

To: Councillor Hacker (Chair)
Councillors G Dennis, Ayub, Barnett-Ward,
Cresswell, Cross, Emberson, Kitchingham,
Kretchmer, Lanzoni, McCann, McGonigle,
O'Connell, Mpofu-Coles, Rowland, R Singh
and Woodward

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22 December 2022

Your contact is: **Julie Quarmby - Committee Services (julie.quarmby@reading.gov.uk)**

NOTICE OF MEETING - HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE 4 JANUARY 2023

A meeting of the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee will be held on Wednesday, 4 January 2023 at 6.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading. The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

	<u>WARDS AFFECTED</u>	<u>Page No</u>
1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST		
Councillors to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests they may have in relation to the items for consideration.		
2. MINUTES OF THE HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS & LEISURE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 9 NOVEMBER 2022		5 - 10
3. DECISION BOOK REFERENCES		
To consider any requests received by the Monitoring Officer pursuant to Standing Order 42, for consideration of matters falling within the Committee's Powers & Duties which have been subject of Decision Book reports.		
4. HOUSEHOLD WASTE: UPDATE ON PHASE 2 FOOD WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE FOR HIGH AND LOW-RISE FLATS	BOROUGH WIDE	11 - 18

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A report updating on Phase 2 of the roll out of the food waste collection service to high and low-rise flats in the Borough.

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|------------|--|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 5. | ALLOTMENT SELF-MANAGEMENT UPDATE | BOROUGH
WIDE | 19 - 46 |
| | <p>A report updating on the progress made on the actions contained in the Allotment Action Plan and on the uptake of Self-Management practices across the Council's allotment sites.</p> | | |
| 6. | DOMESTIC ABUSE AND SAFE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY 2023-26 | BOROUGH
WIDE | 47 - 78 |
| | <p>A report introducing Reading's Community Safety Partnership's new Domestic Violence and Safe Accommodation Strategy.</p> | | |
| 7. | COMMUNITY SAFETY & SERIOUS VIOLENCE STRATEGY 2023-26 | BOROUGH
WIDE | 79 - 112 |
| | <p>A report introducing Reading's Community Safety Partnership's new Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy.</p> | | |
| 8. | HOUSING OMBUDSMAN'S REVISED COMPLAINTS HANDLING CODE | BOROUGH
WIDE | 113 -
140 |
| | <p>A report on changes to legislation and Government Guidance that impacts on a Social Landlord's response to a complaint, Reading Borough Council Housing Services' compliance with the new Complaints Handling Code published by the Housing Ombudsman, and any changes in process required.</p> | | |
| 9. | HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT | ABBEY;
COLEY | 141 -
152 |
| | <p>A report providing information on the achievements of the High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) programme over the past two and half years and what it aims to deliver in the remaining 16 months of the programme.</p> | | |
| 10. | STREET ART ADVISORY PANEL UPDATE | BOROUGH
WIDE | 153 -
162 |
| | <p>An update on the progress of the Street Art Advisory Panel and its next steps.</p> | | |

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Agenda Item 2

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE 9 NOVEMBER 2022

Present: Councillor Hacker (Chair);
Councillors Ayub, Cresswell, Cross, G Dennis, Emberson, Lanzoni,
McCann, Mpofu-Coles, O'Connell, Rowland, Singh and Woodward.

Apologies: Councillor Kitchingham, Kretchmer and McGonigle

15. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of 29 June 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

16. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meeting were submitted:

Community Safety Partnership - 14 July 2022 and 15 September 2022.

Resolved - That the Minutes be received.

17. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

<u>Questioner</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Reply</u>
Cllr Singh	Public Litter Bins	Cllr Rowland
Cllr McCann	Making Our Narrow Pavements Useable	Cllr Rowland

The full text of the questions and replies were made available on the Reading Borough Council website.

18. ANNUAL UPDATE ON THE OPERATION OF LEISURE FACILITIES BY GREENWICH LEISURE LTD AND ACCEPTANCE OF THE SPORT ENGLAND GRANT

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing an update on the ongoing delivery of leisure services and development of new facilities by Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL) and on progress in securing a £1.5m grant from Sport England's Strategic Facilities Fund.

The report explained that the new leisure contract had started on 1 July 2021 with GLL taking over the operational management of the Council's sports and Leisure Centres. Refurbishment works had been undertaken at the Meadway Sports Centre and South Reading Leisure Centre. A new centre was being built at Rivermead Leisure Centre, and provision of a new pool and refurbishment of the existing facilities at Palmer Park Sports Stadium was underway.

Stephanie Smith and Craig Woodward of GLL gave a presentation on progress that had been made since they had started operations in July 2021 including :

- Usage levels;
- Programmes being run/facilities available;

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- Customer feedback;
- Targeted activities;
- Improvements that had been made at South Reading and Meadway Leisure Centres;
- New Build programme update.

The report further stated that, the Council had been successful in its bid to Sport England for further £1.5million from its Strategic Facilities Fund to support the new leisure developments at both Rivermead and Palmer Park.

Resolved -

- (1) That GLL be thanked for their presentation in respect of the progress of the leisure contract;**
- (2) That the progress made in respect of the Council's bid to Sport England's Strategic Facilities Fund for a £1.5m funding contribution towards the construction costs of the new leisure facilities at Rivermead and Palmer Park be noted.**

19. WINTER SERVICE PLAN 2022-23

The Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report informing the Committee of the outputs that had been delivered by the Winter Service Plan 2021-22, of the Winter Service Plan review that had been carried out to ensure compliance with the Highway Act 1980 and 'Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice' and sought approval for the Winter Service Plan 2022-2023. A copy of the Winter Service Plan 2022-2023 was attached to the report at Appendix 1 and a Financial Implications Report was attached to the report at Appendix 2.

The report stated that the 2020/2021 winter season had been relatively mild overall although interspersed with colder spells. However, there had been numerous occasions when the temperature had reached the trigger point for precautionary salting action, this had resulted in 54 primary runs and no secondary runs. The cold spells were not severe or prolonged enough for activation of the Snow Plan. There had been no issues with salt supply and delivery which had enabled the contractor to maintain stock levels throughout the winter season and there had been not issues with the contractor replenishing the grit bins as and when had been required. The winter decision making process to determine when to salt had worked well during the previous winter season and the Vaisala weather stations had provided the correct data for informed decisions to be made. The joint arrangement/agreement with Wokingham Borough Council, through their consultants, Volker Highways, for providing the decision-making service had worked well and had delivered against the set key performance indicators during the 2021-2022 winter season. The Winter Service Plan for 2021-2022 had provided a robust service for the duration of the winter period with no disruption to the primary and secondary road network during the season.

A review of the Winter Service Plan 2021-2022 had been carried out and the main points, including updates for the Winter Service Plan 2022-2023 were summarised in the report. A review of the proposed Active Travel Plan schemes had shown that they

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were primarily situated on the existing primary/secondary precautionary salting routes and any future Active Travel Plan schemes brought forward would be evaluated to determine whether they should be added to the precautionary salting route.

Resolved -

- (1) That outputs delivered by the Winter Service Plan 2021-2022 be noted;**
- (2) That the outcome of the review carried out on the Winter Service Plan to ensure compliance with the Highways Act 1980 and the 'Well-Managed Highway Infrastructure: A Code of Practice' be noted;**
- (3) That the Winter Service Plan 2022-2023 be approved.**

20. LOCAL AUTHORITY NEW BUILD PROGRAMME PHASE 4 - SPEND APPROVAL

Further to Minute 6 of the meeting held on 6 July 2021 the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which gave an update on Phase 4 of the Local Authority New Build (LANB) and Acquisitions Programme and sought spend approval of £29.8m to continue the delivery of this phase.

The report explained that, to date, the new build and acquisitions scheme had delivered 234 new homes to the Council's housing stock, of which 43 were purchases of properties. Approvals were in place to build a further 211 new homes which were due for completion within the next three years. The report also set out the current shortlist for Phase 4 which would total 87 properties and explained that the final appraisal and funding bid could not be completed until detailed designs had been developed and planning approval obtained. The report also proposed that a small programme of property acquisitions, often from within the existing Council-owned (HRA) flatted blocks, would continue.

The reported stated that there was a possibility that not all of the sites on the shortlist would be developed at this time and a financial appraisal of each development would be completed to ensure that it was cost-neutral or provided a positive return to the Housing Revenue Account.

Resolved -

- (1) That the spend of £29.6m to continue the delivery of Phase 4 of Local Authority New Build and Acquisitions Programme be approved;**
- (2) That the Assistant Director of Housing and Communities, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Housing, the Leader of the Council, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Service and the Director of Finance, be authorised to agree the specific funding arrangements for each of the sites referred to within the spend approval and restrictions set out in the report.**

21. SUSTAINABLE WARMTH FUNDING

Further to Minute 33 of the meeting held on 10 March 2022, the Executive Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report setting out the

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Council's approach to working with partners to use Sustainable Warmth funding for the installation of energy saving measures in low-income homes in the Reading area.

The report explained that the Sustainable Warmth competition had been launched in June 2021 to bring together two fuel poverty schemes, Local Authority Delivery Phase 3 (LAD 3) and Home Upgrade Grant Phase 1 (HUG) into a single funding opportunity for Local Authorities (LAs). Reading Borough Council had applied for Sustainable Warmth funding as part of a consortium bid to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). The consortium was made up of over 66 Local Authorities generally located in South East England. The consortium had been successful in their bid and was awarded approximately £84m for LAD 3 funding and £34m for HUG funding. Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) had been designated the Lead Authority for the bid and, as the Accountable Body for the delivery of Sustainable Warmth implementation measures, would provide grant funding, project management and support to Reading residents.

The report added that, as a result, low-income households in Reading living within the private sector would be able to access up to £1.7m (LAD £1.16m and HUG £0.54m), to tackle fuel poverty by improving the energy efficiency of their homes and set out the BEIS eligibility requirements for this funding. CPCA had engaged Greater South East Net Zero Hub (GSENZH) to manage the scheme, and they had assigned City Energy as the provider to carry out the retrofit works for Reading. The report also explained that the Council would be working with landlords as they would be responsible for a contribution towards the cost of the upgrade work on their properties and officers had already started a programme of engagement with them.

Resolved - That the approach the Council was taking to work with partners to utilise the Sustainable Warmth funding of £1.7m provided by BEIS through the Greater South East Net Zero Hub (GSENHZ) for the installation of energy saving measures in low income homes in the Reading area be endorsed.

22. READING FESTIVAL UPDATE

Further to Minute 30 of the meeting held on 10 March 2022, James Crosbie, Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Regulatory Services, introduced Melvin Benn, Victoria Chapman, Charlotte Oliver and Noel Painting of Festival Republic who gave a presentation on the 2022 Reading Festival. The presentation particularly focused on the issues of safeguarding, welfare and sustainability:

- Festival Republic had continued to concentrate on providing a safe and secure festival, working with partners and local schools to look at effective messaging;
- A help map had been made available showing the locations of help hubs, medics etc across the festival site;
- The site had operated the Ask for Angela scheme for women and girls who felt vulnerable, threatened or unsafe, and regular tests had been carried out to ensure that all festival personnel were aware and able to help;
- The timings had been amended to allow early bird arrivals;
- Pre-event communications had included low carbon travel, a tent-buying guide and other sustainability measures that could be taken by festival-goers, all of

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which had been underpinned by the Take It Home message and 35% fewer tents had been left behind this year;

- Food and beverage vendors had used a traffic light system to highlight dishes that had a lower carbon footprint;
- Artists had supported and promoted sustainability during their sets;
- Peer to peer engagement had worked well to normalise sustainability among festival-goers and the free eco-campsite area had been particularly successful and popular with those who had camped there;
- The number of unlicensed and unregulated water taxis operating during the Festival, had been reduced significantly;
- Those festival goers who had been removed from the site had been treated sensitively and efforts had been made to ensure that they got home safely.

The Committee discussed the presentation and took the opportunity to ask further questions of Festival Republic regarding the safety of unaccompanied 16 and 17 year-old festival goers, the difficulty of controlling non-eco friendly items brought into the site by festival goers and the introduction of a Challenge 25 policy from 2023. Festival Republic stated that they would send further details of recycling rates to officers once all the data had been analysed.

Resolved - That Festival Republic be thanked for an interesting and informative presentation.

23. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved -

That pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of item 2 below as it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to that Act.

24. READING FESTIVAL UPDATE

Further to Minute 22 above Festival republic updated the Committee further on the 2022 Festival and plans for the Festival in 2023.

Resolved: That the position be noted.

(Exempt information under paragraph 3)

(The meeting opened at 6.30pm and closed at 9.28pm).

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY FRANCES MARTIN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	4th JANUARY 2023		
TITLE:	HOUSEHOLD WASTE: UPDATE ON PHASE 2 FOOD WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE FOR HIGH- AND LOW-RISE FLATS		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR ROWLAND	PORTFOLIO:	ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES AND COMMUNITY SAFETY
SERVICE:	ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	ANDREW EDWARDS	TEL:	0118 937 3458
JOB TITLE:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES	E-MAIL:	andrew.edwards@reading.gov.uk

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide an update on Phase 2 of the roll out of the food waste collection service to high- and low-rise flats in the Borough. This follows on from the previous report to the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee (HNL) on 6th July 2021 which provided information on the Early Adopter phase and the main roll out (Phase 1) of the project.

- 1.1 Phase 2 of the rollout is for approximately 14,000 communal and high- and low-rise flats and commenced in June 2022 and continues to be implemented on a block by basis to achieve greater buy in of residents and maximise participation.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

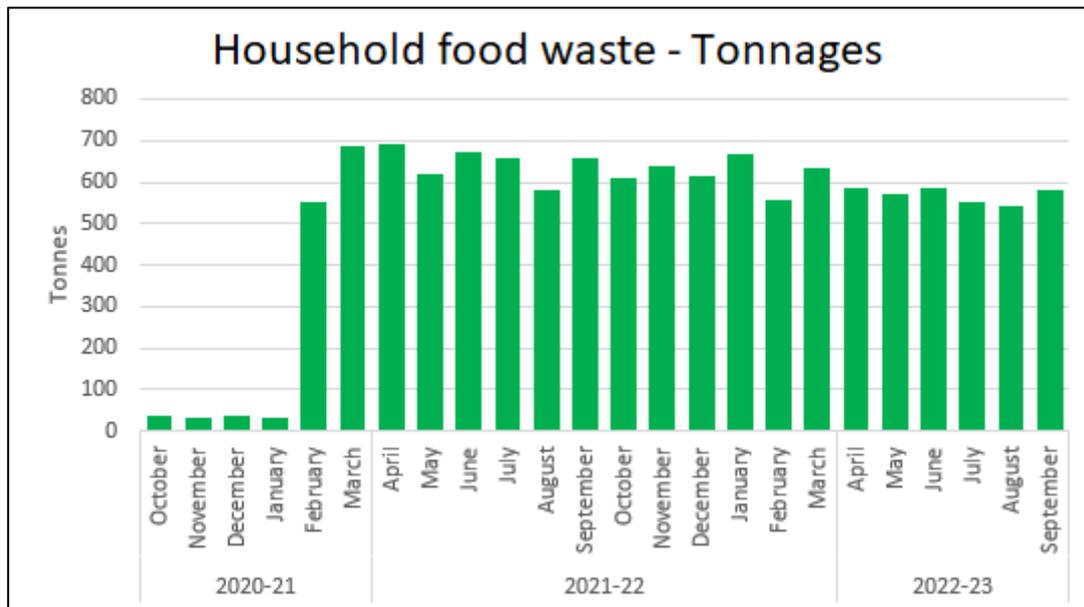
- 2.1 That the Committee note the update on Phase 2 of the food waste collection rollout contained in the report.

3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 3.1 Headline achievements of the introduction of a food waste collection service (Phase 1):

- An increased and sustained recycling rate of 50.5% from 34% pre food waste collection.
- 2.5kg's of food waste per participating household, per week, against a target of 1.4kg (2.7kg at peak)
- Carbon saving of 4,700 tonnes per annum against historic operations
- Efficiency achieved through revised round scheduling and reduced residual waste treatment costs
- A net revenue cost saving of £500k

A reduction from 41% to 23% (2022) of food waste being deposited in the household residual waste bin, detailed in the 2019 and 2022 infographics laid out below.



2019 Binfographic

2022 Binfographic



The Binfographic 2019 and 2022 illustrations are a representation of the type of waste materials experienced when conducting a composition analysis of a sample of Reading households. Waste composition analysis is used to inform the Council of where to concentrate its focus to improve future recycling of materials collected.

4 POLICY CONTEXT

- 4.1 The EU Waste Framework Directive set a recycling and re-use target of 50% for waste materials from households to be achieved by 2020. This target has become UK law and it is anticipated that it will continue to remain in place. The Government has committed to achieving 65% recycling and re-use of municipal waste by 2035.
- 4.2 Policy Committee (26th September 2019) received a report setting out a way forward for the Household Waste service to achieve the ambition to increase recycling and reduce the cost of waste. The Committee resolved to introduce a combined new waste service of alternate weekly collections with 140l residual bins and a weekly food waste

collection. The original timetable, agreed by Policy Committee, set a full roll out in October 2020 following an early adopter phase in June 2020.

