

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE
16 MARCH 2016

Present: Councillor Kelly Edwards (Chair);
Councillors Debs Absolom, Davies, Dennis, Gittings, Grashoff, James,
Lawrence, Livingston, Robinson, Steele, Terry, Tickner and Josh
Williams.

19. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of 18 November 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

20. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meetings were submitted:

- Community Safety Partnership – 14 October 2015.

Resolved - That the Minutes be received.

21. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

A Question on the following matter was submitted, and answered by the Lead Councillor:

Questioner	Subject
Councillor J Williams	Private Rented Sector

(The full text of the question and reply was made available on the Reading Borough Council website.)

22. READING FESTIVAL

James Crosbie, Regulatory Services Manager, gave a presentation on the 2015 Reading Festival.

In the build up to the Festival safety advisory groups and event specific meetings had been held along with a table top exercise for all services and partners and a residents on-site meeting. The campsite had been slightly delayed in opening due to a short period of heavy rain but 40,000 people were on-site by midday on Thursday 27 August 2015. Following the heavy rain emergency planning had liaised with Festival Republic to manage the river levels to improve drainage on the site.

On Thursday 27 August 2015, high pedestrian footfall under Cow Lane bridges had resulted in some safety concerns. Festival goers had moved through in high numbers to access Portman Road. When a restriction on the removal of trolleys from the supermarket was enforced, the flow had started to abate and on Friday 28 August 2015 there had been a safe flow of traffic and pedestrians.

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More day tickets had been sold for 2015 and this had had an impact on the increased exit numbers at the end of each day and therefore there were traffic pressures, especially with pick up and drop offs. There were no major issues on Saturday 29 August 2015 and when issues had been identified they were picked up and communicated quickly. The Safety Advisory Group had met twice during the day. There had been significant traffic disruption on Monday 31 August 2015.

A new system had been trialled which had enabled noise consultants to identify specific frequencies which had caused an issue and change these specific frequencies rather than just dropping the overall volume and this had proved to be very effective. 19 individuals had complained about music noise. Updates had been posted on the website before and during the Festival and there had been no negative feedback.

Reading buses recorded over 12,000 customers visiting the town centre and the shuttle which ran between Station North and Rivermead recorded over 34,000 customers over 6 days. Due to the changes to the site's Orange Gate, the number of day tickets and the rail strike, there were different pedestrian and road use dynamic than in previous years which would need to be considered for 2016. Heavy rain over the weekend and high footfall over a number of days led to mud being deposited on the footpaths. This was resolved by additional mechanical sweeping.

135 food traders had been inspected and 74% of traders had received the highest food hygiene rating. At future festivals officers would be working to improve noise at work exposure for staff and as part of the debrief process had made recommendations to Festival Republic to possibly reconfigure the layout of bars and provide education on using ear protection. All street traders had been inspected and there had been an increase in the number of illegal street traders compared to previous years.

The 2015 festival had included an increased use of paramedic and first responder foot patrols for initial assessments of casualties, a new first aid facility in the arena and an onsite x-ray facility and there had been a 60% reduction in hospital referrals.

Festival Republic had taken the Festival Vision: 2025 pledge, which aimed to achieve a 50% reduction in festival-related annual greenhouse gas emissions by 2025.

Nicky Hodgson, Festival Republic, attended the meeting.

RESOLVED - That James Crosbie be thanked for his presentation.

23. CONSUMER PROTECTION IN PRACTICE

James Crosbie, Regulatory Services Manager, gave a presentation on the work of trading standards team.

James explained that Reading Festival provided local businesses with excellent opportunities to increase their revenue over a short period of time. The Council recognised this and in addition to the year round work officers did with businesses to protect young people from the dangers of alcohol and other age restricted products test purchases were carried out over the festival period. James gave an

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example of an off-licence where a 15 year old test purchaser was sold 28 units of alcohol even though ID was not presented when challenged. This led to trading standards working with licensing and the business lost their premises licence.

The supply of illegal tobacco had been a growing problem in Reading. Two shops in Reading had been checked with a sniffer dog and a second visit had found smuggled alcohol too. Both of these premises had their licences reviewed and their premises licences were revoked. The work of trading standards linked to public health objectives and the priorities to the Berkshire West Tobacco alliance vision. James reported that 40,000 cigarettes were seized from a shop on Oxford Road in February 2016 following several complaints and intelligence received from members of the public. There was also an issue with smuggled or duty diverted alcohol within Reading. The Council had been working in partnership with HMRC to ensure that the duty was recovered on the seizures. James stated that the Community Alcohol Partnership was funded by Public Health and had been very successful in raising standards of alcohol retailing in the areas of age restricted sales and smuggled alcohol.

