversham. I would observe that if everyone who responded to the consultation were to use the bus regularly, this would be easily achieved!

3. Councillor Duveen to ask the Leader of the Council: Accessing the Council Tax Support Scheme

I am sure I am not the only councillor to receive a query from residents about accessing the Council Tax Support Scheme. It seems daft that a scheme which is there to support low paid people can only be accessed online. The very people it aims to help must include a large number of residents who do not have a PC at home, are not computer literate, and are not connected to the web. When I contacted the Council I was told that anyone wanting to claim Council Tax Support should go to Citizens Advice or the Welfare Rights Unit and ask for somebody to access the online system whilst they were present.

It seems deeply troubling that, far from 'narrowing the gap', we as a Council are putting up barriers to make it more difficult for some of our poorest residents to access benefits to which they are entitled. Citizens cannot even come in to the Civic Centre and do it face to face over the counter. Why is the Council making it so difficult for residents to claim this benefit ?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council):

It is now nearly 7 years since the Council moved to online applications for both Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support. I am surprised Cllr Duveen is not aware that online applications are now the normal application route for nearly all types of welfare benefits. Very few organisations now use paper applications.

The move to online applications happened in April 2011, when Cllr Duveen formed part of the Administration. It was in line with other local authorities who followed guidance issued by the Government's Department of Work and Pensions to help mitigate fraud at the point of application. Online applications validate data entered against a set of risks in relation to levels of evidence needed to support the claim. The smaller the risk, the less additional documentation, original documents or evidence needs to be submitted.

Of course, I appreciate that not everyone has access to or is able to use online forms and a great deal of work goes into ensuring residents have the facilities and relevant skills to access online forms.

In this building for example we provide online terminals in reception that are linked to the Council Tax Support application. Staff support is available to help people begin the online application process where they need it.

On December 17, the Government's Universal Credit was rolled out in Reading. This benefit also has to be claimed online. The Council has put in place extra support to help customers with the application process.

Additionally the Council provides support for residents to get online at libraries and a range of other community venues, as well as training and support at job clubs and at New Directions. We publish the 'Where to Get Online' leaflet, which lists public internet access points and directs residents to further support and training.

I would also emphasise that exceptions are of course made where residents have a disability which prevent them from accessing online services. Where that is the case we will work with the resident on a one to one basis should this be needed. Where it is necessary, paper forms are given to people.

Finally, I again need to remind Cllr Duveen of the Government funding cuts this Council has faced since 2010, totalling £58 million over a decade, and which began under the Coalition Government. The Council is having to look at every single area to reduce its costs. A move away from paper applications and to online applications form part of the shift to encourage residents to use online services wherever possible. This of course reduces transaction costs by helps reduce the costs of scanning, indexing, storing, photocopying and printing documents.

Online applications will also assist with Data Protection under the new General Data Protection Regulations which go live being introduced in May of this year.

4. Councillor Duveen to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods:
Missed Bin Collections

Could the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods explain the dramatic rise in missed grey bin collections last year. They increased by 114% in 2016-17. It seems extraordinary that 1,234 bin collections were missed that year. Missed red bin collections were also up by 62% in the same year to 965.

Could she also tell us how many missed bin collections have been reported so far this year ?

REPLY by Councillor Terry (Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods).

The numbers of missed bins by year are shown below:

	2016		2017		2018	
	Domestic	Recycling	Domestic	Recycling	Domestic	Recycling
January	51	77	92	71	134	87
February	43	44	195	178		
March	60	41	205	162		
April	65	45	151	83		
May	47	40	116	80		
June	93	93	134	108		
July	123	141	106	50		
August	91	73	62	50		
September	56	48	54	56		
October	56	39	48	46		
November	65	44	65	54		
December	160	46	42	24		
	910	731	1270	962		
Total	1641		2232			
% of total collected (7 million)	0.023%		0.031%			

Figure 1

The number of bins collected by the waste operations service is continually increasing year on year as the number of properties grows. There are currently 67,800 properties which receive a weekly or fortnightly domestic waste collection, 16,000 properties which receive a green waste collection and 800 businesses which have their waste collected on at least a weekly basis.