- 4.3 The Covid 19 outbreak in March 2020 and the first lockdown resulted in staff absences of up to 20%, the redeployment of staff to other essential operations such as food parcel delivery and the temporary suspension of some waste services in line with the waste service continuity plan and Government guidance: Guidance on prioritising waste collection services during coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic - GOV.UK
- 4.4 This uncertainty about staffing levels, the availability of waste bin delivery contractors and raw materials resulted in a review of the practicality of delivering the project as originally planned, which concluded that a delay was necessary to make the roll out a success. This review was presented to Policy Committee in July 2020, and it was resolved that the early adopter phase of the project should go ahead from October 1st, 2020, with the main roll out in February 2021 rather than being delayed for up to 12 months.
- 4.5 The 11.5% increase in recycling rate from the then prevailing 34% to 45% was predicted to achieve an estimated annual saving of £342k originally profiled, £171k in 2020/21 and the remainder in 2021/22. This was based on a successful early adopters' pilot in June and the full roll out of the service from October 2020. This saving includes the up-front capital costs of £1.5m to purchase new smaller 140 litre bins and the additional revenue costs of the new drivers and loading staff required to support the programme. The delay to the roll out caused by the Covid 19 pandemic resulted in the reprofiling of this saving with £142k being achieved in 20/21 and the remainder of £342k in 21/22. This reprofiled saving was factored into the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy 21/22.

5 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 5.1 Following the postponement of the initial rollout due to the pandemic, the timetable for the introduction of food waste roll out was as follows:
 - Early adopter areas service (3,000 properties) began October 2020
 - Phase 1 food collection service to approximately 56,000 kerbside properties began February 2021. The rollout of the replacement 140 litre bins programme took place once the food waste service was operational and was completed by June 2021.
 - Phase 2 service to the remaining properties (majority are high-rise flats) to 14,000 properties ran in December 2021 for 1 month, stopped due to lockdown, and then re-established as a direct and more detailed intervention with residents from June 2022.
- 5.2 The Early Adopters project October 2020 until February 2021 allowed officers to assess the rollout and make amendments to any communication, service delivery etc.
- 5.3 To enable residents to participate, bins were replaced from a 240 litre to a 140 litre on the day of collection, together with the supply of 23 litre food waste bins, 7 litre caddies and liners. This was undertaken by a third party with the changeover for Phase 1 of the rollout taking approximately 3 months.
- 5.4 As planned, 56,000 food waste bins, caddies, liners and leaflets were delivered between 4th and 29th January and a mop-up service was provided to deliver any bins which had been inadvertently missed. The five new food waste collection rounds began on Monday 1st February 2021 as planned and since then the rounds have continued to be successfully delivered as crews and residents became familiar with the new service.

- 5.5 In April 2022, a Waste Compositional Analysis took place which showed that 23% of the residual waste bins remains food waste (in comparison to 41% pre roll out). This shows that further work still needs to be done to engage residents, who have had the service for over one year to encourage greater participation.
- 6. PHASE 2 ROLLOUT - Communal and High- and Low-Rise Flats**
- 6.1 Phase 2 of the food waste rollout began in June 2022, delivering in a systematic manner to the 14,000 larger blocks of high- and low-rise flats and communal properties that have shared bin facilities as these are recognised as requiring a greater level of support to adapt to the required change.
- 6.2 Although the service currently operates with 5 food waste rounds, with food collected on the same day as recycling or general waste, for on-coming Phase 2 communal properties, there is sufficient capacity built into the existing round schedules to accommodate these additional locations.
- 6.3 The introduction of the food waste collections has already made a positive impact on our overall recycling rate going from 34% to 50.5%. The effect of the introduction of food collections has far surpassed the expectations by an additional 7% increase in terms of recycling performance. The additional resources and time being taking in the Phase 2 introduction will potentially offer further increase in the overall recycling rate.
- 6.4 Prior to the food waste collections starting at these Phase 2 properties, an assessment is made to determine the capacity needed per block for food waste, recycling and residual communal bins. Residents are provided with copies of our recycling guides; reusable recycling bags and bins are stickered to improve awareness of the existing recycling collections. In line with the changes to residual waste bins for houses in Phase 1, the residual waste capacity is also adjusted for residents in flats for Phase 2.
- 6.5 Managing agents and ward councillors are notified in advance by email prior to any changes being made and food waste collections starting. Residents are notified by information leaflet at least 2 weeks prior to the food waste bins being delivered. This information leaflet informs residents that a food waste collection is starting soon, includes a guide on how to use the new service and also references potential changes to their residual waste collections. This information leaflet also includes information on the existing kerbside recycling scheme.
- 6.6 To date, the food waste caddies have been delivered by the recycling team to 34 additional blocks of flats within the borough, totalling 800 new households that now have access to a food waste collection service. Officers knock on doors to engage with residents and explain how they can use the new bins. The full food waste set for residents in flats includes an indoor kitchen caddy, a roll of liners and an information leaflet. A communal food waste bins is delivered to the bin store area at the same time. The second information leaflet informs residents that they can start recycling food waste straight away. On most occasions we have been able to speak to approximately 50% of residents within the blocks and generally the feedback on the doorstep has been positive. Knocking on the doors has enabled Officers to identify any potential barriers to using the service that residents may as experience, such as language. Where possible a translated copy of the information leaflet would then be delivered. Managing agents for a further 37 blocks have been contacted to inform them that a food waste collection is coming to one of their blocks in the near future.
- 6.7 Questions asked by residents and answered by officers include:

- Where can replacement food waste liners be collected from? Food waste liners are available to collect from libraries, leisure centres and some community centres.
 - Are the food waste liner replacements free? Replacement liners are available for residents to collect free of charge. We ask that residents take one roll at a time.
 - What types of food can be collected in the new bins? You can put all forms of cooked and uncooked food in your food waste bin including fruit and vegetables, meat and fish, rice, pasta, bread, dairy, eggs and eggshells, plate and bowl scrapings and tea and coffee bags and grounds. Used cooking oil in a sealed plastic bottle can be placed inside your food waste bin.
 - Where is the food taken and what happens to it? We will collect the food waste from your food waste bin on a weekly basis. The waste will be taken to the re3 recycling centre and then on to the Severn Trent recycling plant where it is turned into fertiliser for farming and energy. So, the new service will turn food waste from a problem into a resource.
- 6.8 Two specific leaflets have been produced to support the Recycling Officers 'your food waste is coming soon' and 'start recycling food straight away' the latter being delivered with the caddies.
- 6.9 Managing agents have mostly been supportive of the scheme so far, but some have expressed concern relating to changes in residual waste collections, and where their blocks are supported living accommodation or designated for elderly residents only and have asked for more information on how this could be managed by them going forward. In these cases, we would suggest an on-site meeting with the managing agent with the option for residents to be invited as well. We have been able to address most concerns from managing agents and residents in this way. Additional support sessions have been offered for residents at support living accommodation blocks, but no sessions have been arranged to date. Officers attended the Older Persons Working Group at start of the main roll-out to address any concerns with elderly residents at an early stage.
- 6.10 Each block of flats has been assigned a dedicated Recycling Officer to oversee and monitor the collections and food waste usage for a 4-week period following the delivery of the new bins. This is to ensure that any issues with collections or resident participation can be addressed at an early stage. Recycling Officers work closely with waste operations supervisors before, during and after the implementation of a food waste collection.
- 6.11 After the capacity assessment, the adjustment of residual waste capacity is managed on a case-by-case basis and would be completed in-line with the delivery of new food waste bins. For larger blocks of flats, it is carried out on a two-phase programme to facilitate potentially larger adjustments to capacities. The first phase is undertaken at the time of the food waste roll out and the second phase is implemented after an 8-week period. At this point, the residual waste capacities, recycling provisions and food waste bin usage would be reviewed again and managing agents informed of any further changes. An assessment would be made on the impact of further residual waste adjustment and managing agents would be informed of further interventions required. This may be through implementation of trade waste collections which would be chargeable. Managing agents would be referred to Reading's trade waste service.
- 6.12 The kerbside (Phase 1) methodology of collection is for the crews to use a secondary collection bin, where food collected from household is emptied into a trailed 240 litre wheeled bin facilitating the servicing of 10 - 20 properties before returning to collection vehicle to unload. This enables a much higher pass rate than the "normal" collection services. For High- and Low-Rise flats, communal food waste will be facilitated using 240 litre bins and therefore will need no special adaption of service or vehicle for collection purposes.

6.13 It is still too early in the rollout of Phase 2 to communal and high- and low-rise flats/properties to measure any changes in the Council’s overall recycling rate or food waste tonnages, however the communications and additional support being applied, will give every opportunity to ensure a positive result. The rollout of food waste collections remains a priority for the recycling team, and where possible it will continue at a rate of one new block of flats per week to ensure resident engagement and monitoring can be maintained.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 It was agreed at Policy Committee in September 2019, to introduce a food waste collection service, at the same time as replacing the 240-litre residual wheeled bins with smaller 140-litre bins. The intention was to achieve an increase in recycling from the current 32% to 43%, in addition, diverting the amount of general waste and gate fees, achieving an estimated revenue saving of £233k per annum. Due to the delay of the commencement of the rollout as consequence of the pandemic, full savings were not realised until the full service was delivered from June 2021.

7.2 As part of the council capital programme for 2020/21, £1.489m of capital expenditure budget was agreed.

7.3 It was anticipated that in 2021/22 the full saving of £342k would be fully delivered.

7.4 The net savings arising from the project was dependent on a reduction of general waste, planned to be circa 1,300 tonnes per annum. The overall savings from the diversion from general waste was circa £981k per annum.

7.5 Initially there was a perceived risk that the fixed costs of the service may not be fully covered by the savings achieved by diverting waste if the take up wasn’t as originally calculated. However, participation has been in line with the higher predictions, mitigating the risk.

7.6 The specialist vehicles required to deliver the food collection service were procured arriving well ahead of the revised timetable.

7.7 Financial saving achieved by the diversion of food waste from general waste are as below. The figures below are disposal costs and do not account for the cost of collection:

	Food Waste Tonnage	Cost of disposal Food Waste	Cost of disposal EfW	Differential in cost	Calculated Saving
FY 20/21	1,377	£22.66	£105.33	£82.67	£113,812.62
FY 21/22	7,606	£20.69	£106.63	£86.34	£656,681.32
FY 22/23 Qtr 1 & 2	3,431	£21.78	£113.74	£91.96	£315,514.76
Total	12,413				£1,086,008.69

8 CONTRIBUTIONS TO STRATEGIC AIMS

8.1 The Council’s Corporate Plan 2022 - 2025 sets out the following strategic priorities, which this initiative contributes towards the delivery of:

- **Healthy Environment** - Making it easy for people to play their part through the choices they make about their home, transport and waste.

9 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 9.1 For Phase 1 of the food waste rollout, a full communications plan was developed alongside implementation. Consultation was sought including liaison with the University, residents' groups, community groups, landlords and street champions. An early adopter scheme was rolled out in advance of phase 1 involving approximately 3000 households. A monitoring period was implemented, and a survey of participants undertaken afterwards.
- 9.2 For Phase 2 of the food waste rollout, the information on the [website](#) and resident leaflets have been updated and tailored for residents in flats. An updated Waste Composition Analysis diagram has also been produced and shared with residents.



- 9.3. Recycling Officers continue to engage with residents relating to recycling matters, and food waste recycling has been incorporated into this. Community engagement is undertaken in the form of residential door-knocking programmes, attending community events and school engagement. In July, a competition was launched for the public and school children to name the food waste vehicles to raise awareness of food waste recycling. The competition attracted widespread social media engagement and a total of 393 entries.
- 9.4. A weekly social media post has been introduced on all platforms for the Council to share recycling tips and advice more widely to residents.
- 9.5 The food waste information leaflets have been translated into Nepalese, Polish and Romanian.

10 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 10.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149 the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, 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.

- 10.2 The Council reviewed the scope of food waste collection introduction and considered there was no direct impact on any groups with protected characteristics. Within Phase 2 of the rollout, some managing agents have expressed concern over the system inclusion especially where there is supported living accommodation or designated for elderly residents only. To address these concerns additional support sessions have been offered for residents at support living accommodation blocks.
- 10.3 Where existing assisted waste collections are in place for residents, this is extended to include food waste collections. However, assisted collections do not apply to communal bin facilities.

11 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The Council has duties under various UK and EU legislation to deliver waste collection and disposal services, principally the Environment Act 2021, Environmental Protection Act 1990, and the revised EU waste framework directive 2008.

Consultation advice has also been sought from the Corporate Legal team, and they have advised that there is no Statutory Duty to consult regarding the proposals.

- 11.2 Detailed work confirmed enforcement powers and legislation are available to ensure that where needed, the Council may enforce and act when regulations are not adhered to.

12. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The separate collection of food waste at the kerbside and its treatment by anaerobic digestion benefits the climate by reducing the amount of overall waste not being treated or recycled. Although most of the collected domestic waste from Reading residents is disposed of by burning it in the Energy from Waste (EfW) plant, however, a small amount may end up in landfill, resulting in the contribution of methane gas emissions (a powerful greenhouse gas).
- 12.2 Food waste remaining as an element of general waste and not anaerobically processed has the potential of being a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the UK and globally.
- 12.3 Although the introduction of additional separate food collections with the deployment of 5 additional vehicles to service the collections, the holistic importance of significant investment in sustainable collection and disposal is vital in order to respond to the Climate Crisis declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.
- 12.4 The introduction of separate food collections has the additional effect of focusing residents on the potential amount of wasted food in their homes.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 13.1 Household Waste -The Way Forward - Policy Committee report (September 2019)
- 13.2 Household Waste - Update on the introduction of the kerbside food waste collection service and the change to 140l residual waste bins - Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee - 6th July 2021.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY FRANCES MARTIN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	4 TH JANUARY 2023		
TITLE:	ALLOTMENTS SELF MANAGEMENT UPDATE		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	KAREN ROWLAND	PORTFOLIO:	ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES & COMMUNITY SAFETY
SERVICE:	ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	ANDREW EDWARDS	TEL:	0118 937 3486
JOB TITLE:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR - ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES	E-MAIL:	andrew.edwards@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To update Members of the Committee on the progress made on the actions contained in the Allotment Action Plan and on the uptake of Self-Management practices across the Council's 20 allotment sites.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Members note the progress of the Allotments Action Plan and Allotments Self-Management Plan, and note the further work needed to develop greater levels of self-management across all sites.
- 2.2 That Members approve a Rent Review in Spring 2023 to allow for a consultation period on proposals prior to giving statutory 12 months' notice period to tenants of agreed new fees and charges.
- 2.3 That Members approve the proposed change to the start date of the Allotment Year from January to April and approve the revised Tenancy Agreement Conditions for consultation.
- 2.4 That Members note the proposal to introduce charging for collection and disposal of tenants' plot waste on completion of a site-by-site waste generation study.
- 2.5 That a further update report to include rent review consultation findings, a proposed new rent structure and the proposal to consider charging for site waste collection be brought to a future HNL Committee meeting.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The provision of allotments is a statutory service. Under S.23 of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908, a Council has a statutory duty to provide a sufficient number of allotments and to let them to residents who want them.
- 3.2 The Council continues to meet this duty and to support social, health and environmental benefits of allotments through the provision of allotment sites.
- 3.3 The Council's Corporate Plan 2021- 2022 'Investing in Reading's Future' sets out the Council's priorities, which include promoting healthy lifestyles, as well as good education, leisure, and cultural opportunities for people in Reading.
- 3.4 In view of the declared climate emergency and against the backdrop of a cost-of-living crisis, the provision and use of allotments remains vital and needs to be supported as a cost-effective, local, sustainable food source.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Current Position:

- 4.1.1 The Council owns and manages 20 sites, consisting of 1,413 workable plots (up 75 since March 2020) across 41.5 ha of land. Half are Statutory sites. Statutory sites are subject to some protection under the Allotments Act 1925 while 'temporary' sites have no security beyond planning system requirements.
- 4.1.2 In 2017, the budget-setting process included the proposal to increase allotment rental income from £35k to £70k p.a. over two years. This would have required doubling the basic rental, removing tiered concessions (and limiting discounts to those on Income Support), and carrying out a review of plot sizes from 2018/19 onward. A savings target of £26k is still to be secured and the proposals set out in the December 2021 reports and in this paper support the delivery of this.
- 4.1.3 The Council is mindful that the 2017 rent level proposal would adversely affect tenants from low-income households. The Council's set out to reduce the rent increases proposed in 2017 by promoting Self-Management that would generate savings and then by recalculating income targets through a better-informed Rent Review in 2021/22 and onward.
- 4.1.4 Though tenants expressed mixed appetite for Self-Management in the 2020 Consultation, sites trying self-management activities have already helped the Council address running costs by reducing demand for various aspects of the allotment management. Some examples of this are as follows,
 - Sites can spot absentee tenants and allocate new tenants quicker than the Council. They thereby reduce vacancy periods in which plots may become unlettable without input from the Grounds Team.
 - SLRs (Site Liaison Representative) save the service time by showing new tenants to plots, signing them up, and explaining tenant responsibilities.
 - Some SLRs carry out plot surveys and follow up absentee tenants on behalf of the Council. Calculating the many savings being generated is not exact, but a site carrying out plot-surveys and tenant chase-ups can save the Council between 2 and 10 hours, depending on the site.

- Volunteers answer many tenant queries that would otherwise be directed to the Council. Each general allotment enquiry handled by a site saves the Council at least 15 minutes of work.

4.1.5 The Allotment Action Plan (an updated version is shown in Appendix A. Table 1) sets out actions agreed at the December 2020 HNL Committee. The Project began with the 6-month full-time secondment of an Allotment Project Officer in October 2021. On completion of the secondment, the Officer's position was extended two years at two days per week. Actions are split into three Plans, Self-Management (see para 4.2 and Appendix A Table 2), Tenancy Management (see para 4.3), and Site Maintenance (see para 4.6) that inter-relate but are split to provide a clearer picture to specific stakeholders of activity that is relevant to them.

