

**HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE  
15 NOVEMBER 2017**

**Present:** Councillor James (Chair);  
Councillors Debs Absolom, Davies, Dennis, Kelly Edwards, Ennis,  
Grashoff, Hacker, McGonigle, Steele, Terry and Tickner.

**Apologies:** Councillor McDonald, O'Connell and Rose Williams.

**8. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of 5 July 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**9. PETITION REQUESTING THE REMOVAL OF COMMUNAL BINS AT AMITY STREET AND CHOLMELEY ROAD**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report informing the Committee about the receipt of a petition from some residents living in part of Amity Street and Cholmeley Road.

The petition, containing 21 signatures, read as follows:

"Petition regarding residential waste for 22-32 Amity Street/83-101 Cholmeley Road. Use of two large communal bins (1100 litre) outside 32 Amity Street is an unacceptable solution for the residents. It is unhygienic, smells terribly, attracts vermin and has created a focal point for fly-tipping from the Newtown area. The council are not taking it upon themselves to manage tidiness and cleanliness of the site and the bins and fly-tipping are causing obstacles for pedestrians and a traffic hazard at the road junction. We the undersigned request the bins are permanently removed and we return to a regular bag collection."

The report stated that the properties at 83 to 101 Cholmeley Road and 22 to 34 Amity Street fronted directly on to the street, consequently, residents were not able to store wheelie bins at the front of their properties. Residents previously presented their residual waste in sacks on the pavement for weekly collection on a designated collection day. Following the receipt of a petition from residents and an informal consultation an on-street 1100l bin scheme was designed and installed in 2015 and the bins were collected weekly. A second petition had now been received requesting that the bins be removed and that the previous sack collection be reinstated because of concerns over smells, vermin and fly-tipping.

At the invitation of the Chair, lead petitioner, Karen Hodgson, addressed the Committee.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the receipt of the petition be noted;
- (2) That an informal consultation be carried out by officers of residents in 22 - 34 Amity Street and the section of Cholmeley Road between numbers 83 and 101 asking residents whether they wanted to retain the current on-street bin or to return to a weekly sack collection;

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- (3) That the results of the informal consultation be reported to a future meeting of the Committee;
- (4) That the lead petitioner be informed accordingly.

**10. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

Questions on the following matters were submitted by Councillors:

| <u>Questioner</u>    | <u>Subject</u>                 | <u>Reply</u> |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Councillor Dennis    | Rough Sleeping                 | CLlr Ennis   |
| Councillor McGonigle | Land for Retirement Properties | CLlr Ennis   |
| Councillor McGonigle | Use of Glyphates               | CLlr Terry   |

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

**11. TENANT PARTICIPATION IN COUNCIL HOUSING**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report outlining the approach that the Housing Service had taken to involve tenants in improving and shaping the service. The aim of tenant involvement was to work in partnership with tenants to develop and influence how services were delivered in order to continuously improve and drive up standards and thereby increase tenant satisfaction.

The report stated that the Housing Service had a flexible approach to tenant involvement providing a range of both formal and informal opportunities for tenants to participate. Tenants were able to opt in or opt out of opportunities as they arose. Following a review of tenant participation earlier this year involving the Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TACT) the refreshed strategy for tenant involvement included:

- Offering tenant participation opportunities that ranged from one off or short-term limited involvement such as focus groups or task and finish groups to ongoing commitments such as the Tenant Scrutiny Panel
- Holding an annual tenant consultation day
- Using impact assessment techniques and reality checking such as mystery shopping
- Evaluating the connection between what tenants said and what the Housing Service had done to assess the overall outcomes of service improvement and reporting back through a variety of methods including newsletters, website and the annual report
- Exploring the use of social media and electronic forms of engagement

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In addition to methods of direct tenant involvement, the Housing Service also sought to identify the needs and aspirations of tenants through the use of customer intelligence:

- A comprehensive survey of tenants and residents (STAR) which identified trends in satisfaction
- Gathering equality and diversity statistics through customer contact points such as tenancy sign up, verification, exit surveys and logging a complaint to help determine whether the processes created unintended barriers to service for key groups
- Tenant complaints analysis to identify trends in dissatisfaction and help to solve the systemic problems for all tenants as well as addressing individual tenant complaints
- Carrying out a tenant census, enabling the Housing Service to better understand the profile of tenants.

