

AGENDA ITEM 6

QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

1. Councillor Pearce to ask the Lead Councillor for Health:  
Health Services in South Reading

It was reported last year that the South Reading CCG saw a rapid increase in the number of patients registered at GP surgeries, up from 129,945 to 144,066 or over 10%. With the South Reading CCG still the most underfunded in the whole of the UK, can the Lead Councillor update us with what measures are being taken to help improve health services in South Reading ?

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

NHS colleagues confirm that in 2017/18 South Reading was the lowest funded Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) area in the country. In 2018/19 the new Berkshire West CCG which covers Reading will be the second lowest funded CCG in the country, with Oxfordshire being the lowest. Berkshire West CCG will also be £25m below its target allocation based on national funding formula. So not only does Reading lose out on a national funding formula that doesn't properly take into account the health deprivation challenges Reading faces but we are even funded considerably below even that.

It is my view that Reading's patients and NHS staff are particularly let down by government underfunding. Without action to save money and cut services our local NHS planning area of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire West faced a funding shortfall of just under half a billion pounds (£495,176) by 2020. Staffing shortages are another major concern. The impacts of shambolic Brexit negotiations are now being strongly felt across the NHS. In the 12 months following the referendum nearly 10,000 European Economic Area national quit the NHS, up 22% on the previous year, whilst recruitment has plummeted. In our NHS planning area of Oxfordshire, Bucks and Berkshire West there over 1,000 nursing post vacancies.

It is a tremendous credit to the dedication and hard work of local NHS staff that local NHS services perform relatively well compared to the country as a whole. Despite the Royal Berkshire Hospital (RBH) recording its worst A&E waiting times ever, nearly a fifth of patients waited more than four hours for treatment last winter the RBH is rated "Outstanding" by the CQC and Berkshire Healthcare NHS Trust "Good". These are tremendous achievements in such difficult circumstances and I am sure the whole council joins me in congratulating local NHS staff.

This council takes very seriously its role in working closely with the NHS in order to support local services to our residents. Working together and with the voluntary sector we are helping to keep people well and out of hospital and for the last two full years, Berkshire West has been in the top 4% in the country for emergency admissions to hospital.

There have also been innovative approaches to improving clinical care and patient experience across a range of specialties and conditions. For people with diabetes a consultant led community diabetes service has been established, supported by 4 nurse specialists and provided more training for GPs and patients themselves in how to manage their condition; access to specialist Stroke Care has been improved which increases people's chances of a successful recovery, we have a nationally recognised Talking Therapies service and the waiting times for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services has also significantly reduced.

There are major problems in Reading with increased demand for GP services but significant problems with the recruitment and retention of staff. The NHS CCGs have been working with practices to bring new workers into the primary care team including nurse practitioners, paramedics, pharmacists and physician associates. In the future it is planned to create larger practices that are not only better equipped but have modern premises where GPs can work together to improve the range and quality of services for people in Reading.

In particular there is work to support a business case for new and expanded premises in the Whitley and there have already been extensions to existing GP premises to accommodate additional patients.

There is much to be proud of. However, the local NHS does face the prospect of a diminishing financial allocation beyond 2018/19, rising demand from the increase in the local population and the number of people living with multiple complex conditions and a shortfall in workforce. Local partners, including our council, will continue to work together to address these challenges by increasing the emphasis on prevention, redesigning services and maximising the opportunities from digital technology.

2. Councillor Livingston to ask the Leader of the Council:  
Implementation of Universal Credit

Could the Leader update me on the latest situation regarding the implementation of Universal Credit.

Can she confirm that after all the delays which indicated it would not be introduced until 2022 that it is has now been completed, as rescheduled at the end of 2017 ?

Can she also say what impact it has had on families on the lowest incomes in Reading ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Lovelock Leader of the Council.

Can I thank Cllr. Livingston for her persistent interest in the long running saga of the Conservative (and the Lib-Dem/Tory Government from 2010) Government's much vaunted Universal Credit. Having said it would be rolled out in 2022 in Reading the Government suddenly speeded up the process - I guess even this government realised that 12 years for a "flag-ship" policy was ridiculous.

So, as Cllr Livingston rightly says the Council was suddenly told that Full Service Universal Credit (UC) was to be rolled out in two stages in Reading according to a claimants post code. The first stage was from 6<sup>th</sup> December 2017 which covered most of Reading then the remaining areas followed on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2018. Universal Credit Full Service is now live in the whole of the borough for any new claims or for anyone claiming a current benefit where there is a change in their circumstances. For some people there are constant changes in circumstances due to the uncertainty which often surrounds low paid employment, including variable hours.

The Council has dedicated officers in place within the Housing Service who are helping UC claimants with the provision of assisted digital support which can help with the making of a UC claim or the ongoing maintaining of a claim.

The biggest impact for any UC claimant is the minimum 5 week waiting period for their first payment. The Council offers assistance to UC claimants through Personal Budgeting Support

to help them through that 5 week wait and further assistance is also provided to help claimants to organise an advanced payment, prepare for monthly budgeting and to obtain a food parcel referral where necessary. Some residents are struggling with the long wait for an assessment of their ability to work because of disability and others are subjected to the unfair bedroom tax. Obviously it is still early days, but the situation will be monitored.

Training was run by the DWP for RBC staff and took place the week commencing 9<sup>th</sup> October 2017 and further bespoke training and support has been given to teams across the Council by Housing's Welfare Reform Team.