4.2 SELF-MANAGEMENT PLAN

4.2.1 Since October 2021, the Council's Allotment Self-Management Project has helped tenant groups to play a greater part in managing their sites. The model being used follows Oxford City Council (OCC) where all 35 sites have devolved management run by site Committees reporting to the Oxford Federation of Allotment Associations, who in turn work in partnership with OCC.

4.2.2 Appendix A Table 2 shows the direction of travel of the sites toward joint/self-management as at December 2022. Appetite and uptake vary across the sites. For example,

- Ashampstead decided they do not want to take on self-management but have a Site Liaison Representative (SLR) who reports site suggestions and problems direct to the Allotment Project Officer.
- Emmer Green (Grove Road) has one highly active SLR who has collated a tenant database, acts as a communication link between tenants and the Council (and vice versa), can call on other volunteers to help with tasks, but has no urge to move toward forming an Allotment Society yet. Their SLR reports poor plot cultivation to the Council, manages plot lettings, helps coordinate site improvements.
- Scours Lane have an Allotment Association, Lane Reps and an elected Committee that has just held its first AGM. The Committee holds their own comprehensive tenant register, carries out routine plot inspections, chases absentee tenants and refers aberrant tenants to the Council for action. They also hold work party days, social events and have taken joint-responsibility for site security issues.

4.2.3 Sites presently actively engaging in this process are:

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Ardler Road | • Emmer Green* |
| • Ashampstead (SLR only) | • George Street (progress slowed since March 2022) |
| • Balmore (new since March 2022) | • Goddards Farm* |
| • Bulmershe (first meeting only) | • Henley Road* |
| • Caversham Court (Initial meeting only) | • Lower Southcote* |
| • Circuit Lane | • Meadway* |
| • Coley (SLR & helper) | • Mockbeggars* |
| | • Newcastle Road* |
| | • Oak Tree Road (Started 2022) |

- Oakley Road*
- Scours Lane*
- Victoria Road (Acting SLR engaged, one site meeting since March 2022)
- Waterloo Meadows*

Sites marked * are the most advanced. The most encouraging examples of progress include,

- Scours Lane holding its first AGM; Circuit Lane electing its first Committee; Mockbeggars constituting its own Allotment Society.
- Regular plot surveys reported to the Council from Emmer Green (Grove Road), Goddards Farm, Henley Road, Meadway, Mockbeggar, Newcastle Road, Scours Lane, and Waterloo Meadows.
- SLRs and tenants involved in drawing up site maintenance plans at Henley Road and Lower Southcote (Brunel Road).
- Caversham sites discussing possible joint Caversham Allotment Federation.
- Scours Lane Committee agreeing to and notifying all tenants that the site will use on-site composting/recycling and move towards zero-waste collections by the Council.
- Significant improvements in waste-streaming at Henley Road, Newcastle Road, and Scours Lane.
- Self-organised clearance of an uncultivable area and creation of woodland glade social area at Oakley Road.
- Key/padlock exchanges run jointly between SLRs and the Council at Emmer Green, Newcastle Road, and Scours Lane.

4.2.4 The observed reduction in allotment service requests (complaints, enquiries, chase-ups, etc.) looks to be a result of the Council's drive to improve its service while empowering tenants to handle issues themselves, either alone or with the service. Prior to the start of the Project, the service would receive 40 complaints/enquiries per month. This has reduced to 13 per month in the last year. This reduction may be in part due to improved call handling at Call Centre stage, but is also due to the following factors,

- SLRs are acting as sites' first port of call for general tenant queries.
- SLRs are contacting waiting list tenants who agreed to the Council sharing their contact details. This reduces the numbers of callers asking when they might get their first tenancy. The Council has also now contacted waiting lists for most sites asking if each tenant wishes to remain on the waiting list and advising of current waiting times. This has reduced waiting lists by up to 40% as some customers withdraw their applications.
- Some SLRs act as spare keys/padlock holders. SLRs can distribute replacement keys faster than the Council can. Tenants with access problems are now more likely to contact their SLR than the Council.
- Overall feedback from sites is that tenants no longer feel that the only way to prompt a service is to make a complaint. The scale of achievements on sites has persuaded doubtful tenants that the Council has not forgotten them.
- A key system change has been the SLRs having the Project Officer's direct number so they can seek advice on self-management issues and benefit from swift responses that they can feed back to their sites.

4.2.5 Special mention must be made of Oak Tree Road. In the 2020 Consultation, the site showed no appetite for any form of self-management, believing that the Council had neglected the site so that it could be sold for development. The site

was thus low priority for whole-site overhaul that has that has proved so successful in stimulating interest in self-management elsewhere. The Project Officer booked a site meeting for November 5th, 2022, at which around 45 tenants attended. Their response and interest were at odds with their opinions in the 2020 Consultation. 11 tenants volunteered to act as block representatives, two as Site Liaison Representatives. Within a week, they met again, distributed responsibility for blocks, drafted, and sent the Council an excellent site maintenance plan. From a standing start, the site's ambition was as welcome as it was unexpected. Maintaining momentum at this stage hinges on the Project Officer supporting them and ensuring the whole-site overhaul goes ahead as planned and agreed with the volunteers.

- 4.2.6 All-round communication continues to improve. SLRs and Committees have compiled their own tenant registers and created email distribution lists, Facebook, or WhatsApp groups. The service has confidence in SLRs disseminating our messaging to their tenant groups. Furthermore, work to improve e-mail coverage to all tenants has seen the proportion of tenants for whom records include a working email address leap from 46% in 2020 to 71% in 2022. This has boosted site meeting turn out.
- 4.2.7 The rate of letting new tenancies has increased dramatically. Before the project start, new lettings occurred at a rate of 5 per month. In the last twelve months, our new lettings rate has increased to 14 per month. This increase is due to whole-site overhauls that have brought long-derelect plots back into lettable condition; to SLRs plot-surveys and informal efforts to help absentee tenants to quit along with the Council's firmer and more targeted action on non-conforming tenants; and to SLRs and the service working more efficiently on plot-lettings.
- 4.2.8 Tenants and SLRs report that the Councils increased commitment and activity helps persuade sceptics that there are benefits in self-management. SLRs also report that Council investment is helping to make tenants more accepting that a future rent increase is justified and expected. Some tenants continue to express their concern that some rent levels are set too low to fund an effective service.
- 4.2.9 SLRs and tenants continue to stress that their contributions are dependent on the Council continuing to support their efforts to develop. Sites state that there are tasks that are and will remain beyond their abilities and that responsibility for major infrastructure maintenance and tackling noncompliant tenants should remain with the Council. They have consistently said that the Council must not assume that self-management means it can divest itself of allotment management. They assert that the Council must not expect self-management to grow without advice on governance issues. SLRs also report that any drive by the Council to impose self-management on their sites would be counterproductive. They want to feel their way into new areas of responsibility at their own speed.
- 4.2.10 This paper includes three proposals relating to the Tenancy Management theme.
 - Undertake a consultation on Rent and Discount levels. (Para 4.3 below). The Rent Review aims are to set allotment provision on a firmer financial footing, investigate how we can support households with low incomes, and to help meet the agreed savings target. 5

- Propose, consult on and issue new Conditions to the Tenancy Agreement so it is clearer about rights and responsibilities (see para 4.4 below). This will help plottolders understand what they should do to keep a plot properly and will help the service to uphold the condition.
- Address excessive waste generation on sites and so reduce disposal costs (see Para 4.5 below)

4.3 RENT REVIEW

4.3.1 The 2017 budget-setting process proposed the doubling of allotment rents. It was agreed that this be recalculated, factoring in the savings generated through self-management action. It is now proposed that Rent Review will be subject to tenant consultation from January to March 2023, put before HNL Committee for approval and then subject to the 12-month written notice period (1st April 2023) before being applied from April 1st, 2024.

4.3.2 For 2023, it is proposed that Fees and Charges are increased by 4% in line with the annual DEGNS Fees and Charges Schedule for 2023/24. For information, the 2022 and 2023 fees and charges are set out in Tables 1 and 2 below. Note that two discount levels are available, 10% discount for those with Your Reading Passport (YRP), and 84% for those aged 60 and over who have Your Reading Passport.

Table 1. 2022 Rent Matrix showing rent levels by discount and Site Category.

2022 per 25 sqm	Standard Rate	Your Reading Passport Rate	YRP & aged 60 or more
Start-up Fee	£43.39	n/a	n/a
Category A site annual rent	£7.80	£7.00	£1.25
Category B Site annual rent	£5.80	£5.30	£0.85
Category C Site annual rent	£3.90	£3.50	£0.65
% Of all tenancies paying by Rate	64%	12%	24%

Table 2. 2023 Rent Matrix showing rent levels by discount and Site Category.

2023 per 25 sqm	Standard Rate	Your Reading Passport Rate	YRP & aged 60 or more
Start-up Fee	£45.10	n/a	n/a
Category A site annual rent	£8.10	£7.30	£1.30
Category B Site annual rent	£6.00	£5.50	£1.00
Category C Site annual rent	£4.10	£3.60	£0.70

4.3.4 In calculating reasonable rent for allotments, landlords are recommended to benchmark rates against other providers. Rent levels for 2021/22 have been assessed at sites managed by Local Authorities in the Southeast, Parish and Town Councils in Berkshire, and private providers within Reading Borough. The exercise found a mean rent level charged for standard (non-discounted) plots in 2021/22 to be £8.60 per 25 sqm, 40 pence higher than charged by Reading Borough Council in 2022. The landlords studied were:

- **£9.00** per 25 sqm for Slough, Windsor & Maidenhead, Basingstoke, Guildford, London Councils, Milton Keynes, & Southampton Councils.
- **£7.50** per 25 sqm for Parish & Town Councils in Berkshire.

- **£12.00** per 25 sqm at Tilehurst Poor Lands (private charity-run site within Reading Borough)
- For reference only and not included in benchmarking calculations, Roots Allotments charge £138.60 per 25 sqm. Roots Allotments are a new business that offers a more expansive service than traditional allotment providers. They have sites in Bath and Bristol, are planning a new site in Wokingham and have expressed interest in setting up a site in Reading.

The Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) reports that in 2022, two-thirds of allotment providers are continuing to or plan to increase rents. Based on benchmarking, and considering service needs, it is not proposed to set new rents higher than the current benchmark average or the expected 2024/25 benchmark level.

4.3.5 Factors to be considered in setting rents for 2024/25 are as follows,

- Whether an increase is considered to be ‘significant’ and that would be subject to consideration under section of the 10 Allotments Act 1950 and the Consumer Rights Act 2015. s10 Allotments Act 1950 states that allotments shall be let at such rent as a tenant may reasonably be expected to pay.
- Mitigating the negative impact of rent increases on the least able to pay.
- Timing of agreed rent increases in terms of the required notice period and the current cost of living crisis.
- Setting the service on a robust financial footing for the 21st Century and contributing to service savings needed, especially when combined with efficiency derived from self-management.
- Valuation of Allotments to decide what tenants would be expected to pay. Use of ‘agricultural rent’ as a comparison. Legal Services advise that the Council values allotment sites at £0.
- Benchmarking against rent levels at other sites.
- Comparing ‘subsidy’ value against other similar subsidised Council services. The APSE ‘State of the Market report 2022 found that two-thirds of providers continue to subsidise allotment services from other budgets. *Harwood v Borough of Reigate and Banstead* (1982) held that Local Authorities did not have to subsidise the provision of allotments. Reading’s allotments are heavily subsidised with annual allotment income of £45,000 and normal running costs of £85,000. Costs have been higher from 2021 till now because of the recruitment of the Project Officer and because of waste costs arising from the programme of whole-site overhauls. Rent increase, uptake of self-management and proposals to reduce waste disposal costs will all combine to shrink the subsidy gap but will not result in a cost-neutral service.
- Reinvestment of increased rent income in allotment infrastructure and support for Allotment Societies.

4.3.6 The Rent Review Consultation will follow the same successful method of the 2020 Allotment Consultation. Site Liaison Representatives and volunteers who were not in place in 2020 will enhance the reach of consultation.

4.4 **TENANCY MANAGEMENT - REVIEW OF TENANCY AGREEMENT CONDITIONS AND ALLOTMENT YEAR START DATE**

Overall approval to amend and strengthen the current Tenancy Agreement conditions is supported through soft consultation discussions with SLRs and at site meetings.

- 4.4.1 It is proposed that current Tenancy Agreement conditions (see Appendix B) are replaced by new conditions, subject to Legal Services approval, set out in draft, subject to the Legal Services sign-off (at Appendix C). The new conditions provide clarity of the responsibilities and rights of the 21st century plot-holder and landlord. Key changes include
- Minimum plot cultivation requirements, as a percentage of plot size.
 - Inclusion of anti-social behaviour or criminality as grounds for eviction.
 - Limits on maximum height of newly planted fruit trees and a ban on planting of non-crop amenity trees on plots.
 - Banning the use of carpet as a ground cover. Carpets are harmful to soil health, are often difficult to remove and are costly to dispose of.
 - Banning the use of tyres due to their environmental impact and disposal cost.
 - Maximum proportion of plot area that can be used for storage of materials or left under cover for more than one season.
 - Outline guidance about responsibilities that are shared between Allotment Societies and the Council on matters such as tenant disputes, etc.
- 4.4.2 The new Agreements will be applied to new tenancies from the April after the completion of the 12 month notice period, proposed for April 2024. The Council will notify Allotment Societies, Site Liaison Reps (SLRs) and tenants that the proposed new Conditions will be posted on the new Allotment webpage in January 2023. Hard copies will be given to SLRs to distribute to the digitally excluded. The Council will receive collective feedback from the Allotment Societies and from SLRs.
- 4.4.3 Changing the start date of the rental year is a ‘significant’ change to the terms of the tenancy agreement. There is no statutory requirement that the Council consult on such a change, but they must give tenants 12 months’ written notice of the proposed change and it is good practice to listen to the opinions of stakeholders. Tenants will therefore be given informal notice of the proposed change through annual rent invoices in December 2022, then through the formal 12 month notice period as above.
- 4.4.3 The following changes to operation of the Waiting List are proposed with from April 1st 2023:
- **Applicants to choose their three preferred sites.** At present, applicants can choose “Any Site” as their preferred option. This creates a complex and unrealistic waiting list. Tenants sometimes take a plot far from their home requiring a car journey each time they visit the plot.
 - **Priority Order.** Waiting lists run by date of application only. It is proposed that priority is given first to Reading Borough residents, then their proximity to the sites applied for (based on post code stems RG1, RG2, RG30, RG31, RG4 and RG6) and then by date of application. As such, Out-of-Borough residents are would only be likely to reach the top of the waiting list during a period of low-demand for plots. An exception will be made for Bulmershe Allotments (in Earley - Wokingham BC) where proximity will be based on post code stems RG1, RG5 and RG6.
 - **One-Plot Only Policy.** There are many current tenants renting two or more plots. When plots are surrendered, they will be remarked to 125 sqm and relet as individual plots. No new tenant will be granted tenancies to more than one-plot.

4.5 WASTE MINIMISATION & MANAGEMENT

4.5.1 Allotment waste collection and disposal is expensive and wasteful. Plotholders are supposed to dispose of their own plot waste lawfully, either in green waste areas (where provided), through on-plot composting, or at the Smallmead Recycling Facility. Some sites have designated waste areas/bays, green waste bays that are generally found to be contaminated, and informal dumping areas on tracks, boundaries, and other communal areas. Waste arises from the following sources:

- A. **Plot waste from worked plots.** Green/organic in the main, but often inorganic. Tenants bring in many materials to build their plots. These include metals, plastics (sheeting, pots, etc), glass and double-glazed windows and doors, tyres, timber, paving slabs and bricks, sheds, greenhouses, household and garden furniture, trailers, washing machines, fish-tanks, oil drums, header tanks, etc.
- B. **Waste brought in by tenants or by fly-tippers.** It is not possible to find who is culpable in each case. Items found on sites this year include broken furniture, domestic and garden waste, building materials, asbestos sheets, toilet bowls, white goods, car parts, broken power tools, etc.
- C. **Plot and communal area waste generated by the service during site maintenance and plot clearance.** The service is clearly responsible for managing its own waste arisings from works on communal areas such as hedges, trees, tracks, and fences. However, the main source of service-derived waste since 2021 has been in the clearance of abandoned plots. Some do not resemble allotment plots as they have been lost to materials and undergrowth accumulated by the former tenant over many years. One plot yielded 3 tonnes of mixed waste, costing £540 in tippage fees plus staff time/on-costs and fuel. As it is unacceptable to let overgrown/cluttered plots to new tenants, it must be cleared. Over 100 plots were cleared in 2022.

4.5.2 There were mixed feelings in the 2020 Consultation about site waste provisions. Some see it as unacceptable to expect free waste services when tenants are supposed to manage their own waste and in the light of austerity. Others were vociferous in objections that, 'we've always had a waste taken away, it's what we pay rent for.' This belief does not recognise that waste collection is not a right set in the Tenancy Agreement; that the Tenancy Agreement says no waste should be dumped elsewhere on site; or that the task may be free of charge to the tenant, but that all other Council Taxpayers will pay for plotholder waste to be disposed of.

4.5.3 It is proposed that the following steps be implemented through 2022/23 to reduce waste generation on sites:

- **Promote on-plot composting.** Some sites have composting champions who help educate other tenants.
- **Promote on-site composting** through the installation of green/compostable waste composting bays. These will not be emptied by the Council but will be managed by volunteers on site to create compost to return to plots.

