

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	19 NOVEMBER 2014	AGENDA ITEM:	11
TITLE:	LOVE CLEAN READING IN NEIGHBOURHOODS		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR LIZ TERRY	PORTFOLIO:	NEIGHBOURHOODS
SERVICE:	TRANSPORTATION AND STREETCARE	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Members on the results of the Love Clean Reading (LCR) initiative, the feedback received, lessons learnt and to make recommendations about how they may inform the reshaping of the Transportation and Streetcare services and the Neighbourhood Agenda.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the report is noted.
- 2.2 That regular update reports are brought to the Committee on the progress of Love Clean Reading initiatives within the emerging Neighbourhood and Waste Minimisation works programmes.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Corporate Plan states that the Council will: 'Protect and manage the cleanliness and safety of the streets, open spaces and the green environment'.
- 3.2 Another key Council priority is 'To keep Reading clean with a crack down on fly tipping and graffiti'.

3.3 The Administration has identified the following key priorities:

- ‘Enhance the vision for Reading which takes account of the needs and aspirations of all residents’.
- ‘Continue to invest in front line street care services but work smarter and more efficiently by harnessing new technology’.
- ‘Review and enhance the grass cutting regime and find ways to improve the service, particularly during the spring and early summer’.

4. THE PROPOSAL

In 2013 the Lead Member for Neighbourhoods identified a need to carry out a deep cleaning and vegetation clearance programme for certain areas of highway and housing land, in response to concerns raised by residents and the wider community. The Love Clean Reading initiative carried out deep cleans in 134 streets and areas of open space throughout the Borough using a combination of in house staff, agency labour and sub-contractors and removed 65 tonnes of waste.

The preliminary list of roads, footpaths and carriageways identified by Members and Officers is shown in Appendix A.

1. The Love Clean Reading initiative had 4 works stages:

- Pre-inspection. The roads and alleyways listed in Appendix A were inspected and cross referenced with the results of EVA’s, Cleansing, Housing, Safer Reading and Highways inspections. The inspections identified particular problems, such as overhanging trees or hedges, overgrown vegetation to be cleared, access issues and estimated the resource needed to carry out the work. The inspection included pre-condition photographs to allow a before and after comparison.
- Appendix A was then refined into a works schedule.
- The works programme began with an extra highways grass cut in October and November 2013 and the main clearance works began in early January and were completed by the end of July 2014.
- Post works inspections were carried out and “after” photographs were taken.

2. The Love Clean Reading initiative concentrated on the following areas of concern: Detritus, weed growth, overhanging hedges and trees, grass cutting, dog fouling, fly tipping, street furniture cleaning and graffiti removal.

3. Communication Strategy

The Love Clean Reading initiative was supported by a communications strategy which used the following methods:

- Boroughwide via the RBC website, Twitter and Facebook. The My Reading page of the website was updated to include streets covered by the Clean and Tidy initiative. A weekly progress update was posted on the web.
- A project launch was carried out on the Canal towpath at Blakes Lock.

- Love Clean Reading branded notices were put up in advance of the works to advise residents.
- A post work pre-paid feedback card (as shown in Appendix B) was given to all residents in the streets that were cleaned asking their opinion of the works and comments.

4. Love Clean Reading results and recommendations.

The Love Clean Reading initiative was highly successful, both from a perspective of results on the ground but also in the positive customer feedback received via post and on site during the works. It achieved its aim of restoring areas of poor environmental quality to a high standard of quality and safety as well as improving the public perception of an area and Neighbourhood services in general.

443 pre-paid response cards were returned by residents following the deep cleaning works. We asked for the following feedback, scored on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very poor, 5 being excellent, the results of which are shown below:

Standard of cleanliness after visit. 98% of responses were good or above.
 Overall impression/quality of work. 93% of responses were good or above.
 Would you like an annual deep clean? 98% of responses were yes.

A selection of the comments made on the cards is as follows:

“Very pleasant to look out also to walk. A cleaned street.Thank you.”
 “Needs to be more than once a year! Very, very pleased to see work done as the streets were in a state!! More please”.
 “Ask Thames Water to clear the drains at the same time. Ask for a volunteer street champion to alert you of specific issue”.
 “Good job well done the estate now reminds of how it used to be years ago. Thank you”

Love Clean Reading also threw a up a number of challenges for the emerging Neighbourhood Services, namely to prevent environmental deterioration in the first place and to design a schedule of deep cleaning for the Borough which is embedded within the normal business of the Service which is preventive rather than reactive.