I would add that this whole saga, which began with Iain Duncan Smith's ideological onslaught on the poorest in society has descended into a shambles nearly 8 years later and we have yet to see the full impact. The Conservatives and Liberal Democrats should be ashamed that in our town people are needing food parcels in affluent Reading as a direct result of government policy - so much for the Prime Minister's "more equal Britain".

3. Councillor McGonigle to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:  
Engine Idling Policy

We welcome the Engine-idling Champion Campaign but would like to see `no idling` notices outside all schools and hospitals across the Borough. Can we know when this may be put into action ?

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

I thank Cllr McGonigle for her question.

Reading's Borough Council's No Idling Campaign is the next step in the Council's plans to cut vehicle emissions from the unnecessary idling of engines.

A sign, designed by a pupil at St Johns Primary School following a Borough wide competition, has been displayed at known idling hotspots such as outside Reading Station, on Garrard Street and Friar Street and at selected primary schools as listed below. All the primary schools in Reading have been offered a sign(s) to display.

Each of the schools listed below has requested and been assigned a number of signs to go in the locations identified as being the problem:

- Wilson Primary School
- Coley Primary School
- Caversham Primary School
- Meadow Park Academy
- EP Collier Primary School
- Thameside Primary School
- St Johns Primary School

It is hoped that further requests will be received from additional schools to display signs, and actions to encourage wider engagement are underway.

Headteachers and Governing Bodies should remember that they have a responsibility to the wider community, and that all schools should have up-to-date travel plans that recognise the

need to reduce the car-based school run and promote the greater use of public transport, cycling and walking.

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

Arthur Hill Swimming Baths

At the end of 2016, Labour Councillors took the sad decision to close the Arthur Hill swimming baths, and later voted against a proposal to allow the local community to run the pool. The resolution closing the pool made clear that the value of any capital receipt to the Council from disposing of the current Arthur Hill Pool site would be used to contribute to the cost of a new pool at Palmer Park Stadium. The motion stated that a sum equivalent to the capital receipt would be invested in new replacement swimming facilities. With the sale of the site imminent, can the Lead Councillor confirm that the resolution still stands, and all money raised from the sale of the Arthur Hill site will be invested in new, replacement swimming facilities ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Hacker Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services.

Thank you Councillor Williams.

And to confirm there is no change in the position as agreed at the Council meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> October 2016, namely:

**'That a sum equivalent to the capital receipt arising from the disposal of the site is invested in new replacement swimming facilities.'**

I am also pleased to inform Councillor Williams, and all Councillors present, that tomorrow we will be formally initiated the leisure procurement by advertising the opportunity in the Official Journal of the European Union. This complex procurement will take over a year to complete followed by a mobilisation period for the successful leisure operator prior to commencing management of our facilities in Autumn 2019.

5. Councillor Pearce to ask the Lead Councillor for Education:

John Madejski Academy

Can the Lead Councillor for Education update us on the rumoured possibility that the John Madejski Academy in South Reading is considering the restructure and redundancy programme that would lead to the sixth form being "mothballed" ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Jones Lead Councillor for Education.

The John Madejski Academy is managed by the White Horse Federation Trust, a multi academy trust based in Swindon.

It has recently emerged that the trust has been considering a range of options to reduce costs. These include "mothballing" the sixth form and ending the academy's elite sporting programme - a notable strength of the school which has been singled out for praise by Ofsted. Over the last few months, they have been working to plan the very best future for the school.

Despite the serious financial situation facing the academy, the Trust has confirmed that, with support from the government, JMA is going to be able to continue to offer education from 11 through to 18.

Their ambition is to ensure that over the coming months and years, they build on the good recent improvements to enable students to thrive from 11-16. They are also committed to work on enhancing the range of choices for students from 16 to 18 to study a range of academic, vocational, and sport-based education.

The Trust has confirmed its view that JMA's role in the local community is of vital importance.

Any significant change to provision in the future will involve wide consultation with all stakeholders and, as a Council, we will clearly be central to these consultations due to our statutory responsibilities for pupil place planning.

6. Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:  
East Reading MRT

The Lead Councillor for the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport recently voted to refuse the University of Reading's planning application 172045 because the proposal would result in the harmful loss of sixty-eight mature trees. Can the Lead Councillor confirm how many trees will be lost due to the proposed East Reading Mass Rapid Transit scheme ?

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

I thank Cllr White for his question.

As he well knows the East Reading Mass Rapid Transit scheme is a proposed public transport, pedestrian and cycle route and is a key element of the wider sustainable transport strategy for Reading and the A329 corridor, and is adopted policy of both Reading and Wokingham Borough Councils.

The scheme will provide substantial benefits to Reading and the wider area by providing attractive and sustainable public transport alternatives to the private car. The MRT link will help to manage the significant levels of development planned to provide jobs and homes for residents in Reading, Wokingham and the corridor to Bracknell.

The original planning application for the scheme detailed the removal of 86 trees out of a total of 193 trees within the application site. The majority of trees proposed for removal are category B or C (medium to low quality), with all other trees in the area retained and protected.

However, a revised scheme is currently being finalised following feedback received during the formal consultation undertaken as part of the statutory planning process. The precise details of the revised scheme, including the number of trees that will need to be removed and the number of new trees that will be planted, are currently being finalised alongside a full package of mitigation measures relating to landscaping, ecology and flood storage.

When the details have been finalised the updated planning application documentation will be made available on the Planning Portal section of the Council's website, and will be considered by the Planning Applications Committee in due course.