- **Improve site security.** With volunteer help, the service is changing site padlocks and keys periodically to maintain the security of the site. Secondly, the service is stressing the importance of keeping gates always locked. This task is often overlooked and thus allows in fly-tippers. Once plotholders realise they are liable for their own site waste disposal, site security will improve. Gate locking will be explicitly referenced in the revised Tenancy Agreement.
 - **Introduce waste collection charges.** When the service collects tenants' plot waste, weighbridge readings are used to calculate the tippage costs by site. The annual site waste cost is divided by the number of plots to give a pro-rata Waste Levy that will be added to annual Rent Invoices for each tenant.
 - **Charging for clearance of plots in poor condition.** The current Tenancy Agreement has provisions for the Council to require a plot to be cleared by a departing tenant. If the tenant does not clear the plot, the Council may clear it and recover costs from the outgoing tenant. This clause has not been implemented. From January 2023, the clause will be applied in all circumstances, while taking into consideration special cases such as the death or move into care of the tenant.
- 4.5.4 The "APSE State of the Market" Report 2022 found that only half of all allotment providers offer free waste collection. The feasibility and impact of the waste proposals were discussed with Site Representatives, site meetings, the National Allotment Society and Allotment Societies outside Reading. At site meetings, few tenants expressed an appetite for such an approach, but through deeper discussion it was agreed that something must be done to reduce waste generation. Scours Lane Association have announced they will become a zero-waste site, subject to the Council still removing its own waste arisings. External sites said that their fear that the removal of free waste collection would lead to an increase in on-site dumping proved incorrect. They suggest that, aside of some poor tenant behaviour initially, on site waste management improved because of provision of composting facilities, through peer pressure and to avoid increased charges.
- 4.5.5 Based on waste collection costs since October 2021, the Waste Levy per tenant across the 20 sites is estimated to be £14 per plot. An exercise to estimate the cost per site is underway, but early indications are that some sites might incur a Waste Levy of £5 per plot a year and others £18. The National Allotment Society recommend it is wise to consult on proposed waste charges, despite such charges falling outside of the rent assessment. It is therefore proposed that Waste Levy arrangements are not brought in until the year beginning 2024/25. This delay allows for Council give notice and consult, to install on-site composting bays and embark on a waste minimisation awareness programme with site volunteers. It also gives time for tenants to prepare for new arrangements.
- 4.5.6 Ideally, this approach which includes co-produced solutions could mean the end of waste collection and its associated costs, but the Council may still offer planned one-off collections when carrying out site-maintenance on site. During the first clearances, tenants were offered a plot waste amnesty, allowing them to add their accumulated rubbish for removal.

4.6 SITE MAINTENANCE PLAN

- 4.6.1 The Site Maintenance Plan is held within the Streetscene service. Major site works are restricted to the winter when the Grounds Team have completed their summer programme. However, Henley Road and Lower Southcote (Brunel Road) saw some major works this summer. Most sites were overhauled in the last two winters, with some ad hoc or preliminary works being carried out on others this summer. Those in need of works this winter are Balmore (revisit), Bulmershe (whole-site overhaul), Caversham Court (minor overhaul), Coley (whole-site overhaul), Oak Tree Road (whole-site overhaul), Victoria Road (revisit), Waterloo Meadows (whole-site overhaul). Whole-site works at Bulmershe and at Oak Tree Road will place significant workloads on the Grounds Team because these sites are large and in extremely poor condition. This winter's works are currently 7 weeks behind schedule due to the persistent wet weather being experienced, which may result in some site overhauls being postponed to winter 2023.
- 4.6.2 Tenants and SLRs on sites that have not been subject to overhauls have expressed concern that their sites have been overlooked and that they are currently less inclined to even discuss, let alone adopt any self-management potential. At the recent first Bulmershe site meeting, attendees were initially reluctant to commit to tasks they said were the Council's responsibility. However, the meeting steadily grew and ended on optimistic terms and with a firm commitment to collaborative working through this winter's proposed whole-site overhaul.
- 4.6.3 There have been many examples of minor works being carried out by volunteer work parties on sites. These grow more productive and ambitious once tenants see the Council overhauling their sites after years of under-investment.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 Reading Borough Council's vision is:

To help Reading realise its potential - and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.

5.2 The proposals contained in this report contribute to the Corporate Plan priorities as follows:

- **Creating a healthy environment.**
Allotments provide residents with an opportunity to produce food locally and to reduce food miles. Access to nature in urban settings contributes to improved mental and physical health and a healthy lifestyle.
- **Creating thriving communities**
Allotment gardening offers benefits to all residents, that help to improve the lack of social capital embodied by loneliness and enables citizens to contribute to society, especially beyond retirement as part of like-minded communities with a shared goal and shared achievements.
- **Creating an inclusive economy.**
Allotment gardening offers informal learning opportunities for users of all ages.

Allotment grown produce can be sold and offers a cheap source of healthy food to residents.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Council has made commitments relating to climate change and the UK Government declared a Climate Change emergency in 2019. As a result, a high-level assessment has been undertaken on the switch from Council management to self-management of statutory allotments on carbon emissions.

- Energy Use - No known impacts.
- Waste Generation - Residents will be encouraged to compost more arisings and dispose of non-compostable items themselves. Management groups will check materials brought onto site which will reduce the frequency of fly-tipping. These factors will result in less waste being generated and removed from sites by the Council. Calculating site waste tonnage and potential pro-rata Waste Levies will continue through 2023. As tenants learn to dispose of their own waste, tenant trips to recycling centres will increase.
- Transport - As maintenance is gradually taken over by tenant's self-management groups this will result in fewer journeys to allotments for Council vehicles.

It has also been assessed whether the decision will improve resilience to climate change impacts.

- Heatwaves - No known impacts
- Drought - No known impacts
- Flooding - No known impacts
- High Winds/Storms - No known impacts
- Disruption to Supply Chains - No known impacts

The overall rating assigned to this decision is a low positive one.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 The foundation for this report and direction of the Allotment Plans is the 2020 Allotment Consultation Report and is updated through ongoing dialogue with existing and emerging allotment committees and societies.

7.2 Ongoing feedback is gathered through service requests, site meetings and discussions with Site Liaison Representatives (in person, phone and through the SLR e-mail group).

7.3 Site Liaison Reps have reported that Council input to date has helped them develop more on-site collaborative approaches and goodwill towards the service. They also convey their gratitude for the Project and for what the Council has achieved given resource constraints.

7.4 Site Liaison Representatives, Committees and elected Allotment Societies are growing in confidence and now offer suggestions and solutions to problems and are more willing to develop and trial their own policies and approaches.

7.5 Though the overhaul of the Allotment webpage is delayed, it will be operational before 2023 and will become another conduit for two-way engagement through a suggestions section and through direction to on-line consultation material.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, 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 The Council has reviewed the scope of the project as outlined within this report and considers that the proposals have no direct impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Rights and responsibilities relating to allotments provision are defined in the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The proposals set out in this paper seek to deliver all or part of the commitment to save £26k as required by the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

10.2 Where available, bids will be made for funding in to make improvements to infrastructure are identified in this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 HNL Report 15 December 2020 "Allotment Consultation Report"

11.2 HNL Report 10th November 2021. "Allotments Self-Management"

11.2 Appendix A - Allotment Action Plan 2022

11.3 Appendix B - Allotment Self-Management Plan and Case Studies

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APPENDIX A . ALLOTMENT PLANS. DECEMBER 2022

Table I. ALLOTMENT ACTION PLAN AT SEPTEMBER 2022					
	ACTION	NOTES	DATE	METHOD	STATUS
	Targets arising from 2020 Plan		Reported at HNL Committee November 2021		
1	Publish 2020 Consultation results & report	All tenants	Nov 2020	Email. Website	Completed
2	7 Sites to be engaged in a level of joint-/self-management		End Mar 2021	Officer engagement	8 sites of 20 engaged by end August 2021
3	Site Audits of Pilot Sites		To Feb 2021	GM Supervisor	Completed March 2021
4	Winter Clean-Up for Pilot Sites		To March 2021	GM Teams	Completed July 2021
5	Winter Works to Other Sites		To March 2021	GM Teams	Completed March 2021
6	Appoint Allotment Project Officer	6-month post	October 2021	Secondment	Extension agreed
7	HNL Progress update report & Lead Councillor Briefings		November 2021	Written report	Complete & ongoing at each LCB
8	Overhaul Allotment webpage	With Site Reps	Feb 2022	In-house	Still in Design – Now Jan 2023
Pages 10-13	Set Rent Levels for 2022, issue invoices and self-management newsletter	Inflation only	Dec 2021	Electronic invoicing	Completed. Rents agreed, invoiced, but not electronically
	Site engagement in self-mgt dialogue Site surveys & agreed site works plans, Mail-outs, site meetings, ongoing dialogue		Ongoing	See Appendices A & B	Working with/on 18 of 20 sites. Mail-outs/site meetings 19 sites.
	Targets developed since HNL Nov 2021				
12	HNL March 2022 Update Report HNL November 2022 Update Report		March 2022 Nov 2022	Written report “”	Completed “”
13	Engage with the 6 sites that have not had initial site meetings or that are identified as needing a renewed engagement push.		To April 2022		Meetings held on all sites. Cav Court needing follow up.
14	Identify Site Liaison Reps and run SLR Sounding Board. Host first SLR Meeting with National Allotment Society (NAS)	ID as many as possible	ASAP Summer 2022	Site meetings	19 SLRs on board and on Site Liaison Rep Sounding Board. No SLR Meeting held
15	Self-Management Information Sources		Continual	Site Reps, website, from NAS	Promoted site meetings, circulated in Site Liaison Rep email group.
16	Promote National Allotment Society (NAS) membership to support formation of AllotSocs.		Continual	Share NAS mission & contact details	Info shared with 14 sites. 2 sites approached NAS directly for guidance

				with SLRs and Steering Groups.	
17	Reviews of -Tenancy Agreement Conditions - Rents and Discounts - Site waste recycling & waste collection, and charges for clearance of abandoned plots. -Data handling, billing, etc -Site plans (plot numbers, sizes, infrastructure) -On-site buildings		All December 2021 to Spring 2022	Internal & benchmarking	Draft Tenancy Agreement with Legal Services for approval. Rent Review options to be determined January 2022. Waste policy to be developed over Jan-March 2023 Allotment Data Management System options under consideration
18	Consultation Drafts of a. Self-Management Plan. b. Site Maintenance Works Programme, and c. Tenancy Management Plan		Spring 2022	Written plans for consultation	a. Completed b. Live c. Draft
19	Approve Consultation Plan for ... -Rent Review & Tenancy Agreement Review -Waste management & recycling proposals. -Consult on proposals regarding joint-/self-mgt	Statutory Desirable Essential	Jan 2023	Internal via LCB & HNL	Internal discussions, options to be prepared Jan 2023 prior to consultation from March 2023 only
20	Consultation Phase Consult Analysis of feedback across all themes Update/Proposal report to HNL as Allotment Strategy 2023 Implement approved changes		By April 1 st 2023	Using consultation plan used in 2020 with increased traffic via Site Reps and website	Subject to 19 above
21	Joint-/Self-Management uptake on sites -All sites investigating options at any level -Sites with elected committees -Sites with AllotSocs -Sites proposing fully devolved management		Detailed in Appendix A Table 2	Delivered through Self-Management Plan.	Direction of travel positive, but pace is reduced.
22	SITE MAINTENANCE	Planned Winter Works Reactive works	Annual Oct-March As arising	Site Maintenance Plan	Programme Winter works over 2 winters, dealing with minor works and reactive works in summer months or as required.
23	Policy and procedure for TENANCY MANAGEMENT 'ACTION'	Non-compliant tenants	January 2023	Written policy agreed with Legal Services	Tenancy management caseload is to the detriment of the overall project.

Table 2. READING ALLOTMENTS SELF-MANAGEMENT PLAN – DECEMBER 2022		
DATE	SELF-MANAGEMENT TARGETS. Set February 2022	PERFORMANCE AT September 2022
Spring 2022	Site Liaison Reps are in place on all 20 sites . 13 of the 20 SLRs are already proving an effective communication channel and are helping each other through the SLR email group.	19 ex 20 sites have an active Site Liaison Rep, who is also linked into the SLR e-mail group. Caversham Court & Oak Tree Road process initiated Oct 2022
Summer 2022	Inaugural Reading Allotment SLR Meeting – To launch consultation on Reading Allotments Strategy 2023 (including Self-Management Plan, Site Maintenance Plan, and Tenancy Management Plan). To scope potential Reading Federation of AllotSocs .	No meeting held. Only soft/verbal consultation with SLRs and at Site Committee or informal meetings.
		RG4 SLRs have had initial dialogue about forming a Caversham Allotments Association
Autumn 2022	Level 1 activities are being worked towards or carried out on all 20 sites , of which...	18 EX 20 SITES. Caversham Court and Oak Tree Road process initiated Oct 2022.
	... Level 2 activities are operational OR being developed AND elected Site Committees/AllotSocs are in place on 9 sites .	11 ex 20 sites with Level 2 activities. 6 of these 12 have an elected Committee, and 6 have some form of unelected site steering group.
	... Level 3 or Fully Devolved Self-Management is being developed on 1 site .	No site is currently considering or developing plans for Fully Devolved Self-Management.
Winter 2022	Level 2 activities and an elected Site Committee/AllotSoc on 9 sites .	12 ex 20 sites with Level 2 activities. 6 of these 12 have an elected Committee, and 6 have some form of unelected site steering group.
	Level 3 proposals being worked on at 3 or more sites . Level 3 negotiation on terms of lease underway on 1 site (aspirational). Reading Federation of AllotSocs formed , comprising at least 15 sites. (aspirational)	
Spring 2023	Level 2 activities AND an elected Site Committee/AllotSoc on 12 sites .	No Level 3 proposals currently being taken forward
Winter 2023	Level 2 activities AND elected Committee/AllotSoc on all or as many sites as possible . Level 3 Fully devolved Self-Management in place on 1 site. Level 3 being worked toward on 5 sites .	

Table 3. Site-by-site appetite for and progress towards self-management. September 2022								
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
	2020 Interest in Self-Mgt? % of replies	2020 Interest in Site-Maint? % of replies	2020 Social Media on site	2022 Social media on site	2020 Steering Group or Committee on site?	2022 Steering Group or Committee on site?	2022 Site Liaison Rep?	Self-mgt appetite & progress since Oct 2021 to Dec 2022
ARDLER ROAD	100% of 1	100% of 1	N	Y	N	TBA	Y	New SLR linking in with other Caversham SLRs
ASHAMPSTEAD RD	50% of 2	50% of 2	N	Y	N	N	Y	Not required at present
BALMORE	80% of 5	80% of 5	Not known	Y	N	N	Y	Positive, awaiting whole site overhaul.
BULMERSHE	45% of 29	62% of 29	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Informal group is positive
CAVERSHAM COURT	13% of 8	75% of 8	Not known	Not known	Not known	N	Y	Needs reinitiating
CIRCUIT LANE	33% of 6	67% of 6	N	Y	N	Y	Y	V Positive
COLEY	56% of 9	78% of 9	Not known	Y	N	N	Y	Positive but dependent on seeing RBC Grounds Team on site by March
EMMER GREEN (Grove Road)	20% of 15	27% of 15	N	Y	N	N	Y	Positive
GEORGE STREET	33% of 3	100% of 3	Y	Y	N	TBA	Y	Needs reinitiating
GODDARDS FARM	50% of 10	60% of 10	N	Y	N	Y	Y	V Positive
HENLEY ROAD	45% of 20	40% of 20	N	Y	N	Y	Y	V Positive
LOWER SOUTHCOTE (Brunel Road)	78% of 9	67% of 9	N	Y	N	TBA	Y	Positive
MEADWAY	25% of 4	75% of 4	Not known	Y	N	Y	Y	Positive
MOCKBEGGARS	50% of 4	100% of 4	Y	Y	TBA	Y	Y	V Positive
NEWCASTLE ROAD	100% of 7	86% of 7	Y	Y	TBA	Y	Y	V Positive
OAKLEY ROAD	63% of 8	75% of 8	Not known	Y	N	Y	Y	Positive
OAK TREE ROAD	53% of 17	65% of 17	Y*	Y*	N	Y	N	Start November

SCOURS LANE	62% of 29	66% of 29	Y	Y	TBA	Y	Y	V Positive
VICTORIA ROAD	33% of 3	100% of 3	Not known	Not known	N	N	Y	Needs support
WATERLOO MEADOWS	29% of 7	71% of 7	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	V Positive

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APPENDIX B. CURRENT ALLOTMENT TENANCY AGREEMENT

An agreement made on the between Reading Borough Council of Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading RG1 2LU, Assistant Director of Environmental & Commercial Services, Andrew Edwards and duly authorised Agent in that behalf (hereinafter called “The Council”) of the one part and (Hereinafter called “The Tenant”) of the other part The Council agrees to let and The Tenant agrees to hire as tenant from to the 31st day of December 2021 and thereafter year to year until determined the allotment garden in the Register of Allotments kept by the Council being Plot No at the Council’s Allotment containing approximate m² or thereabouts subject to any exceptions and reservations contained in the Lease or Agreement under which the Council holds the land at the yearly rent of £payable in advance on the First day of January in each year and at a proportionate rent for any part of a year of which the tenancy may extend (unless waived by the Council for any reason such waiver to be in the absolute discretion of the Council).

The tenancy is subject to the conditions and provisions of the Allotments Act 1908 – 1950 and any other enactment’s regulations or orders relating to allotments.