The Committee received a presentation from Veronica Klopper and Pat Watson, members of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel TACT (Tenants and Council Together).

The Committee also received a presentation from Ruby Mann and Chris Matta, members of the Building Cleaning Tenant Group.

**Resolved - That the Housing Service's approach to tenant involvement be noted.**

## **12. HOME IMPROVEMENT SERVICES**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report on the position since the Home Improvement Service had been taken in-house in June 2016.

The report stated that Home Improvement Agencies were small, locally based not for profit organisations that helped vulnerable residents who were older, disabled or on low incomes to repair, improve, maintain or adapt their homes to meet their specific needs. The Council had supported the provision of Home Improvement Services in Reading since 1996 and Aster Living had been commissioned to provide a Home Improvement Service in November 2013 for a period of three years with an option to extend. The contract was for the provision of services to Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire Councils. In October 2014 Aster Living were issued with a Default Notice as a result of failing to meet the performance level set out in the contract. The service was then closely monitored and improvements were made however, Aster chose to end the contract early in June 2016. In view of the short timescale for procurement of a new contract, the three local authorities decided it would be more cost effective and provide a better service to residents for each authority to bring the work in-house.

The report stated that in June 2016 the Council undertook to provide the Core Agency Services and the Minor Adaptions work but the Handy Person Service was commissioned externally. When the Council took over the Home Improvement Agency contract there had been a backlog of 83 jobs outstanding. 81 of these jobs

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had now been completed and the other two jobs were currently in progress. In addition, there were 13 Home Improvement Grant cases outstanding, 11 of which had now been completed. The average time taken to complete major adaptations had fallen significantly since bringing the work in-house from 45 weeks to 27 weeks for private sector adaptations and from 45 weeks to 24 weeks for Council properties. Initial customer feedback via the Occupational Therapist Team confirmed that customers were happy with the current service. Further detailed consultation with Council tenants who have received major adaptations to their home would take place later in the year. The results of surveys that had been undertaken by the Private Sector Housing Team and the Housing Property Services Team were included in the report.

**Resolved - That the work undertaken to date and the improved outcomes for users of the service further to bringing Home Improvement Services in-house to be delivered directly by the local authority be noted.**

**13. HOUSING SERVICE RESPONSE TO THE BENEFIT CAP**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report detailing the work of the Housing Services Welfare Reform team in response to the reduction in the Benefit Cap.

The report stated that the Benefit Cap was first introduced in August 2013 setting the maximum benefit entitlement to any household at £26,000 per year for couples and families and £18,200 per year for single claimants. In November 2016 this cap was reduced to £20,000 per year for couples and families and £13,400 for single claimants for households outside of London. The Council was highlighted as one of the largest affected Local Authorities and the Housing service had identified that the reduction in the cap would pose two potentially significant risks. The first being an increase in homelessness due to those households affected not having the ability to pay their rent. The second being an increase in Social Landlords' rent arrears. To mitigate these risks a bid was made for grant funding from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for £45,874 which was match-funded by Housing to create three posts (one Senior Welfare Reform Officer and two Benefit Cap Coordinators) to create the Welfare Reform Team.

The report explained that all households identified by the DWP were written to, offering support prior to the new lower cap being introduced. Those households that were already subject to the original cap were also telephoned to advise them that the team could support them prior to their benefits being capped further. For any households that had not been spoken to directly, the Welfare Reform Team had carried out a home visit to ensure every effort had been made to offer support to those affected. When the new lower cap was fully rolled out in Reading on 19 December 2016 there were 338 households affected. This number was far lower than expected, partly due to the team starting to work with households prior to the cap being applied, but mainly due to the way that the cap was applied meaning that some households that had a recent change in circumstances were excluded from the initial implementation of the cap but were slowly picked up by the system and had the cap applied over the following months. As newly affected households had the cap applied, the Housing Benefit team notified the Welfare Reform Team who then began to work with the household if they were not already working with them.