1. Timing. The timing deep cleaning works has a significant effect on its efficiency and efficacy. The Love Clean Reading initiative works took place during the main spring growth flush when resources were stretched and in future we would look to schedule works in the autumn and winter to fit with the annual shrub maintenance works and would scale them back during March to September whilst all hands are to the pump. Tree works would be restricted to the winter months again to fit with the annual highways tree maintenance works.

Recommendation 1. Timing of deep cleaning works will reviewed and prioritised outside the grass cutting season.

2. Assessment and prioritisation. The works produced significant improvements in all the roads and drew favourable comments from residents. However, it is

clear that the resources required to carry out a deep clean in all highway areas on an annual basis is unsustainable under current budget restrictions and that a system of assessment and prioritisation will be developed to target the areas of most need whilst maintaining a baseline standard in all areas.

Recommendation 2: An assessment system will be introduced via the Neighbourhood Officers identifying target areas in their patches and coordinating the relevant works to address them.

3. Resources. The Love Clean Reading programme worked best when a settled, dedicated team of staff carried out the work with the input of specialists or additional labour as required or when it became available.

Recommendation 3: Existing resources will be re-evaluated with a view to creating a dedicated deep cleaning team, working with the Neighbourhood Officers. The possibility of dedicating a supervisor to Love Clean Reading will be investigated.

4. Grass cutting -One area of particular concern is highways grass cutting, the frequency of which has been gradually reduced in response to budget pressures and is currently based on 6 cuts a year. This has resulted in a build-up of grass cuttings on footpath back-lines, channels and in gullies, compounding the build-up of detritus and outstripping the capacity of current resources to clear it. One extra cut was carried out this year, 6 cuts are planned for 2014/15 and a service review will be carried out in order to increase the number of grass cuts within existing budgets.

Recommendation 4: The number of grass cuts is increased to a minimum of 8 with the aim of restoring it to 10 in the future.

5. Verge siding (edging). Love Clean Reading proved that a tidy verge is a major factor in the perception of a quality environment and it was a significant contributor to the success of the initiative.
It must be carried out on a regular basis to prevent degradation of footways and channels which resultS in additional costs.

Recommendation 5: Verge siding is carried out on a regular basis, ideally on a 3 yearly cycle.

6. Parked Cars. Love Clean Reading proved that to achieve a thorough deep clean in areas with on street parking, vehicles must be removed. This has been considered previously, employing a temporary traffic order to suspend parking, but it has never been tried in Reading and is rare nationally. The cleaning crews were regularly approached during the works by residents offering to move their cars because they could see the benefits and wanted the street cleaned more effectively. Clear streets will also allow highways to carry out repairs and inspections, empty gulleys, repair street lights and renew lining

Recommendation 6. That a Neighbourhood Engagement Strategy is created that will improve communications and target specific neighbourhood and environmental maintenance such as the removal of

cars by residents to allow works. A trial area for voluntary removal of cars should be identified and a trial set up as soon as possible.

7. Overhanging vegetation. The majority of residents cut back their hedges and trees away from the highway, but overhanging vegetation is an ongoing problem for all users. Pruning privately owned vegetation is beyond the Council's resources and is currently managed under the provisions of the Highways Act via letters to residents which ask them to prune their vegetation away from the highway. These letters are effective, but communications channels must be improved to encourage residents to carry out the work before it becomes a problem and what services the Council can offer to help residents, such as green waste recycling collection bags, HMRC opening times and composting advice.

Recommendation 8: Information about pruning private vegetation should be a target of the Neighbourhood Engagement Strategy (see Recommendation 7).

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 To promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 Posters, fliers and the Council web site were used to inform residents of the Clean and Tidy works.
- 6.2 Residents feedback surveys were be carried out as part of the Clean and Tidy.
- 6.3 Statutory consultation will be carried out in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Council has powers under Section 151 of the Highways Act 1980 to require property owners to cut vegetation back to their boundary and to a height of 2.75m over a footway and 5.5m over a carriageway.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 In addition to the Human Rights Act 1998 the Council is required to comply with the Equalities Act 2010. Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to:-
 - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.2 An equality impact assessment has not been carried out at this stage.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Clean and Tidy will be funded from existing budgets and the identified additional funding.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.