The tenant hereby agrees with the Council as follows: -

- a) To pay the rent in advance on the First day of January in each year.
- b) The yearly rent, as detailed above, is subject to a reasonable annual increase.
- c) The Tenant shall keep the allotment paths and allotment surroundings on and immediately adjoining his plot clean and cut free from weeds and the allotment well maintained in a good condition and in proper state of cultivation.
- d) The Tenant shall not cause any nuisance or annoyance to the occupier of any other allotment garden or deposit any refuse in any ditch or upon or otherwise obstruct any paths set out by the Council for the use of the occupiers of the allotment.
- e) The Tenant shall not underlet assign or part with possession of the allotment garden or any part of it.
- f) The Tenant shall not use barbed wire for a fence adjoining any path set out by the Council for the use of the occupiers of the allotment gardens.
- g) The Tenant shall not without the written consent of the Council cut or prune any timber or other trees except the proper pruning of fruit trees or bushes in the proper course of husbandry or take or sell or carry away any mineral gravel sand or clay or permit any other person to do so.
- h) The Tenant shall keep every hedge that forms a part of the allotment garden properly cut and trimmed keep all ditches properly cleansed and maintain and keep in repair any other fence and any gate on the allotment garden.
- i) The Tenant shall not without any written consent first obtained by the Council create any building shed or other structure on the allotment gardens nor shall the Tenant use the allotment garden or any building shed etc. lawfully erected thereon for the storage of any goods chattels supplies other than those used directly in the cultivation and maintenance of the allotment garden and in particular the Tenant shall not store any motor vehicle thereon.
- j) The Tenant shall so far as is consistent with his or her tenancy of the allotment garden observe and perform all conditions and covenants in the lease or Agreement (if any) under which the Council hold the land.
- k) The Tenant shall observe and perform any other special conditions, which the Council consider necessary to preserve the allotment from deterioration and to which notice to the applicants is given in accordance with any rules made or to be made by the Council with respect to allotments.
- l) The Tenant shall not use any hose or sprinkler to water the allotment garden nor any other means or device except watering can or container.
- m) Any dispute between Tenants shall be referred to and settled by the Council’s Head of Transportation & Streetcare Services but in the event of a tenant being dissatisfied with the Head of Transportation & Streetcare Services determination of a dispute he or she shall be entitled to appeal to the Council whose decision in the matter shall be final and conclusive.
- n) Any Member or Officer of the Council shall be entitled at any time when authorised by the Council to enter and inspect the allotment.

o) The Tenant shall not later than the determination of his or her tenancy remove or cause to be removed at the request or the direction of the Head of Transportation & Streetcare Services or any other responsible Official of the Council all sheds buildings erections etc. and the foundations of the same situate on the allotment garden if the Head of Transportation & Streetcare Services so requests in writing and if the outgoing tenant refuses or fails to remove the said buildings etc. the Council may remove the same and charge the cost thereof to the outgoing tenant.

p) Every allotment garden shall bear a plot number allocated by the Head of Transportation & Streetcare Services and every tenant shall be responsible for providing and displaying this number in a prominent position on the plot.

q) The Tenant shall not keep on the allotment hereby let any hens or rabbits in such place or in such a manner as to be prejudicial to health or nuisance or a hazard to other allotment tenants, no Tenant may use more than one allotment in order to keep pigs or chickens, which may only be kept on plots at Bulmershe site or other sites which are unsuitable for any other purposes, no more than 30 chickens shall be kept on one allotment, in any event pigs, chickens or rabbits shall only be kept with the permission of the Head of Transportation & Streetcare Services.

r) The tenancy may be determined by the Council or the Tenant by 12 months in writing on or before the Sixth day of April or on or after the Twenty-ninth day of September in any Year.

s) The Council may re-enter the allotment after three months previous notice in writing to the Tenant:

i. On account of the land being required for building planning or any industrial purposes or for roads or sewers in necessary connection with any of those purposes or

ii. Under the provisions of the Allotments Act 1922

n) The Council may re-enter the allotment after one month's notice in writing to the Tenant: -

i. If the rent is in arrears whether lawfully or for not less than 40 days or

ii. It appears to the Council that the Tenant not less than three months after the commencement of the tenancy has not duly observed the conditions contained in or endorsed on this agreement or is resident more than one mile out of the borough or is bankrupt or compounds with his creditors.

❖ Any notice to be served on the Tenant under or by virtue of the Allotments Act 1908 – 1950 or this Agreement except for determining the tenancy in accordance with the 2nd paragraph of this Agreement paragraph (q) and (r) shall be validly served if sent by ordinary letter post to the Tenant addressed to his or her address as entered in the Allotment Register.

❖ Any notice to be served under paragraphs (q) and (r) shall be validly served if sent to the Tenant addressed to his or her address as entered in the Allotment Register by Recorded Delivery post.

❖ It is hereby declared and agreed that any person not previously an allotment tenant of the Council and for the first time acquiring a tenancy of an allotment garden from the Council shall pay on the commencement of the tenancy a reasonable fee which is to be such as the Arts and Leisure Services Committee from time to time prescribes.

❖ The Council reserves the right to re-grade or reclassify any or all of its allotments sites thereby varying the rent for the allotment gardens at that site but shall not do so without first giving notice of its intention to affected tenants.

APPENDIX C. PROPOSED DRAFT ALLOTMENT TENANCY AGREEMENT

An AGREEMENT made on [DATE]

between Reading Borough Council of Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading RG1 2LU (the "Council") of the one part and [FULL NAME] of [ADDRESS] (the "Tenant") of the other part.

The Council agrees to let and the Tenant agrees to hire as Tenant from [START DATE] to the 31st day of December **202X** and thereafter year to year until determined in accordance with the provisions of this agreement the allotment garden in the Allotment Register kept by the Council being **Plot No [NUMBER]** (the "Plot") at the Council's [ALLOTMENT NAME] **Allotment** (the "Site") measuring approximately [NUMBER]m² or thereabouts subject to any covenants or obligations referred to in the Council's title to the land at the yearly rent of **£[YEARLY RENT]** (the "Rent") payable in advance on the First day of January in each year and at a proportionate rent (as determined by the Council) for any part of a year of which the tenancy may extend (unless waived by the Council for any reason such waiver to be in the absolute discretion of the Council).

The Tenant hereby agrees as follows -

Rent

1. The Tenant will pay the Rent in advance on the First day of January in each year. The yearly rent, as detailed above, is subject to a reasonable annual increase to be determined by the Council and notified to the Tenant.

Use of an Allotment Plot.

2. The Plot is let solely as an 'allotment garden' as provided for in the provisions of the Allotments Acts 1908 to 1950 as to allotment garden tenancies, and the provisions of those Acts apply accordingly.
3. The Plot is to be wholly or mainly cultivated by the Tenant for the production of vegetables or fruit crops for consumption by the occupier and their family, or flowers, and shall not carry on, nor permit to be carried on, any trade or business on or from the Plot.
4. The Tenant shall not underlet assign or part with possession of the Plot or any part of it.
5. Where an allotment plot is let to two or more Tenants or community groups they shall be jointly and severally liable for their obligations under the terms and conditions of this agreement. The Council may take action against, or release or compromise the liability of, any one or more of the persons or groups comprising the Tenant without affecting the liability of the other such persons or groups.
6. The Tenant shall provide and display the Plot number as allocated by the Council's Streetscene Manager (or such other officer of the Council from time to time responsible for carrying out similar duties to the Streetscene Manager) in a prominent position on the Plot.

Maintenance and Care of the Allotment Plot

7. The Tenant shall at all times maintain the Plot in a good condition, free from weeds and in a proper state of cultivation.
8. The Tenant shall keep paths adjacent to the Plot mown, clean and free from obstruction.
9. The Tenant must not plant, or allow to grow, any hedges around the Plot, or use barbed or razor wire or the like for any purpose.
10. The Tenant must not plant, or allow to grow by natural seeding or otherwise, any trees or bushes other than fruit trees and bushes of recognised varieties cultivated for their crop. Fruit trees and bushes must not be planted within one metre of, nor hang over or encroach upon roads, paths, fences, or neighbouring allotment plots. Fruit trees and bushes should be pruned annually so their height does not exceed 3 metres. Fruit trees should be dwarf variety, in espalier or fan form.
11. The Tenant shall not, without the written consent of the Council, cut or prune any timber or other trees except the proper annual pruning of fruit trees or bushes on the Plot.
12. The Tenant shall keep every hedge that forms a part of the Plot properly cut and trimmed, keep all existing ditches properly cleansed and keep in good repair any other fence and any gate on the Plot.

13. The Tenant may from time to time cover part of the Plot with weed-suppressant membrane or similar. No more than 50% of the total area of the Plot may be so covered at once, and areas may only be covered for a maximum period of 6 months.
14. The Tenant shall not use, install or bring tyres on to the Site.
15. The Tenant shall not take or sell or carry away any mineral, gravel, sand, or clay or permit any other person to do so.
16. The Tenant shall not dig or permit to be dug any pits, shafts, wells, or new ditches. One small pond, covering no more than 10% of the area of the Plot is permitted for the efficient use of rainwater and to increase biodiversity.
17. The Tenant shall not import, store, or allow on the Site any materials which are not connected with the intended and lawful use of the Plot as an allotment garden or which are likely to cause environmental damage or adversely affect the horticultural quality of the Site.
18. Hosepipes may be used on the Site, subject to water company regulations, recommendations and guidance. Hoses must be held in the hand and not left unattended when water flows through them. The use of sprinklers, irrigations systems and the like is forbidden.

Plot Waste

19. The Tenant must not deposit any refuse or other material of any kind on any communal land, roads, paths, lay-bys or anywhere on car-parking areas, or in watercourses.
20. Disease-free organic waste should be composted on the Plot, or in a dedicated communal composting bay on Site where one is provided.
21. The tenant shall remove waste materials that cannot be composted from the Site and dispose of them in a lawful manner.
22. The Tenant shall not burn waste on Site from 1st April to 31st September in any year.
23. During the period 1st October to 31st March, the Tenant may burn dry organic materials (but no other materials nor waste whatsoever) on the Plot provided that the Tenant remains in attendance throughout the duration of their fire and the Tenant must extinguish the fire before leaving the Site. The Tenant must not cause a nuisance or pollution, and must not allow smoke or smuts to encroach on any highway.

Structures & Paths

24. The Tenant shall not without any written consent first obtained from the Council create any building shed or other structure on the plot. If consent is issued in respect of a proposed shed, it must be positioned and kept within the Plot boundary and must not exceed 2.5 metres in height. Consent may be subject to any other conditions considered to be reasonable by the Council.
25. The Tenant shall not use the Plot nor any building shed etc. lawfully erected thereon for the storage of any goods, chattels, or supplies other than those used directly in the cultivation and maintenance of the Plot and in particular (but without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing words) the Tenant shall not store any motor vehicle on the Plot.
26. The total area of all structures on the Plot (including sheds, greenhouses, polytunnels and the like) may not at any time exceed 20% of the total Plot area, must be built and maintained to a reasonable standard, and should include rainwater harvesting to provide sustainable water use.
27. The Tenant may create paths or patios within the Plot, providing these areas are constructed only from organic materials. The use of concrete or cement in the construction of paths and hard-standing is prohibited. The total area of paths, shall not exceed 10% of the total area of the Plot.
28. The Tenant shall not place any form of play equipment, including but not limited to swings, see-saws, slides, paddling pools, upon the Plot.

Care of the Site and toward Other Tenants, Neighbours, and the Council.

29. The Tenant must lock gates after entering or leaving the Site even if they are found to be open or unlocked. The Tenant must make arrangements to meet personally at the entrance of the Site any

persons visiting them or vehicles making deliveries to the Tenant on the Site and to ensure that the entrance is locked securely before and after. The Council shall have the right to refuse admittance to any person other than the Tenant or a member of his/her family or household to the allotment unless accompanied by the Tenant or a member of their family.

30. The Tenant shall return to the Council at the end of the tenancy all gate and other keys provided by the Council or Allotment Society (where one exists). All keys and locks remain the property of the Council.
31. Tenants should report to their Site Liaison Representative any matters of mains water leakage, any damage to fences, property or produce, through trespass or vandalism or from any other cause.
32. The Tenant must keep dogs under close control, on a lead, while on the Site. They must not be allowed to foul or cause damage to any allotment plot on the Site.
33. The Tenant shall not do in connection with the allotment any act or thing which may be, or become, illegal or a nuisance to the Council, to the Allotment Society (where one exists), to other Tenants or to the owners or occupiers of other property in the neighbourhood.
34. The Tenant shall not encroach or trespass, or allow others to trespass, upon another Tenant's allotment or encroach onto any path, road, or communal space at the Site.
35. The Tenant shall not cause, or allow to be caused, any damage to or theft of any property, including crops, belonging to other persons.
36. The Tenant shall only park on Site when in attendance on the Site, and shall not park or cause to be parked any motor vehicle or wheeled vehicle on any allotment or on any part of the Site except in areas designated by the Council for parking.
37. The Tenant shall not interfere in any way with any material, plant, equipment, building or installation owned by the Council.
38. The Council reserves the right to exclude from the Site without notice, any Tenant or other person who is accused of gross misconduct such as (a) causing serious damage to any allotment or to the crops on the Site or to any communal area or (b) while on the Site, damaging or stealing the property of any other person or of the Allotment Society (where one exists) or (c) assaulting or threatening any person on the Site.
39. The Tenant shall cooperate as far as reasonably possible with the Council, its officers, and with the Allotment Society (where one exists) in ensuring the efficient, effective, and harmonious running of the Site.
40. The Tenant shall inform the Council immediately of any change in their address or contact details.
41. The Council is not responsible for any loss, theft, damage or injury to any persons or property on the Site, and all persons who enter the Site do so at their own risk.
42. Any dispute between Tenants shall be referred to and settled by the Council's Streetscene Service but in the event of a Tenant being dissatisfied with the Streetscene Manager's determination of a dispute he or she shall be entitled to appeal to the Council whose decision in the matter shall be final and conclusive.
43. Any Member or Officer of the Council shall be entitled at any time when authorised by the Council to enter and inspect the Plot.

Chickens and Bees

44. Livestock may NOT be kept on allotments, EXCEPT at Bulmershe and Scours Lane Allotments, where the keeping of chickens/ducks is permitted, with written consent of the Council and subject to the following special conditions, A- The numbers of chickens/ducks must be manageable; B-the livestock are well and humanely managed; and C- they do not cause any danger, nuisance, interference, disturbance or annoyance to tenants or to anyone else including members of the public and the owners or occupiers of the neighbouring and adjoining property or ploholders. The Council may decide that keeping livestock on the site would be prejudicial to health or a nuisance and has discretion to suspend permission to keep chickens/ducks on site.

45. Bees may be kept, with written consent of the Council and satisfaction of the Council that the Tenant-beekeeper is suitably qualified to care properly for them to a proficient level of competence. To this end, the following special conditions apply: A- the beekeeper should have undertaken a recognised course, to the satisfaction of the Council covering both theoretical and practical hands-on training; B- the beekeeper must be a full member of a recognised beekeeping association with full insurance against third party damages; C- any bees brought onto the Site should be of good temperament and kept that way; and D- that the Tenant displays their contact details on the Plot in case of emergency.

Termination of the Tenancy

46. The Tenant must yield up the allotment at the expiration or termination of the tenancy in such condition as shall be in compliance with the terms and conditions contained in this agreement.
47. The Council or the Tenant may at any time terminate a tenancy by giving twelve months' notice in writing to the other expiring on or before 6th April or on or after 29th September in any year except that the Allotment Society (where one exists) or the Council may at its discretion accept from the Tenant a lesser period of notice expiring at any time.
48. In the event of the death of the Tenant, the tenancy shall terminate 3 months after the date of death except that the tenancy may be terminated sooner by agreement with the Allotment Society (where one exists) or the Council.
49. If it appears to the Council that the Tenant, not less than three months after the commencement of the tenancy created by this agreement, (a) has not observed the tenant's obligations and conditions contained in this agreement or (b) is resident more than one mile out of the borough of Reading, the Council may terminate this agreement upon one month's notice to the Tenant.
50. The Council shall have the right immediately to re-enter and take possession of the Plot and to terminate the tenancy created by this agreement at any time when: a) the Rent is in arrears for forty days or more, whether formally demanded or not, or b) the Tenant is in breach of any of the conditions above imposed on the Tenant by this agreement, or c) on the making of an application for a bankruptcy order, the presentation of a petition for a bankruptcy order or the making of a bankruptcy order against the Tenant.
51. The Tenant shall not later than the determination of his or her tenancy remove or cause to be removed at the request or the direction of the Council's Streetscene Manager or any other responsible Officer of the Council all sheds, buildings, materials, etc. situated on the Plot. The Tenant irrevocably appoints the Council to be the Tenant's agent to store or dispose of any such items if the Tenant refuses or fails to remove the said items. The Tenant must indemnify the Council in respect of any claim made by a third party in relation to that storage or disposal. The costs of such storage or disposal shall be payable by the Tenant to the Council. This clause's provisions shall not affect any statutory right of compensation which may arise in favour of the Tenant in respect of any Plot improvements.

Letters and notices

52. Any letter or notice required to be served on the Tenant under this agreement must be served by hand, by pre-paid post, or by suitable electronic means on the Tenant at his or her address as entered in the Allotment Register, or failing that, by fixing the same in some conspicuous manner on the Plot. Any notice served by the Council pursuant to clause 49(b) (i.e., tenant residing more than one mile out of the borough) may be served upon the tenant at his last known place of abode in the borough.
53. Notices directed to all Tenants may be served by posting them prominently on the Site notice board or similar display space or by including them in any newsletter or journal distributed by the Allotment Society (where one exists) or by the Council to all its members/plotholders.
54. Notices directed to the Council must be served by hand or by pre-paid post and must be addressed to "Allotments, 19 Bennet Road, Reading RG2 0QX" or by e-mail to

Allotments.Reading@reading.gov.uk or such other address notified to the Tenant by the Council from time to time.