The Council had been an early adopter of the Primary Authority Scheme, which offered businesses a one stop shop for all matters regulatory. The trading standards team were also working in partnership with the National Scams team, Action Fraud, Adult Social Care and others such as banks and housing associations to identify victims and raise awareness of scams.

Resolved - That James Crosbie be thanked for his presentation.

24. EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY UPDATE

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which provided an update on the progress of the Empty Homes Strategy and set out performance in the past two years and considered opportunities and challenges. The report set out four case studies of work on empty homes.

The report stated that the number of private homes registered by their owners as long term empty homes (LTEs) was 310 in October 2014 and 341 in November 2015. The general trend was for a reduction in LTEs as a result of sustained Council commitment, the national empty homes agenda, excellent working with Council Tax and the unquantifiable impact of housing market forces. In 2014/15, 36 high priority problematic LTEs were brought back into use, exceeding the annual target by 16. These 36 homes had generated 41 units of accommodation (not including net increases through HMO conversion).

The report stated that projections for 2015/16 had indicated that the annual target would be met, if not exceeded. In the last year, further measures of performance had been introduced. The annual target of 20 high priority LTEs per year counted only those properties where there had been a demonstrable and significant intervention by the Council that, on the balance of probability, was the main reason why each home was brought back into use. The Council was not responsible for every LTE returned back into use each year, but there were 83 further non-priority LTEs that had come back into use since April 2015 that had involved lighter touch Council inputs.

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The report set out how the total number of empty homes was estimated and provided information about the New Homes Bonus (NHB), which provided an incentive for Councils to reduce the numbers of homes that were registered as LTE. The report also provided information about the use of the Homes and Communities Agency funded 'Loan-Lease' schemes and the Flexible Home Improvement Loan Scheme.

The report stated that joint work with the Council Tax team had led to improved data confidence, sharing of intelligence on debt recovery cases and had helped numerous charge payers to get control of their Council Tax accounts by understanding their obligations.

The report stated that residents sometimes made an empty home referral because a house looked dilapidated but on investigation, alleged empty homes sometimes happened to be occupied, often by a householder who could no longer cope with their home. Empty home owners and those living in self-neglect were often 'difficult to engage'. The Private Housing Initiatives Officer contributed to a multi-disciplinary Chronic Disorganisation Project which aimed to improve service responses to complex householders. The Private Housing Initiatives Officer had provided training to housing, social care and regulatory services staff on self-neglect and squalor.

Resolved -

- (1) That the progress made in bringing empty homes back into use since April 2014, be noted;**
- (2) That 36 high priority long term empty homes had been brought back into use in 2014/15, be noted.**

25. WASTE MINIMISATION STRATEGY 2015-2020 ANNUAL UPDATE

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which updated the Committee on the progress achieved in the first year of the Waste Minimisation Strategy 2015-2020 Action Plan and to set out the work priorities for the second year of the strategy. The Waste Minimisation Strategy Action Plan was attached to the report at Appendix A, the Waste Minimisation Strategy Marketing and Communications Campaigns Update was attached to the report at Appendix B and Waste Management Guidelines for Architects, Property Developers and Managing Agents was attached to the report at Appendix C.

The report stated that the Council had adopted the Waste Minimisation Strategy 2015 - 2020 in March 2015 demonstrating its commitment to promoting waste minimisation through reuse, recycling and composting, to minimise disposal and to achieve the EU Directive target recycling rate of 50% by 2020. Reading currently sent 27.4% of its municipal waste to landfill with 72.6% being recycled, composted or sent for Energy from Waste. This was the first co-ordinated Waste Minimisation Strategy that the Council had adopted. The Action Plan set out the detailed work programme for implementing the Strategy and Year 1 had concentrated on reviewing the Council's current practices to identify improvements to be introduced in the future. In order to reach the target of 50% by 2020 the Council would be working with re3 waste partners to develop joint working and resource sharing opportunities and to explore

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the current operational and collection procedures and policies with a view to reducing the waste collected and to make savings.

The report stated that the most significant successes and progress had been made with the WEEE Take Back Scheme funding and trial, the recycling contamination trial, the food waste collection review, the bulky waste review, the flats project, on the go recycling bins and receiving a Clean Britain award.