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The Welfare Reform Team liaised closely with other teams across the Council. The team also worked closely with many different external partners including Reading Job Centre with officers co-located in the Job Centre one day per week. The team had worked hard to build partnerships with many different support organisations that catered to the individual needs of clients, including one with a recruitment agency that not only provided free CV and Interview Skill sessions for those households affected by the cap but also regularly sent the team job opportunities for clients.

Between October 2016 and the end of September 2017 the team had 1,692 contacts with clients, made 719 referrals to other support agencies, helped 382 households out of the cap of which 189 households have now gained employment. To date only three households had been capped again after initially finding employment, showing that the majority of those who had moved into employment had gained long-term sustainable employment. As of 26 October 2017 there were 281 households who were currently capped. The amount of benefits lost to the cap per household per week varied from £0.08 up to £313.93, with the average loss of £56 per week per household.

**Resolved - That work of the Housing Services Welfare Reform Team and the outcomes for the affected households be noted.**

#### **14. UPDATED ON FIRE SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS POST GRENFELL TOWER**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which set out the Council's response following the Grenfell Tower fire in Kensington on 14 June 2017. This included action taken in relation to the Council's own housing stock, other corporate buildings and schools, as well as wider work in partnership with the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service in respect of privately owned high rise residential blocks within the Borough boundaries.

In summary the Council had taken the following action post the Grenfell Tower incident:

- Published information on the Council's website in respect of the Council's own housing stock and advice to residents more widely;
- Internally reviewed the fire safety measures and systems in place in relation to the Council's own housing - with a focus on high rise flatted blocks;
- Despite the Council's seven high rise housing blocks differing in design to Grenfell Tower, the Council had appointed an external qualified Fire Engineer (FireSkills) to carry out a review of fire safety practices;
- The structure and first safety practices of other corporate buildings and schools had been reviewed;
- Fire Risk Assessment re-inspections of other Council buildings had been commissioned for Priority 1 and 2 buildings and these were currently being undertaken; school re-inspections would be actioned later in 2017 following completion of the current programme of site works;
- An internal Council Officer group had been set up to manage subsequent phases of work given the medium to longer term implications of the Grenfell Tower fire incident;
- Across tenures, a total of 88 residential buildings over 10 meters in height had

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been identified in Reading and the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Services (RBFRS) had visited all of these to review fire safety including an assessment of the external materials used on each block. Where there was a concern over the cladding used, the owner had been asked to send material for testing by the Building Research Establishment (BRE);

- Officers had been in close liaison with RBFRS since the Grenfell Tower incident and a County-wide Steering group had been convened by RBFRS with representatives of the six Unitary Authorities to agree a programme of joint work cross tenure to ensure that residential high rise (and other) buildings cross tenure were safe.

**Resolved - That the action taken and planned following the Grenfell Tower fire, as detailed in the report, be noted.**

## **15. PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR CHARTER**

Further to Minute 20 of the meeting held on 16 November 2016, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which provided an update on the progress made in delivering the Private Rented Sector (PRS) Charter action points. The PRS Charter aimed to build a common understanding of values, standards and requirements for the private rented sector and it further demonstrated the Council's and partners' commitment to improving the sector. The PRS Charter was developed around 'providing a home for those most in need', as outlined in the Council's Corporate Plan 2015-2018.

The report set out a table which showed progress against the action points in the Charter. The key piece of work highlighted for this year's work programme was the Reading Rent with Confidence Scheme. The purpose of the scheme was to differentiate landlord/letting sub sectors. The Scheme had been designed to rate Landlords, Letting and Managing Agents based on the criteria they had achieved. The criteria were divided into 3 tiers of (1) bronze, (2) silver and (3) gold each reflecting the different levels of private rented sector standards required with bronze being the basic standard required of all private rented properties and the other 2 standards built in this. Membership of the scheme was purely voluntary but early indications showed interest from across the sector to be part of the scheme.

The report also set out the proposed work for the next 12 months.

**Resolved - That the progress made against the action points of the Private Rented Sector Charter and the next steps outlined in the report be noted.**

## **16. ABBEY QUARTER PRESENTATION**

Matthew Williams, Museum Manager, gave a presentation on the Abbey Quarter Project.