General Data Protection Regulations

55. Tenants' contact details, allotment history and other information relevant to their tenancy and membership of an Allotment Society may be stored by the Council on a secure drive on a computer or otherwise. This information will be used only for management and administration of Allotments and will not be disclosed to third parties unless the Council is required to do so by law or in compliance with its legal obligations. The Tenant may inspect the information held by the Council about him/her/them on request. For more information please contact the Information Commissioner's Office: <https://ico.org.uk/>

Other

56. The Tenant shall observe and perform any other special conditions or rules, which the Council considers necessary to preserve the Site from deterioration and in respect of which notice has been to the Tenant. It is hereby declared and agreed that any person not previously an allotment tenant of the Council and for the first time acquiring a tenancy of an allotment garden from the Council shall pay on the commencement of the tenancy created by this agreement a reasonable fee which is to be such as the Council's Housing, Neighbourhood and Leisure Committee (or such other body possessing the authority to determine such fee) from time to time prescribes.

57. The Council reserves the right to re-grade or reclassify any of its allotments sites, thereby varying the rent for the allotment gardens at that site but shall not do so without first giving notice of its intention to affected tenants.

Signed (Signature) – [] Acting for and on behalf of the Council

Signed & Dated(Tenant):

Tenant Address, e-mail, and phone number.

Signed & Dated (Witness)

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee		
DATE:	4 January 2023		
TITLE:	Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation Strategy 2023 - 2026		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	Cllr Karen Rowland	PORTFOLIO:	Environmental Services and Community Safety
SERVICE:	Housing & Communities	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	Jo Middlemass	TEL:	0118 937 3177
JOB TITLE:	Community Partnerships Service Manager	E-MAIL:	joanne.middlemass@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report introduces the Domestic Abuse & Safe Accommodation Strategy 2023 - 2026, which has been produced in collaboration with Reading's Domestic Abuse Partnership Board. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 placed new statutory requirements on local authorities to:

- Assess the need for domestic abuse support in their area for all victims who reside in relevant safe accommodation, including those from outside their area.
- Prepare and publish a strategy for the provision of such support to cover their area having regard to the needs assessment.

1.2 A comprehensive strategic assessment has been conducted which has informed the strategy and will be used to inform the commissioning of new safe accommodation provisions and support services as a result of current contracts coming to an end.

1.3 Appendix A - Domestic Abuse & Safe Accommodation Strategy
Appendix B - Priorities Consultation - Response summary
Appendix C - Equality Impact Assessment

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 That Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee endorses and adopts the new Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation strategy.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 Reading's current Domestic Abuse Strategy ends this year, as do the contracts for commissioned services to provide refuge spaces and non-refuge support services. This, coupled with the statutory duties set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which requires the council to assess the needs and develop a strategy within safe

accommodation and plans to ensure the provision of support for victims and their children, has resulted in the development of a new strategy that encompasses a strategy for safe accommodation, which will inform the commissioning process for a new refuge provision and non-refuge support services contract.

3.2 In addition to these requirements, a duty was placed upon local authorities to form a Local Partnership Board, to act as a consultation board for specified functions. Reading's existing Domestic Abuse Steering Group was formally renamed to become Reading's Domestic Abuse Partnership Board at the beginning of 2022 and set new terms of reference to ensure compliance with the Act. The Board is a subgroup of Reading's Community Safety Partnership, which provides scrutiny over the board's activities.

3.3 A comprehensive Needs Assessment was undertaken in the spring of 2022 to understand the needs of victim survivors in relation to safe accommodation and support. The identified needs have shaped the priorities, which are set out as follows:

- Effectively commission refuge and other Safe Accommodation spaces.
- Raise awareness about Domestic Abuse.
- Engage with those in diverse communities experiencing abuse with a view to encourage trust to remove barriers to access support services and supporting victim survivors to view seeking help early.
- Develop and support a multi-agency approach to working with an array of groups, inclusive of perpetrators, victim survivors (irrespective of gender/sexuality identity).
- Continue to safeguard and advocate for all children who have witnessed or experienced domestic abuse

3.4 A public consultation to seek views about the proposed strategy priorities was undertaken between 25th July and 5th September 2022, which consisted of an online survey. The overview of responses is set out in appendix B.

3.5 The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board has worked collaboratively to develop this Strategy (appendix A), which ensures the needs of all victim-survivors of domestic abuse and their families, both within safe accommodation and the community, are considered and this is reflected in the strategy's priorities. The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board is currently writing an action plan to accompany the strategy, which will be published when the strategy is launched.

3.6 The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and wider Community Safety Partnership acknowledges that this strategy is being published at a time when public finances are considerably impacted and when there are resourcing challenges across the partnership. Both factors impact on the partnership's response to tackling Domestic Abuse and supporting victim-survivors, however, in response to these challenges, the Partnership is committed to developing a realistic and achievable delivery plan and to ensure more effective, efficient and collaborative use of the resources each agency has to reduce harm caused by domestic abuse.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 It is a statutory requirement for the Council to assess the needs and develop a strategy which sets out its local response to providing support within safe accommodation and plans to ensure the provision of support for victims and their children.

4.4 It is proposed that the Strategy will be launched on 5th January 2023.

4.5 The completion of the needs assessment and the development of the strategy is providing officers with the foundations to commence a procurement and commissioning exercise to ensure that new and appropriate services are commissioned as the current

contracts end. An interim contract has been put in place with the current provider, Berkshire Women's Aid, which will run until 30th June 2023, to allow for the commissioning process to be carried out, now that the strategy has been finalised.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 Reading Borough Council's vision is:

To help Reading realise its potential - and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.

This area of work will contribute towards the Thriving Neighbourhoods and Healthy Environment priorities, with a focus on reducing domestic abuse and addressing the issues around providing safe accommodation to those people and their children who are affected by domestic.

Reducing the impact of Domestic Abuse has an impact of both the Health and Wellbeing and Community Safety agendas of the Council and partners.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no environmental or climate implications arising from this report.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 The priorities for the Strategy have been consulted on through a public consultation, which was conducted between 25th July and 5th September 2022.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed (appendix x) in respect to the draft strategy. It is considered that the priorities within the strategy could have positive differential impact on groups with the following protected characteristics:

- Racial
- Disability
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Religious belief

7.2 No Negative impact was recorded on any group.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 This Strategy enables the Council to meet its statutory duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Council has in place a budget which is allocated to the costs for refuge provision and non-refuge support services.

10.2 New Burdens Funding was allocated to the Council for the period of 2022-2023 to the amount of £342,933 to support Reading with its delivery of the new Domestic Abuse Act. This funding will be used in addition to the funding already committed by the council to ensure the needs identified by the Domestic Abuse & Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment have been met.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Reading's Domestic Abuse Strategy 2019 - 2022.

Reading's Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation Strategy.

2023 - 2026

Overseen by the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board

A sub-group of Reading's Community Safety Partnership

DRAFT

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1 FOREWORD

I take great pride in introducing Reading's 2023-2026 Domestic Abuse Strategy, which is dedicated to protecting and serving the needs of all victim-survivors of domestic abuse. The Strategy builds upon the work delivered through the previous Strategy, whilst embracing the duties set out in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and our new strategic priorities.

Through this Strategy, we are committed to a true partnership approach, ensuring that the public health issue of domestic abuse is 'everyone's business'. Underpinning our Strategy is an intelligence-led Plan, setting out our activity to address the needs identified in our recent Strategic Needs Assessment, including Safe Accommodation options through collaborative commissioning, ensuring our reach is inclusive across all our communities and continuing to safeguard and advocate for children and young people who have experienced or witnessed domestic abuse.

As a Partnership, we acknowledge that this Strategy is being launched at a time when domestic abuse is still prevalent and our residents are facing further challenges following the COVID 19 pandemic, with cost-of-living pressures adding to risks posed to victim-survivors. Agencies are not immune to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, with resources across the Partnership being more limited than ever before as a result of continuing cuts in public spending. Therefore, we are committed to working together with a strong, collaborative multi-agency approach to address the priorities set out in our Strategy. Working together, we will continue to do all we can to ensure that individuals who have been and continue to be affected by domestic abuse are at the heart of how we take our actions forward to combat the harms caused by domestic abuse.

Councillor Karen Rowland

Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety

Reading Borough Council

2 INTRODUCTION

Reading as a partnership have acknowledged the increase in the prevalence of Domestic Abuse and the devastating effects it can have on the individual and the communities they reside in. Reading have continued to support and commit to a collaborative, multi-agency approach in reducing the prevalence of Domestic Abuse and bettering the lives of victim-survivors and their families. The development of this Strategy is in response to the new published [Domestic Abuse Act 2021¹](#), placing a statutory duty on all local authorities to produce a Domestic Abuse Strategy, with significant emphasis on the Safer Accommodation initiative. We believe that a coherent Strategy that tackles Domestic Abuse effectively needs to be informed by an understanding of the various forms of Domestic Abuse whilst considering the needs within our borough through an evidence-based approach. Therefore, this strategy has been consulted on and co-developed by the Reading Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, on the basis of a robust Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment and consideration of service user feedback and victim-survivors voices which are central to the development of this Strategy.

The Reading Domestic Abuse Partnership Board was re-formed in 2021 in alignment with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and reports into the Reading Community Safety Partnership. The main responsibility of the Board is to strategically oversee and take ownership of the development and implementation of Domestic Abuse related priorities within Reading. The Reading Domestic Abuse Partnership Board acknowledge that reducing the prevalence of Domestic Abuse is beyond producing a Domestic Abuse Strategy but also ensuring that all priorities are successfully achieved and implemented. This will be fulfilled through the development of a coherent action plan, produced by the Reading Domestic Abuse Partnership Board which will include clear objectives, timelines and a review process to determine that the needs as highlighted by the Domestic Abuse Needs Assessment are being met effectively.

Our commitment as a Partnership to successfully deliver the above will allow us to meet the four main objectives set out by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which are to:

- **PROMOTE AWARENESS** of Domestic Abuse
- **PROTECT AND SERVE** victims of Domestic Abuse
- **TRANSFORM** the justice response to prioritise victim safety and provide an effective response to perpetrators
- **DRIVE CONSISTENCY** and better performance in the response to Domestic Abuse across all local areas, agencies and sectors.



2.1 DEFINING DOMESTIC ABUSE

As a Partnership, it is understood that statistically women are disproportionately affected by violent crimes which has been highlighted in the national response to [Violence Against Women and Girls \(VAWG\)](#).² Despite this, it is recognised that all local services must provide

¹ GOV.UK (2021) [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

² GOV.UK (2021) [Violence Against Women and Girls \(VAWG\) strategy 2021 to 2024: call for evidence - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

inclusive and accessible services for those who may present with different sexual/gender identities alongside intersectional factors that need tailored support systems of support. This Domestic Abuse Strategy will exclusively focus on Domestic Abuse rather than the wider strands of VAWG. Reference to Domestic Abuse in this Strategy is defined by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as:

Anyone aged 16 and over who are ‘personally connected’ to one another who may be experiencing behaviours inclusive of:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Violent or threatening behaviour
- Controlling or coercive behaviour
- Economic abuse
- Psychological, emotional or other abuse

The above only needs to occur once to be considered abusive.

‘Personally connected’ in this instance can be defined as those who are:

Intimate relationships

- (1) In intimate relationships (both historic and current)
- (2) In civil partnerships (both historic and current)
- (3) Have agreed to marry one another (regardless of whether the agreement has been terminated)

Familial relationships

- (1) Those who maybe related
- (2) The person is a parent of the child
- (3) The person has parental responsibility for the child

The definition of Domestic Abuse relates to more than just intimate relationships, with a significant increase reported by statutory agencies around child to parent abuse. However, this Domestic Abuse Strategy will focus specifically on Domestic Abuse perpetrated in intimate relationships with our response to Child to Parent Abuse highlighted in the [One Reading Young People and Extra Familial Harm Strategy 2021/24](#)³. We also acknowledge and support that children and young people are individually victims of Domestic Abuse, regardless of whether they have personally experienced, heard or witnessed Domestic Abuse.



³ One Reading children and Young People’s Partnership (2021) [Early Help Strategy 2021-2023 update](#)

2.2 THE PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

2.3 NATIONAL CONTEXT:

- Police recorded 845,734 domestic abuse related crimes in the year ending March 2021 across England and Wales⁴
- 73% of victims involved in Domestic Abuse related crimes were female in the year ending March 2021⁵
- Domestic Abuse has cost communities an estimated £66.2 m in 2017⁶
- Costs the economy 47bn in total annually thus far
- March 2020 - 2.3 million victims of Domestic Abuse are aged 16-24 (1.6 million women and 757,000 men)⁷

2.4 LOCAL CONTEXT:

- 2020/21: 4,597 reports of Domestic Abuse related incidents (1% increase compared 2019/2020)
- 2,816 were recorded as crimes from the above number
- Most common reported crime was violence without injury (60%)
- 75% of victim survivors were female (Highlighting the gendered nature of domestic abuse)
- 75% of perpetrators were male
- Females aged 20-28 were most at risk of reporting domestic abuse
- Males aged 28-37 were most at risk of being reported as perpetrators
- 304 cases were discussed at MARAC 2020/21 (21 cases per 10,000)
- 2020/21 BWA received 243 referrals for their Reading Refuge Spaces
- 2020/21 99 refuge referrals were unsuccessful. Most common reasons for unsuccessful referrals:
 - Complex needs
 - Not safe in area
 - No recourse to public funds
 - High safety risk
 - No available refuge spaces

Domestic abuse is more than an individual or societal issue but rather a public health issue and a human rights violation⁸. This is due to the negative and long-lasting affects that Domestic Abuse has on the livelihood of victim-survivors'. It is estimated that annually, Domestic Abuse costs the economy £47bn⁹, with 2.3 million victim-survivors reporting instances of Domestic Abuse in 2020 and the police reporting 845,734 Domestic Abuse



⁴ Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2021) [Office of National Statistics \(ONS, 2021\) Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2021](#)

⁵ Office of National Statistics (ONS,2021) [Domestic abuse victim characteristics, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

⁶GOV.UK (2019) [The economic and social costs of Domestic Abuse](#)

⁷ GOV.UK (2021) [Office of National Statistics \(ONS, 2021\) Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2021](#)

⁸ World Health Organisation (WHO, 2021) [Violence against women \(who.int\)](#)

⁹ GOV.UK (2019) [The economic and social costs of Domestic Abuse](#)

related crimes in 2021. Despite the severity of these statistics, it is well recognised that nationally, Domestic Abuse cases are under-reported. Irrespective of this, roughly £66.2m¹⁰ has been put forward by communities to reduce the prevalence of Domestic Abuse, with a continuous need for additional resources. Reporting Domestic Abuse can be a fearful experience, with many victim-survivors reporting barriers which can deter them from reaching the point of disclosure. Therefore, there is a significant emphasis across the Partnership in understanding and tackling the barriers and gaps within services to support victim-survivors and reduce the prevalence of Domestic Abuse within Reading.

Domestic Abuse within Reading is ‘everyone’s business’, with the Partnership taking a collaborative approach to reinforce this across all working networks.



3 SUMMARY OF OUR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

3.1 SAFER ACCOMMODATION

- A need to review and increase safer accommodation spaces through commissioning/de-commissioning where needed
- A need to explore dispersed accommodation for those who need it
- A need to explore self-contained accommodation for those who need it
- Exploring alternative accommodation solutions for older victims and those with disabilities
- A need to explore safe spaces for male victim-survivors
- A need to support those victim survivors with no recourse to public funds.

3.2 DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES

- A need to increase available outreach support
- More specialist support workers to provide support that is fit for purpose for those with complex needs
- Understanding why younger victims are reluctant to access services
- Increasing interventions to support children and young people
- A need to make Domestic Abuse support services more visible in Reading

¹⁰ GOV.UK (2019) [The economic and social costs of Domestic Abuse](#)

4 READING'S DOMESTIC ABUSE & SAFE ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY - 2023-2026 PRIORITIES

The Domestic Abuse Strategy for Reading 2023-26 set out the following five priority areas, which will be the focus of the three-year Delivery Plan:

4.1 PRIORITY 1: EFFECTIVELY COMMISSION REFUGE AND OTHER SAFE ACCOMMODATION SPACES

To ensure:

- There is a range of appropriate Safe Accommodation options for all victim-survivors of Domestic Abuse who need it
- Effective support is available to enable victim-survivors to return home safely or to move into alternative permanent accommodation quickly and safely

Safer accommodation is defined as the following:

- **Refuge accommodation** - Accommodation and intensive support where victim survivors must be residents to access support
- **Specialist safe accommodation**- Specialist refuges for specific groups, for example: BAME, LGBTQIA+, disabled victims and their children (this list is not exhaustive)
- **Dispersed accommodation** - Safe dedicated housing to supporting victims of domestic abuse in a self-contained area for victim survivors who are unable to stay in communal refuge or semi-independent accommodation with support for victims who may not require intensive support but are still at risk of abuse
- **Sanctuary schemes** - Properties within the local authority that have safety measures put in place to allow victim survivors to remain in their own homes where it is safe to do so
- **Move-on and second stage accommodation** - Projects temporarily accommodating victims' survivors and their families who no longer need an intense level of refuge support but would benefit from low level domestic abuse support
- **Other forms of domestic abuse emergency accommodation**- Safe places with appropriate support to give victim survivors the opportunity to make decisions within a temporary time span in an environment which is self-contained and safe.