This equates to a total of 8.55 million bin lifts per year, 7 million of which were for grey and red domestic bins. The percentage of missed grey and red bins per year as part of the total collected is shown in Figure 1 above,

ie. in 2016 0.023% of bins were reported as missed and in 2017 0.031%.

Collection crews always try to collect all the bins which are presented as required by the Waste Collection Service Standard which was introduced in February 2017.

Crews get to know their rounds and know when a bin has not been presented and ensure that non-presented bins are recorded to allow the customer call centre to inform residents who

call to report a missed bin that it was not presented. However, with the number of bins each round collects per day it is inevitable that some bins may be missed by mistake.

Current operating procedures require that crews return and collect genuinely missed bins the same or following day. Crews will not return to bins which were not presented but reported as missing.

The introduction of the collection service standard in February 2017 requires that bins are presented at the property curtilage by 7am on the day of collection as well as requiring the right material to be put in the right bin.

Contaminated red bins will not be collected and are noted by the crew, for a follow-up visit by the waste minimisation staff. Grey bins whose lids are not closed due to excess waste will not be collected and are again reported. Similarly, domestic side waste will not be taken, however recycling side waste will be collected.

The number of missed bin reports for 2017, as shown in Figure 1 show a clear increase in February and March immediately after the new service standard was introduced, the figures then reduce to previous levels.

5. Councillor Steele to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:
Pot Holes on the Borough's Roads

In 2013 the Council received 76 claims amounting to a total of £95,605 for damage caused to vehicles as a result of pot holes in the Borough's roads.

In 2014 there were 22 claims and in 2015 there was a further fall in the numbers of claims as there were 17.

How many claims and what amounts have been paid to settle claims for damages in the years 2016 and 2017 ?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport).

I thank Cllr Steele for his question.

The Council received 22 claims for compensation associated with vehicles damaged from potholes within the Public Highway network during 2016. One claim settlement with compensation of £157.50 was paid out.

The Council received 35 claims for compensation associated with vehicles damaged from potholes within the Public Highway network during 2017. To date no compensation has been paid out resulting from these claims.

The Council operates a robust highway safety inspection regime and actions repairs to all potholes that meet the Council's current investigatory levels in line with accepted practice.

The Council has also fully invested the Pothole Action Fund Grant we received in successive Pothole Repair Plans over the last 4 years, which has enabled potholes of a lesser depth than the Council's current investigatory criteria to be repaired.

6. Councillor Steele to ask the Leader of the Council:
Staff Appraisals

In the update of the Borough's Strategic Risk Register given to the Audit and Governance Committee meeting on the 25th January 2018 and I quote. "Ensure that managers are carrying out 1:1's appraisals and team meetings at a local level" Also stated and again I quote "Chief Executive has issued clear instructions that appraisals must be completed by March 2018"

The Chief Executive acknowledged that a long overdue cultural change was needed. Can the Leader of the Council give an estimate as to what percentage of the Council staff have received their annual appraisal as of Friday 16th February and can the Leader of the Council also re-confirm that all staff will receive a 1:1 appraisal by the end of March 2018 as stated in January's Audit and Governance meeting ?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council).

As at 16th February 2018, the following percentage of staff have had an appraisal in the last 14 months. This 14 month timescale is used to allow for the slight time delay caused by the senior officer approval and data entry process. It should be noted that this figure is the number recorded centrally by HR and it is likely that there are a number of appraisals that have been completed but are yet to be documented, countersigned or sent to HR for recording.

Council - 79.73%

CSS - 69.16%

DENS - 77.87%

DACHS - 81.35%

DCEEHS - 93.67%

These figures represent a significant increase on the figure of under 50% recorded completed appraisals at April 2017.

Outstanding appraisals are expected to have been completed by the end of March.