The report stated that Reading, like most authorities, was experiencing significant growth in the number of flats which were being built or converted from offices, particularly in the town centre. It was important that developers had clear guidance about how to ensure sufficient capacity was made for waste storage and disposal and in response the 'Waste Management Guidelines for Architects, Property Developers and Managing Agents' had been produced and would be made available on the Council's planning web page. Officers would continue to advise developers and address any issues they may have but the onus would be on them to make suitable provision.

Resolved -

- (1) That the progress to date of the Waste Minimisation Strategy Action Plan be noted;
- (2) That the changes to the Waste Minimisation Action Plan be agreed;
- (3) That a second annual progress report be submitted to the March 2017 Committee meeting;
- (4) That the Head of Transport and Streetcare, in consultation with the Lead Councillor, be delegated authority to make amendments to the action plan as required;
- (5) That the Waste Management Guidelines for Architects, Property Developers and Managing Agents as shown in Appendix C to the report be adopted.

26. BULKY WASTE REVIEW

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the outcomes of the Bulky Waste review. The Waste Minimisation Strategy 2015-2020 adopted in March 2015 set out an approach for working with residents, stakeholders and partners to improve the way waste was managed with a growing population and limited resources. The review of the Bulky Waste collection service contributed to the Waste Minimisation Strategy's objectives. The aim of the Bulky Waste service review was to increase the number of items re-used and recycled and to increase patronage by developing the service to become more efficient and more accessible to customers, especially lower income families. Attached to the report at Appendix 1 was benchmarking information of other local authorities and attached to the report at Appendix 2 was the Equality Impact Assessment.

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The report stated that the Bulky Waste collection service was reviewed through process mapping, workshops with the Call Centre and the Neighbourhood Services staff. This had been supplemented by an analysis of customer feedback, emails and calls, mystery shopping and data analysis of the volumes and most frequently collected items.

The report set out the details of the changes that would be implemented to address the issues identified in the review. The proposed changes included improving the online booking facility, clarifying which items were not accepted for collection, reintroducing schedules for bulky waste collections, introducing a new charging structure, continuing to provide 25% concessions, moving estimates to the trade waste section and increasing the reuse and recycling of household items.

Resolved -

- (1) That the findings of the Bulky Waste collection service review be noted;
- (2) That the following recommendations for developing and improving the Bulky Waste collection service be approved:
 - That the online booking form be improved to facilitate online bookings and online payment;
 - That the items not accepted for collection be clarified and communicated to customers;
 - That scheduled dates for Bulky Waste collections be reintroduced;
 - That a new charging structure be introduced to charge £31 per item, £5 for each subsequent item and £10 for less than 3 working days' notice of cancellations;
 - That the preparation of estimates for larger bulky collections be moved to the Trade Waste team;
 - That the reuse rate of household items be increased by signposting customers with reusable items to local charities.

27. STREET CLEANSING POLICY

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report to update and amalgamate existing Street Cleansing Policies and Working Practices into a single Street Cleansing Policy document.

The report stated that the Council had several stand-alone Street Cleansing Policies and Working Practices and it was proposed to update and amalgamate them into a single Street Cleansing Policy document. The proposed Street Cleansing Policy was attached to the report at Appendix 1. A Service Standards Leaflet for residents had

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been produced and was attached to the report at Appendix 2. An annual review of the Street Cleansing Policy and the Service Standards Leaflet would be carried out.

Resolved - That the Street Cleansing Policy be adopted and the Service Standards Leaflet be approved.

28. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR STRATEGY 2015-2019

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which provided an overview of the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Strategy 2015-19, taking into consideration the findings of the consultation that had taken place from 25 January 2016 until 28 February 2016.

The report stated that the 2015-2019 strategy acknowledged the successful work that has been achieved during the period covered by the last strategy, examples of which were set out in the report. For the first time the strategy pulled together the cross agency and department response to a wide variety of ASB types, from fly-tipping to drug dealing through the development of six key areas:

1. Victim and witness support
2. Improving communication
3. Prevention and intervention
4. Enforcement
5. Tackling situational ASB
6. Performance Management

A draft action plan had been developed alongside the strategy.

The report set out the key findings of the consultation, which included:

- Overall there was an acknowledgment that the strategy was taking the partnership in the right direction;
- There were concerns about the impact of the mental health of both victims and perpetrators and the role this played in ASB, and the need for improved joint working with the Community Mental Health Team;
- The work in relation to victim and witness support would be challenging in some service areas;
- Desire across service areas to work more closely to improve outcomes for victims and where possible reduce costs.

Resolved -

- (1) That the outcomes of the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy consultation be noted;**
- (2) That the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy be endorsed.**

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 8.10pm).