Safe Accommodation provision in Reading up until June 2023.

- 3 refuge properties across 2 locations, providing a total of 21 beds which meets the criteria for the Women's Aid Quality Standard
- There are 4 Asian-specialist spaces which have shared funding between BWA and Reading Council.
- Reading Council also operates a Sanctuary Scheme which is considered safe accommodation under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, with the demand for this service significantly increasing between 2020-2022.

A significant part of the new Domestic Abuse Act 2021 highlights the importance of providing safer accommodation spaces for victim survivors and their children. The Act emphasises how critical it is to make safer accommodation accessible, encompassing the array of needs that victim-survivors present with. Reading Borough Council has adopted a more proactive approach to early intervention and prevention to homelessness and are able to rapidly facilitate access to private rented sector accommodation; including offering financial assistance where needed with deposits and rent in advance, however, at the time of writing this Strategy, access to private rented accommodation is becoming more challenging and the Partnership will explore options ensure the burden of lack of move-on provision is relieved. The Partnership also acknowledges that there are specific issues in relation to those victim-survivors with no recourse to public funds and will actively explore what support and help can be provided.

4.2 PRIORITY 2: RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT DOMESTIC ABUSE

With a focus on:

- **Workforce Development** - Continue to support a knowledgeable and a well-trained workforce and develop new innovative ways to engage the workforce to commit to training development
- **Community awareness** - Promoting and supporting community mobilisation and awareness to understand and reduce the prevalence of Domestic Abuse.

All front-line services and agencies have the potential to interact with someone who has experienced or witnessed Domestic Abuse. The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board are committed to improving victim-survivors experiences, ensuring they receive appropriate and impactful responses from professionals. It is recognised that when Domestic Abuse concerns are resolved effectively and at an earlier stage, this sets positive and streamlined responses and support for the entire course of professional interactions with the victim-survivors, reducing the negative impacts of Domestic Abuse on victim-survivors and their children.

Moreover, the awareness and understanding of Domestic Abuse does not stop at training workforces. It is equally important to encourage and aid community mobilisation and training continuity, to make the issue of Domestic Abuse more visible and understood across all communities.

The training that has been delivered throughout 2019-2022 was positively received by 100% of delegates. This speaks to the positive impact training uptake has had across the Partnership, suggesting competency and a strong knowledge base that can empower and support victim-survivors accessing Reading's front life services.

The following strengths were identified:

- Confidence in dealing with disclosures of Domestic Abuse
- Confidence in asking the right questions and providing appropriate responses to disclosures
- A positive understanding in risk management

- Understanding referral pathways dependant on victim-survivors needs.

The Partnership acknowledges that this needs to continue but also that workforces need to be alert to changes in legislation, best practice and emerging themes, and this will be a focus within the Action Plan.

4.3 PRIORITY 3: ENGAGEMENT WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

With a view to:

- Encourage and gain trust from those experiencing abuse to remove barriers to accessing services
- Supporting victim-survivors to view seeking help as realistic at an earlier stage.

Diverse communities can be at a higher risk of experiencing Domestic Abuse due to their protected characteristics. These characteristics can sometimes make it difficult for diverse groups to have the confidence to seek support from mainstream Domestic Abuse organisations out of fear of being judged and a lack of understanding for their needs from professionals. The Partnership is committed to promoting equality and inclusivity, creating the same opportunities for all victim-survivors and their children and will set out clear actions within the Action Plan as to how it will tackle these priorities and the links across other areas of work across the wider Partnership.

4.4 PRIORITY 4: DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING A MULTI-AGENCY APPROACH TO WORKING WITH AN ARRAY OF GROUPS, INCLUSIVE OF PERPETRATORS, VICTIM SURVIVORS (IRRESPECTIVE OF GENDER/SEXUALITY IDENTITY)

With a focus on:

4a: Providing the highest standard of support for victim-survivors

The empowerment and advocacy of all victim-survivors is central to all statutory agencies' responses to Domestic Abuse. The Partnership will continue to prioritise the protection and respect of all victim-survivors accessing routes to support, irrespective of gender or sexual identity. Every Domestic Abuse related incident is different, with no direct definition of how a victim-survivor of Domestic Abuse may present. Therefore, it is important that all services supporting victim-survivors are adaptable and accessible to allow for anyone suffering from Domestic Abuse to feel confident to seek support and have their needs met effectively.

4b: Strengthening the local response to perpetrators to break cycles of abuse

Commonly, when addressing Domestic Abuse incidents, victim-survivors and their families are prompted to make drastic changes in their lives. This can be very distressing as victim-survivors and their children are forced to detach themselves from their communities, friends, family and social networks which can often place blame on the victim-survivor. Therefore, the Partnership will focus on targeting perpetrator behaviours, forming the correct response first time to bring perpetrators to justice and break the cycle of abusive

behaviours and repeat Domestic Abuse offences. Through our action plan, we will explore how as a Partnership we can make best use of the tools and powers available to remove perpetrators from the properties in which the abuse is taking place to ensure that victim-survivors can remain in their homes without causing further distress and disruption.

4.5 PRIORITY 5: CONTINUING TO SAFEGUARD AND ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED OR WITNESSED DOMESTIC ABUSE

Children and young people are recognised as victims of Domestic Abuse, regardless of whether they have witnessed or experienced Domestic Abuse. The Partnership recognises that the voices and opinions of children and young people are often overlooked and that their contributions need to be incorporated into all strategies and action plans relating to Domestic Abuse. To prioritise and understand the needs of children and young people allows for interventions and support mechanism to be put in place which can address unhealthy behaviours that can cause cycles of abuse, leading to children and young people being at a high risk of being perpetrators or victims themselves and our Action Plan will set out how we will ensure the voices of young people are captured and used to inform service delivery.

4.6 HOW WILL WE TACKLE OUR PRIORITIES?

This Strategy will be accompanied by a Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation Plan, which will be delivered through the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, reporting into the Community Safety Partnership Executive Group. The Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and wider Community acknowledges that this Strategy is being launched at a time when public finances are considerably impacted and when there are resourcing challenges across the Partnership, both factors of which impact on its response to tackling Domestic Abuse and supporting Victim Survivors in Reading. In response to these challenges, the Partnership is committed delivering a realistic and achievable plan and to ensure more effective and efficient use of the resources within each agency to tackle Domestic Abuse collaboratively.

Underpinning these priorities is the need to embed a strong communication strategy to ensure that residents feel well informed about what is happening to tackle issues of crime and disorder and promote reporting mechanisms and make best use of data available to the Partnership to ensure resources are effectively utilised to achieve successful outcomes for these outcomes.

5 GOVERNANCE AND LINKS TO OTHER STRATEGIES

This Strategy and plan will be delivered by Reading's Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and will be monitored by Reading's Community Safety Partnership. This Strategy will also complement other key strategies across the Partnership and nationally, aiming to improve day-to-day life for residents. These include:

[Reading's Community Safety Partnership Community Safety & Serious Violence Strategy and Plan 2023 - 2026 - Link to be added when finalised](#)

[National Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy 2021-2024](#)

This National Strategy not only focuses on Domestic Abuse, but various strands of VAWG affecting Women and Girls such as sexual violence, stalking and harassment, forced marriage and so-called ‘honour’ based violence (this list is not exhaustive). The four main objectives of this Strategy which Reading’s Domestic Abuse Partnership Board are committed to prioritising are to, prioritise prevention, support victims, pursue perpetrators and have stronger working systems across agencies.

[Local Thematic Review: Services provided to young people and their families in relation to serious youth violence \(Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership\)](#)

Following two incidents in 2021 involving six young people who were charged with serious offences, the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership commissioned a Thematic review that found that some young people who committed serious offences had adverse childhood experiences and were often involved with a range of agencies with limited engagement and successful outcomes. These young people were also more likely to be involved in crime and/or sexual exploitation. This thematic review allows for the Partnership to consider interventions and collaborative working with relevant agencies to inform decision making and intervention development, regarding the prevention of unhealthy behaviours in children and young people.

[Local One Reading Young People and Extra Familial Harm Strategy 2021 - 2024](#)

The One Reading Young People and Extra Familial Harm Strategy focuses on responding and bettering the challenges young people face outside their homes and wider social contexts. Extra Familial harm within the Strategy includes child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, missing children, gang affiliation, county lines and serious youth violence. All of these crimes can occur through social media, peers, schools, neighbourhoods and wider community settings, which ties into the work the Partnership aim to support within schools to better the experiences of children and young people



6 REVIEWING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE STRATEGY

This Domestic Abuse Strategy will be reviewed over the course of three years (2023-2026). To ensure that this Strategy is being effectively delivered, it will be assessed using a detailed action plan that will be agreed and monitored by the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board. The Partnership will also be responsible for reporting into the Community Safety Partnership every six months, to maintain accountability and achieve the objectives as set out by the Strategy and action plan. It is important to consider that due to legislations being published at different times under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the action plan will remain under review and continue to be a flexible document that aligns with all Domestic Abuse legislation.

Reading's Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation Strategy 2022 – 2025

Consultation Link: <https://consult.reading.gov.uk/dens/domestic-abuse-priorities-public-consultation>

Key Summary:

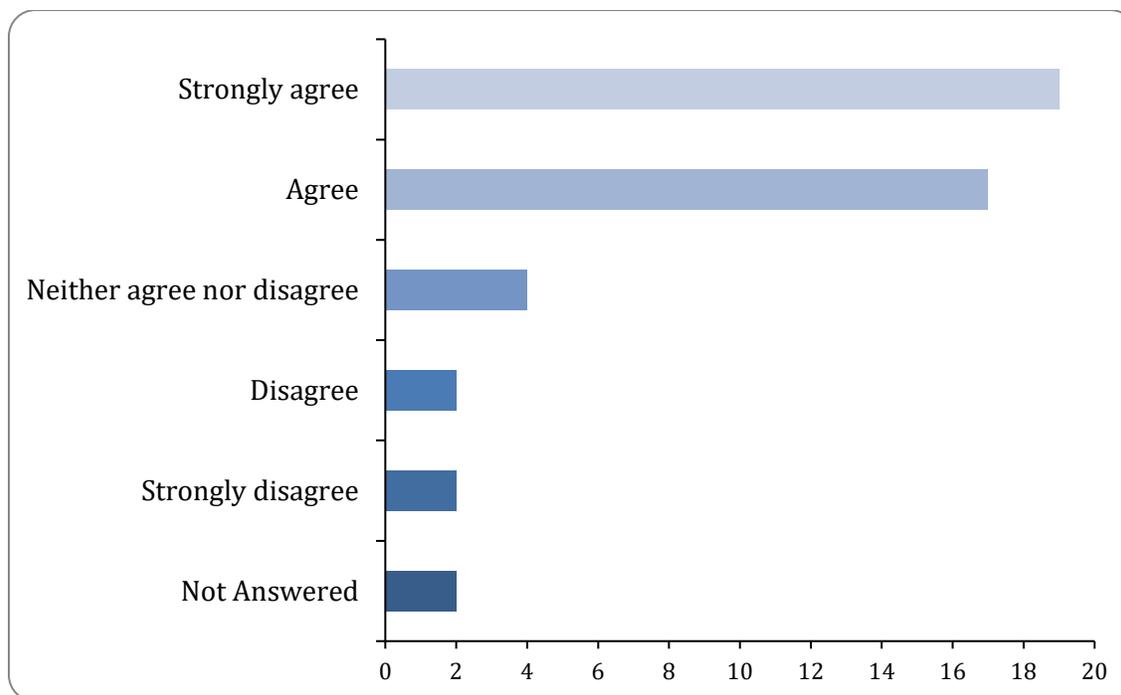
The activity ran from 25/07/2022 to 05/09/2022

Responses to this survey: **46**

1: To what extent do you agree with the proposed priorities for Reading's Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation Strategy for 2022-25?

To what extent do you agree with the priorities?

There were 44 responses to this part of the question.

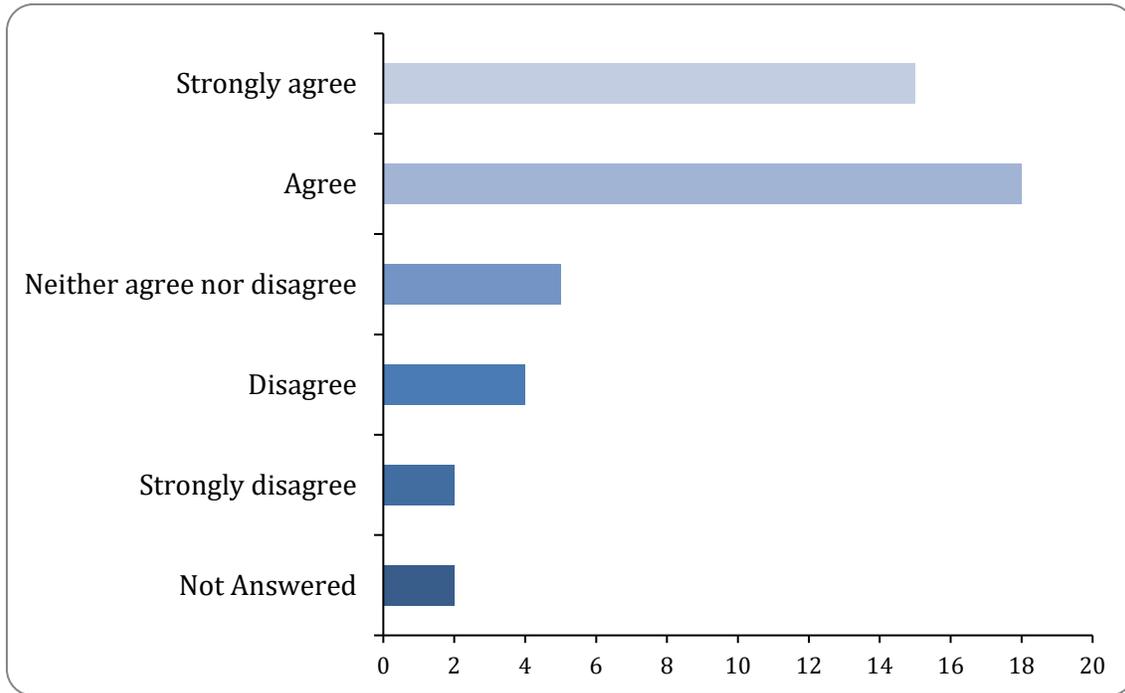


Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	19	41.30%
Agree	17	36.96%
Neither agree nor disagree	4	8.70%
Disagree	2	4.35%
Strongly disagree	2	4.35%
Not Answered	2	4.35%

2: To what extent do you agree the scope and objectives of the Strategy meet the support needs of victim-survivors of Domestic Abuse in Reading?

Do the scope and objectives meeting v/s needs

There were 44 responses to this part of the question.



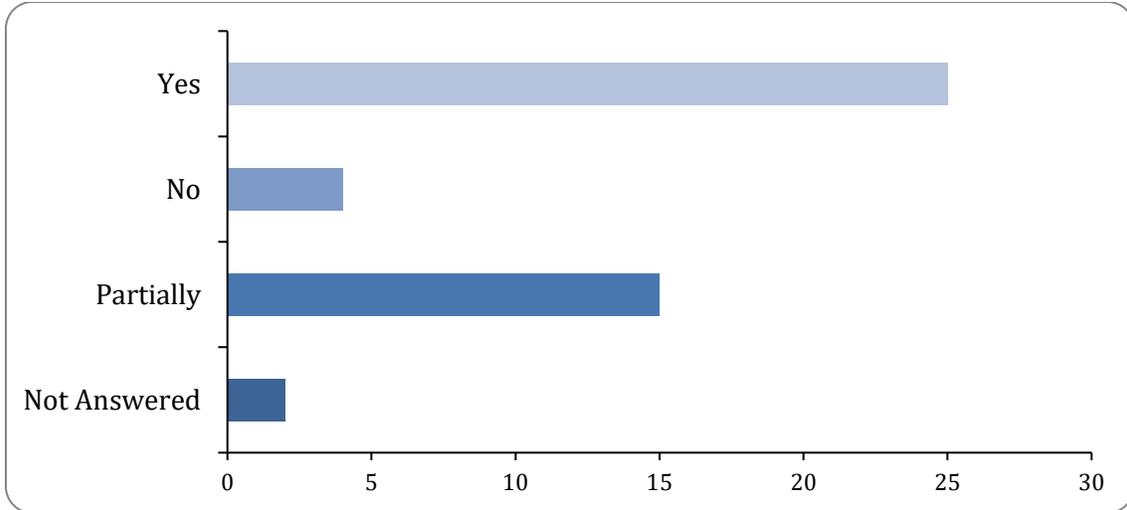
Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	15	32.61%
Agree	18	39.13%
Neither agree nor disagree	5	10.87%
Disagree	4	8.70%
Strongly disagree	2	4.35%
Not Answered	2	4.35%

3: Do you have any comments on the proposed priorities?

There were 25 responses to this part of the question.

4: Do you think the strategy highlights victim-survivors needs appropriately? does the strategy highlight v/s needs appropriately?

There were 44 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	25	54.35%
No	4	8.70%
Partially	15	32.61%
Not Answered	2	4.35%

4 Does the strategy highlight v/s needs (Comments)

There were 19 responses to this part of the question.