7. Councillor O'Connell to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods:
Fly Tipping

Could the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods update us on the number of fly-tipping incidents reported to the Council in 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 so far, and the cost of clearing them up ?

REPLY by Councillor Terry (Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods).

The number and cost of clearing fly-tips for the period requested is shown in Figure 1 below.

Year	Reports	Cost of Clearance
2014 - 2015	2521	£125,174
2015 - 2016	2214	£117,253
2016 - 2017	3066	£136,621
2017 -2018	(1st April - 31st Dec) - 2119	£89,805

The increase in fly-tipping reports is a worrying national trend which all Councils are struggling to address with reduced budgets. Councils, such as the Re3 partners and West Berkshire have been forced to introduce access restrictions and charges to deposit waste at Household Waste Recycling Centres and this may reflect in an increase in fly-tipping reports.

In a previous answer I gave some figures which compared the scale of the fly-tipping numbers in Reading with Southampton and Milton Keynes, who had 8,100 and 4,282 fly-tips in 2015/16 respectively. However, neighbouring councils are also seeing an increase in the number of fly-tips. Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council had 3025 fly-tips in 2015/16 and 4499 in 2016/17, an increase of 32%.

The Council has demonstrated its commitment to addressing this environmental blight by introducing 2 dedicated Environmental Enforcement Officers. Since their introduction in April 2017 they have issued 294 Fixed Penalty Notices for fly-tipping compared to a total of 12 in 2016/17.

The Council will continue to devote the available resource to investigating and prosecuting fly-tippers and to investigate alternative ways of addressing this problem.

8. Councillor Hoskin to ask the Leader of the Council:
Council Tax

When the Council Tax was introduced by the Major government it was recognised that some Councils would collect more tax than other for the same Council tax rates as they may have more properties in higher bands than other councils. What is now called Revenue Support Grant was introduced to address this problem as well as differing levels of need. This has now been almost abolished for Reading. Could the Leader please inform the Council what the average household Council Tax paid is in the Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire Council areas, including Parish Council precepts? Would she also be able give the Council figures on the average level of Council Tax raised per head of population for each of the three areas?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock (Leader of the Council).

As Councillor Hoskin rightly says, Council Tax was introduced 25 years ago in 1993/94 to replace the Community Charge (so called "Poll Tax"). In both systems and subsequently there has been an assessment of needs and resources available to each local authority to determine the amount of government grant. The present needs assessment was last done several years ago, and with changing needs over time we can't be sure it reflects current relative needs of authorities. A revised needs assessment is not due to be completed until 2020/21 (which will

decide how much business rates authorities like Reading get to retain). As you know we are still waiting for any clarity from the Government about Business Rate retention.

As not all authorities have yet set final taxes for 2018/19, the comparative averages have been prepared using current year (2017/18) information and other data. The table below shows the various comparative information requested for the 3 authorities:

2017/18 RBC calculations	Reading	Wokingham	West Berkshire
Band D Tax (With parishes where relevant)	1,490.56	1,417.58	1,442.44
Total tax raised towards budget (£m)	80.0	95.6	92.4
Average Tax per (chargeable) dwelling (£)	1,171	1,433	1,421
Tax per head of population (£)	488	537	536

Although all authorities raise tax on about the same number of dwellings, last year our neighbours raise much more tax overall because their properties are in higher council tax bands (Band D on average rather than Band C). The numbers are in the following table and show clearly that in Reading nearly 69% of properties are Band C or below and only 31% in D and above. In Wokingham only 23% are in Band C and below and 77% in Band D and above. In W.Berks 42% are Band C and below and 58% are Band D and above.