Matthew explained that the Abbey ruins had closed in 2009 after condition surveys found that they were unsafe to the public due to deteriorating condition. In 2010 the Council looked to conceive a project for the wider abbey quarter area and in 2015 secured £1.77million of lottery funding with match funding from section 106

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contributions to create a £3.15million project to restore the abbey ruins, abbey gate and interpretation and public participation activities. The Abbey ruins were due to reopen in Summer 2018.

Matthew stated that Reading Museum was leading on the Abbey Quarter project. The museum attracted over 111,000 visitors a year and 15,000 school children visited every year. The museum had a new blog which informed people about the history of the area and what work was currently taking place. Matthew talked about the three areas of Abbey Quarter project which were conservation, interpretation and volunteering.

Matthew stated that Reading was in the UK's top 16% of local authorities for quality of heritage and Reading was the resting place of a King of England, had over 800 listed buildings and two scheduled ancient monuments. Matthew explained that Reading Abbey had been founded in 1121 by King Henry I and became one of the largest and best known abbeys in medieval Europe. Queen Elizabeth I lived at the Abbey and Jane Austin had attended school at the Abbey Gateway. The Abbey site was one of the largest scheduled ancient monuments in the country. Matthew added that the conservation work was ongoing but work had been completed on the south transept including the founder's chapel, and the chapter house. The masons were currently working on the refectory and the dormitory.

**Resolved - That Matthew be thanked for his presentation.**

## **17. CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which provided an update on two key developments relating to cultural services and activities. The report focused on progress in taking forward Reading's successful bid to the 'Great Places Scheme' (including a reconfiguration of the Cultural Partnership) and the delivery plans being developed by the Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) and Reading Museum consequent on being jointly awarded National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status by Arts Council England (ACE). Attached to the report at Appendix 1 was the Cultural Partnership revised membership and draft Terms of Reference and at Appendix 2 the Great Place Scheme Project Management Structure.

The Committee had already endorsed the work that had been undertaken to secure the Great Place Scheme grant and had supported the proposals for the Council and its partners (Reading UK and Reading University) to take forward implementation. The report (in section 4.1) provided an update on progress since the July Committee meeting with considerable focus on the reconfiguration of the Cultural Partnership that had taken place and which was also a key recommendation from the Peer Review of cultural services earlier this year. The Cultural Partnership would keep its membership and activities under review and remain flexible to accommodate changes should these be needed. It was also proposed that the Committee fulfilled a scrutiny role with regard to the work of the Cultural Partnership and, as a minimum, received an annual report and update on the Partnerships work.

The report stated that led by MERL, the Museums were currently developing a Business Plan linked to their NPO funding from ACE which would commence in April 2018 and continue through to March 2022. An annual delivery plan would need to be

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produced and agreed by ACE for each year of funding. This provided scope to amend proposals and activities as joint working developed over the four year period. The University would be the Accountable Body and would be required to enter into a Partnership or Collaboration Agreement with the Council so that both organisations had a formal commitment both to delivery and to meeting the grant conditions specified by ACE. This agreement was currently in draft format and would need to be signed and submitted to ACE along with the Delivery Plan in February 2018.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the progress being made in taking forward Reading's Great Place Scheme as set out in section 4.1 of the report, be noted;**
- (2) That the Committee scrutinise the work of the Cultural Partnership and as a minimum receive an annual report on its work;**
- (3) That the Council enter into a Partnership with Reading University, as required by Arts Council England, in order to establish Reading Museum and the Museum of English Rural Life as a joint National Portfolio Organisation;**
- (4) That the signing of the Partnership Agreement with Reading University be delegated to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Culture, Sport and Consumer Services, the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services and the Director of Finance.**

**18. ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR STRATEGY**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that provided a short update on antisocial behaviour (ASB) in Reading and identified the need to convert the current Designated Public Place Order (DPPO (Street drinking restriction)), into a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) and made recommendations on a number of restrictions to be included within a new order for consultation.

The report stated that the nature of Anti-Social Behaviour being dealt with by the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour team had changed. Whilst in the main the number of calls for service was still primarily from victims of ASB directed at them (Personal ASB), there had been some areas of Situational ASB that had increased disproportionately.

Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) had been introduced under the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 to deal with a particular nuisance or problem in a specific area that was detrimental to the local community's quality of life. PSPOs had replaced powers to make Gating Orders, Designated Public Place Orders (street drinking restriction powers) and Dog Control Orders. In Reading, there were currently one Gating Order, one Dog Control Order (Borough Wide) and three Designated Public Place Orders in place. These current orders automatically converted into PSPOs in October 2017. However, in the context of the changing nature of anti-social behaviour in the public realm, it was appropriate to both review the necessity of the current provisions and assess the need to introduce new PSPOs to



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include conditions to tackle a wider variety of anti-social behaviour in Reading. There were four options available:

1. Allow current converted orders to remain.
2. Allow current converted orders to remain and bring in additional new PSPOs to address other issues.
3. Discharge current orders and bring in new PSPOs to incorporate the dog control measures, street drinking and other ASB issues causing problems in Reading.
4. Discharge current orders and have no measures in place.

It was recommended that option 3 be taken forward and that additional restrictions (as set out in section 5.4 of the report) regarding begging, busking, dog control, drug activity, street drinking, litter, motorbike nuisance and mooring were consulted on.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the update on Anti-Social Behaviour in Reading be noted;**
- (2) That option 3 as set out in paragraph 5.3 of the report, to discharge current orders and bring in new PSPOs to incorporate the dog control measures, street drinking and other ASB issues causing problems in Reading, be taken forward;**
- (3) That a consultation on the additional restrictions identified in paragraph 5.4 of the report be carried out;**
- (4) That, following the consultation, a report be submitted to the Committee detailing the consultation feedback and making recommendations on implementing any new restrictions.**

**19. WASTE MINIMISATION STRATEGY 2015-2020 - HALF YEARLY UPDATE**

The Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report that provided an update on the progress achieved in the first two quarters of the third year of the Waste Minimisation Strategy 2015-2020 Action Plan. 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 achieving the EU Directive target recycling rate of 50% by 2020. Reading currently sent 19% of its municipal waste to landfill with 81% being recycled, composted or sent for Energy from Waste. The current recycling rate for Reading was 32.6% compared to the national rate of 43.9%.

The report stated that reductions in staff numbers and work programmes which were now focussed on delivering savings and service efficiencies had had an adverse impact on some aspects of the work to deliver the strategy over the past 12 months. As a result, many of the elements of the strategy had not been progressed and would not be in the short term. The main pressures on the service, in summary, were:

- The introduction of the chargeable green waste service.
- Introduction of the waste collection service standard.

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- Dealing with an increase in fly-tipping.
- Work with Housing colleagues to address waste collection from Council housing blocks.
- Increasing numbers of new properties, in particular flats in the town centre.
- Loss of experienced staff.

The report stated that the re3 Joint Waste Disposal Board had adopted a new strategy in 2016/17 in response to changes in government funding as a result of the central government austerity programme and the requirement of the Revised EU Waste Framework Directive (2008) which set the 50% target for reuse and recycling to be reached by 2020. The Reading Borough Council and re3 strategies were aligned in March 2017. The re3 Joint Waste Disposal Board adopted its strategy in May 2016.

The report stated that the Council and re3 strategies had been aligned to focus on the two fundamental goals of reducing costs in a time of austerity and improving re-use and recycling rates. Collaborative work with the Council's re3 partners, Bracknell Forest and Wokingham Borough Councils was continuing through the three officer working groups which examined specific waste minimisation themes and shared good practice with reducing resource. The re3 Councils' Shared Marketing and Communications Strategy 2017-2018 would be the basis of communications over the coming year, supplemented by the Council's own social media campaigns.

A full year summary of the progress towards meeting the objectives set out in the Action Plan would be presented to the Committee in March 2018. However, the results for the key indicators of the strategy for Quarters 1 and 2 of Year 3 (2017/18) were set out in the report.

**Resolved -**

- (1) That the progress to date of the Waste Minimisation Strategy Action Plan be noted;
- (2) That the third annual progress report be submitted to the Committee in March 2018;
- (3) That the Head of Transport and Streetcare, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods, be delegated authority to make amendments to the action plan as required.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 8.55pm).