Dwellings shown on the Valuation List in each Band	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H	TOTAL
Taken from Line 4 CTB1 form Number of chargeable dwellings on 2 October 2017									
Reading	6,012	13,676	27,874	10,341	5,330	3,201	1,824	79	68,337
Percentage by band	8.8%	20.0%	40.8%	15.1%	7.8%	4.7%	2.7%	0.1%	
Wokingham	1,750	3,477	9,968	18,299	14,966	9,850	6,208	499	65,017
Percentage by band	2.7%	5.3%	15.3%	28.1%	23.0%	15.1%	9.5%	0.8%	
West Berkshire	2,314	6,327	19,166	16,842	10,225	6,664	4,466	702	66,706
Percentage by band	3.5%	9.5%	28.7%	25.2%	15.3%	10.0%	6.7%	1.1%	

**9. Councillor Hopper to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:
CIL Contributions**

At the Policy Committee meeting of 15th January this year, in answer to a question from Councillor White, it was confirmed that around £675,000 of CIL contributions had been earmarked for allocation "locally" in accordance with RBC's Community Infrastructure Levy - Draft Spend Protocol.

It was also stated in that answer that "Given the need to align the proposed capital programme alongside the Council's revenue budget, a decision on CIL and how best to use the entire contribution must wait until [after February Policy Committee meeting]."

In the Draft Spend Protocol Reading's CIL contributions are divided into four sub-regions; North, South, East and West. Could the Lead Councillor please provide a breakdown by area to show how it is proposed that the sum of over £675,000 will be divided across the town ?

Given that the majority of CIL liable contributions are generated in the Town Centre wards but the impact of increased traffic, pressure on our open spaces and pressure on public services more widely is felt right across the town, will the Lead Councillor agree with me that it would be more equitable if consideration was given to a town wide distribution of part of the available sum of money ?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport).

I thank Cllr Hopper for his question.

In total £2,172m was received from CIL up to March 2017 and in year to date a further total of £3,268k has been received. 15% of receipts should be spent in the 'relevant local area'. This means that a total of £816k (£326k and £490k respectively) will be available for allocation.

I and colleagues in the Administration are still considering options for deploying these local contributions, and a report will be brought forward with our recommendations by the July 2018 Policy Committee.

Further CIL receipts are anticipated by the end of the financial year and proposed allocations will also be subject to public consultation.

10. Councillor Stanford-Beale to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:
Coordinating Roadworks with Private Contractors

Reading is a thriving town with a large population, good schools, large employers and good transport links.

Unfortunately in recent months, we have had serious congestion which has resulted in the town grinding to a halt. Last week was the start to the second half of the spring term, but it did not start well with Caversham suffering serious delays resulting in delays for people to get to work and children getting to school. Reading Buses suffered serious delays to services and had to deploy additional buses and drivers to try to keep passengers moving.

Some of the delays were due to a private contractor doing works on George Street, a broken down lorry, and Thames Water having an emergency repair. All of these were on top of the Cow Lane works which are a major civil engineering project which will give long term benefits to the town.

Can the Lead Councillor explain what powers the council has to try to co-ordinate Road works with private contractors and utility companies, and can the council "fine" the utilities companies for digging holes, causing delays and failing to pro-actively maintain their networks?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport).

I thank Cllr Stanford-Beale for her question.

We understand and sympathise with the disruption that can be caused as a result of works on the public highway. It affects us all, but it is important to remember that the public highway is a transportation route for goods and services not only above ground but also underground with essential utility services such as gas, water, sewerage, and communications.

Street works carried out by public utilities are undertaken by virtue of a statutory right or licence and do not need the prior consent of the Highway Authority - which as you know is Reading BC.

Local authorities do have certain powers to prevent roads from being dug up following resurfacing, can propose which route a new utility service street works should follow and propose some timing restrictions. However, these will all be subject to the technical feasibility of the request and consideration of the impact that such requests can have on the overall duration of the works.

Officers work closely with utility providers to assist with the planning of works, and our officers advise on and encourage traffic management and working methods to minimise their impact. It is inevitable that urgent works will arise which also need to be accommodated for matters of public safety or loss of a supply.

There is currently a national debate about whether authorities should have new powers to control works on the highway, which include proposals around 'lane rental' schemes. At this time, however, highway authorities have limited powers regarding the precise 'control' of works on the public highway network.

To emphasise the point, highway authorities do not have the power to prevent undertakers from carrying out works on the public Highway.