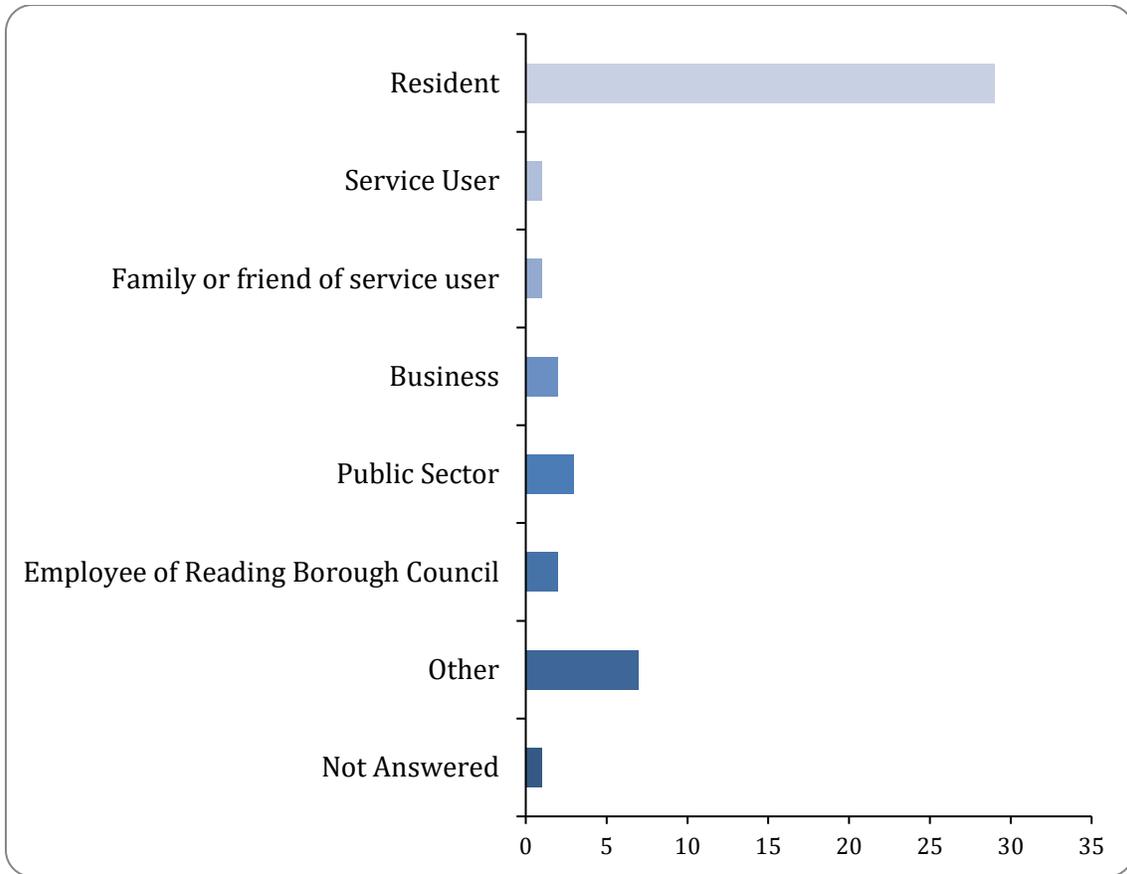
5: Do you feel that there is anything missing that is important to reducing the prevalence of Domestic Abuse?

There were 29 responses to this part of the question.

Section 2:

1: Please indicate whether you are responding to this consultation as a: who are you?

There were 45 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Resident	29	63.04%
Service User	1	2.17%
Family or friend of service user	1	2.17%
Voluntary organisation	0	0.00%
Business	2	4.35%
Public Sector	3	6.52%
Employee of Reading Borough Council	2	4.35%
Other	7	15.22%
Not Answered	1	2.17%

Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit

What is an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)?

The Equality Act 2010 places an 'Equality Duty' on public bodies, to understand the effect of their policies and practices on equality. This involves looking at evidence, engaging with people, staff, service users and others and considering the effect of what they do on the whole community.

An Equality Impact Assessment is tool which helps you to identify how your plans to introduce new, or change existing, policies, procedures or services will affect groups protected under equality legislation (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.)

It **MUST** be completed before the policy, project or service has been set up or changes implemented so that you can make changes if your assessment identifies groups that could be adversely affected by your proposals.

The assessment covers impacts on employees, existing and potential service users, the wider community and contracted out services.

EqIAs aim to

- stop direct and indirect discrimination from happening now and in the future
- highlight diversity as a strength and an integral part of our work, not just an add-on that you feel you must do
- recognise the fact that we don't all have an equal chance in life, and find ways to address this through your work
- ensure that our services are accessible to everyone in the community. The process is not the most important thing - it's the outcomes that matter.

What should an EqIA include?

An Equality Impact Assessment **MUST**:

- contain sufficient information to show the Council has paid "due regard" to equality duties in our decision-making
- identify methods for mitigating or avoiding any adverse impacts identified.

Assessments do not necessarily have to take the form of one document called an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) but it is recommended and helps you make sure you cover everything and sets out your rationale and evidence in one place.

What is the Equality Duty?

Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The relevant protected characteristics are—

- age;
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- race;
- religion or belief;
- sex;
- sexual orientation.

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to—

(a) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;

(b) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;

(c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

The Equality Duty explicitly recognises that disabled people's needs may be different from those of non-disabled people. Public bodies should therefore take account of disabled people's impairments when making decisions about policies or services. This

might mean making reasonable adjustments or treating disabled people better than non-disabled people in order to meet their needs.

Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to—

- (a) Tackle prejudice, and
- (b) Promote understanding.

Compliance with the Equality Duty may involve treating some persons more favourably than others; but that is not to be taken as permitting conduct that would otherwise be prohibited by or under the Act.

When should I carry out an Equality Impact Assessment?

You **MUST** carry out an assessment as part of your planning process when you are putting together your proposals for new (or changes to existing) policies, procedures and service (including financial changes) before the decision is made **UNLESS** you have good reason to show that it is not relevant.

Making sure your EqIAs are in place in could save you problems, time and even money in the long run. See the example below where not completing an EqIA properly has caused problems.

Example: Southall Black Sisters judgement

The judgement by Lord Justice Moses in the case of Southall Black Sisters and London of Ealing was published on 29 July 2008.

Southall Black Sisters (SBS) successfully challenged Ealing Council's decision to end funding their services to Asian and Afro-Caribbean women experiencing domestic violence.

Lord Justice Moses' ruling stresses the need to carry out an equality impact assessment **BEFORE** formulating policies.

Southall Black Sisters won the case and Ealing Council was charged with failing to carry out a proper EqIA and misinterpreting the race equality legislation, subsequently Ealing carried out a full EqIA, including consultation, and had to pay £100,000 because of the case.

Who needs to see my Equality Impact Assessment?

The public equality duty means that equality issues must **consciously** influence the decisions reached by public bodies. Equality Impact Assessments **MUST** be provided for all Committee Reports to enable members to have 'due regard' to the equality duty when making decisions. In the Committee Report you **MUST** state whether the duty is relevant to the decision. If it is not relevant you **MUST** state why. If it is, attach the completed EqlA template as an appendix, and summarise its conclusions.

So what do I have to do?

Save this document and follow through the steps on the following pages. You can fill in the details as you go or come back to it as necessary.

For further advice you can contact Clare Muir on 72119 or email clare.muir@reading.gov.uk. You can also get further guidance on Equality and Human Rights Commission Website - www.equalityhumanrights.com.

Provide basic details

Name of proposal/activity/policy to be assessed

Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation Strategy 2023 - 26

Directorate: Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services

Service: Housing and Communities

Name and job title of person doing the assessment

Name: Jo Middlemass

Job Title: Community Partnerships Service Manager

Date of assessment: September 2022

Scope your proposal

What is the aim of your policy or new service/what changes are you proposing?

Domestic Abuse and Safe Accommodation Strategy 2022 - 2025

Who will benefit from this proposal and how?

Residents at risk of, experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse

What outcomes does the change aim to achieve and for whom?

The new Domestic Abuse strategy for 2019/22 will encourage those experiencing domestic abuse to come forward early in order to keep themselves and their families safe. And it will ensure that, when they do come forward, staff are equipped with everything they need to support individuals, including perpetrators, to build a more secure future. Actions within this strategy that affect protect groups will be subject to further consultation and equality impact assessment.

Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?

- Those experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse
- Organisations in the town, statutory and voluntary, supporting residents experiencing domestic abuse or the impact on other family members.
-

Assess whether an EqlA is Relevant

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than others? (Think about your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc.)

Yes

Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Think about your complaints, consultation, and feedback.

No

If the answer is **Yes** to any of the above you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment.

If No you **MUST** complete this statement

Assess the Impact of the Proposal

Your assessment must include:

- **Consultation**
- **Collection and Assessment of Data**
- **Judgement about whether the impact is negative or positive**

Think about who does and doesn't use the service? Is the take up representative of the community? What do different minority groups think? (You might think your policy, project or service is accessible and addressing the needs of these groups, but asking them might give you a totally different view). Does it really meet their varied needs? Are some groups less likely to get a good service?

How do your proposals relate to other services - will your proposals have knock on effects on other services elsewhere? Are there proposals being made for other services that relate to yours and could lead to a cumulative impact?

Example: A local authority takes separate decisions to limit the eligibility criteria for community care services; increase charges for respite services; scale back its accessible housing programme; and cut concessionary travel.

Each separate decision may have a significant effect on the lives of disabled residents, and the cumulative impact of these decisions may be considerable.

This combined impact would not be apparent if decisions are considered in isolation.

Consultation

How have you consulted with or do you plan to consult with relevant groups and experts. If you haven't already completed a Consultation form do it now. The checklist helps you make sure you follow good consultation practice.

[My Home > Info Pods > Community Involvement Pod - Inside Reading Borough Council](#)

Relevant groups/experts	How were/will the views of these groups be obtained	Date when contacted
<p>Agencies supporting those who experience domestic abuse or their household, statutory or voluntary.</p> <p>Safeguarding Boards</p> <p>Service Users</p> <p>Domestic Abuse Partnership Board members</p> <p>Community Safety Partnership members</p> <p>Reading MARAC</p> <p>Member of Reading Voluntary Action</p>	<p>The consultation adopted a number of different approaches reflective of the stakeholders whose views are sought.</p> <p>Discussions and meetings with colleagues</p> <p>Targeted emails</p> <p>Attendance and discussion at relevant internal and partner meetings</p> <p>Online survey and information</p>	<p>A period of public consultation about the proposed priorities was conducted between 25th July and 5th September 2022.</p>

Collect and Assess your Data

Using information from Census, residents survey data, service monitoring data, satisfaction or complaints, feedback, consultation, research, your knowledge and the knowledge of people in your team, staff groups etc. describe how the proposal could impact on each group. Include both positive and negative impacts.

(Please delete relevant ticks)

Describe how this proposal could impact on Racial groups

A key priority has been identified which sets out how the partnership will engage with diverse communities to:

- Encourage and gain trust from those experiencing abuse to remove barriers to accessing services
- Support victim-survivors to view seeking help as realistic at an earlier stage.

An action is set out in the strategy to Understand the needs and expectations of diverse groups so that safer accommodation is more accessible and inclusive through interviews, public consultations and focus group discussions

Is there a negative impact?

No

Describe how this proposal could impact on Gender/transgender (cover pregnancy and maternity, marriage)

The Domestic Abuse & Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment identified that there is a need provide suitable safe accommodation for male victim survivors. The strategy has identified a priority to ensure there is a range of appropriate Safe Accommodation options for all victim-survivors of Domestic Abuse who need it.

A further priority has been identified to ensure the partnership develops and supports a multi-agency approach to working with an array of groups, inclusive of perpetrators, victim survivors (irrespective of gender/sexuality identity).

The strategy has also set out an action to explore the option of a task and finish group as a sub-group of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to help support the development of mapped referral pathways for all victim-survivors and their children.

An action has been set out in the strategy to Understand the needs and expectations of diverse groups so that safer accommodation is more accessible and inclusive through interviews, public consultations and focus group discussions.

Is there a negative impact?

No

Describe how this proposal could impact on Disability

The Domestic Abuse & Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment identified that there is a need provide suitable safe accommodation for victim survivors with disabilities. The strategy has identified a priority to ensure there is a range of appropriate Safe Accommodation options for all victim-survivors of Domestic Abuse who need it.

The strategy has also set out an action to explore the option of a task and finish group as a sub-group of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to help support the development of mapped referral pathways for all victim-survivors and their children

Is there a negative impact? No

Describe how this proposal could impact on Sexual orientation (cover civil partnership)

The strategy has identified a priority to ensure there is a range of appropriate Safe Accommodation options for all victim-survivors of Domestic Abuse who need it.

The strategy has also set out an action to explore the option of a task and finish group as a sub-group of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to help support the development of mapped referral pathways for all victim-survivors and their children.

An action has been set out in the strategy to Understand the needs and expectations of diverse groups so that safer accommodation is more accessible and inclusive through interviews, public consultations and focus group discussions

Is there a negative impact? No

Describe how this proposal could impact on Age

The Domestic Abuse & Safe Accommodation Needs Assessment identified that there is a need provide suitable safe accommodation for older victim survivors. The strategy has identified a priority to ensure there is a range of appropriate Safe Accommodation options for all victim-survivors of Domestic Abuse who need it.

The Strategy has also identified a priority to continue to safeguard and advocate for all children who have witnessed or experienced domestic abuse

Is there a negative impact? No

Describe how this proposal could impact on Religious belief?

The strategy has identified a priority to ensure there is a range of appropriate Safe Accommodation options for all victim-survivors of Domestic Abuse who need it.

The strategy has also set out an action to explore the option of a task and finish group as a sub-group of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to help support the development of mapped referral pathways for all victim-survivors and their children

An action has been set out in the strategy to Understand the needs and expectations of diverse groups so that safer accommodation is more accessible and inclusive through interviews, public consultations and focus group discussions

Is there a negative impact?

No

Make a Decision

If the impact is negative then you must consider whether you can legally justify it. If not you must set out how you will reduce or eliminate the impact. If you are not sure what the impact will be you **MUST** assume that there could be a negative impact. You may have to do further consultation or test out your proposal and monitor the impact before full implementation.

Tick which applies (Please delete relevant ticks)

No negative impact identified - Go to sign off

How will you monitor for adverse impact in the future?

Any change in practice or policy will be subjected to further specific consultation and equality impact assessment.

Signed (completing officer)	Umi Abdulmutwalib	Date
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Signed (Lead Officer)	Jo Middlemass	Date
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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee		
DATE:	4 January 2023		
TITLE:	Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy 2023 - 2026		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	Cllr Karen Rowland	PORTFOLIO:	Environmental Services and Community Safety
SERVICE:	Housing & Communities	WARDS:	Boroughwide
LEAD OFFICER:	Jo Middlemass	TEL:	0118 937 3177
JOB TITLE:	Community Partnerships Service Manager	E-MAIL:	joanne.middlemass@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report introduces Reading's Community Safety Partnership's new Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy, which has been co-produced with key stakeholders following a comprehensive strategic assessment and consultation exercise. The Strategy has been approved by the Community Safety Partnership Executive Group, which is now in the process of finalising a 3-year plan and will be launched following this committee adopting the new Strategy. A Community Safety Survey will commence at the end of February 2023 to provide a baseline to measure the impact of the strategy on public perception.

Appendix A - Reading's Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy 2023 - 2026

Appendix B - Reading's Community Safety Partnership Priorities Consultation - Response summary

Appendix C - Equality Impact Assessment

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee adopts the new Strategy.
- 2.2 That a Community Safety Survey is undertaken in February/March 2023 to provide a baseline for the Community Safety Partnership's Community Safety & Serious Violence Strategy 2023-26.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 Reading's Community Safety Partnership is required to produce a strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder following the completion of a comprehensive strategic assessment to understand the levels and patterns of crime and disorder in the local area. Further to this, the introduction of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 has placed further requirements on partnerships in the form of a Serious Violence

Duty, which sets out that partnerships must formulate an evidence-based analysis of the problems associated with serious violence in their local area and produce and implement a strategy detailing how they will respond to those issues.

- 3.2 The Community Safety Partnership’s current Community Safety Strategy ended in 2022, therefore as part of its statutory obligations, the Partnership conducted a new strategic assessment which is being used to inform the development of a new 3-year plan. At the time of writing this report, the implementation date for the new Serious Violence Duty has not been published, however, given the timing of the need to produce a new Community Safety Strategy and the likelihood that the new Duty will be in place in early 2023, Reading’s Community Safety Partnership took the decision to undertake a joint Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategic Assessment and produce a combined strategy and plan.
- 3.3 A comprehensive Community Safety & Serious Violence Strategic Assessment was completed in the summer of 2022, with 7 priorities identified:

Community Safety Priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce crime in the top crime-generating neighbourhoods.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the way the Community Safety Partnership works with communities to tackle anti-social behaviour and hate crime.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce community-based drug related activity.
Serious Violence Priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce knife violence, including the carrying of blades and their use in crime.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackle organised crime gangs transporting illegal drugs across Reading’s borders, also known as ‘county lines’ offending.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve safety for women in public places and reduce sexually focused crimes and anti-social behaviour.
Combined Priority.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategy and plan to reduce persistent offending.

- 3.4 A public consultation was undertaken between 25th July and 5th September 2022 which consisted of an online survey. The overview of responses is included in appendix B.
- 3.5 The Strategy (appendix A) has been developed in response to the consultation feedback and discussions with key partners and approved by the Community Safety Partnership at its Executive Group meeting in November 2022. The Strategy, after adoption at this committee has been agreed, will be formally launched at the Community Safety Partnership Executive Group on 2nd February 2023, along with the launch of a new Community Safety Survey, which is proposed to take place on an annual basis, rather than bi-annually, to support the monitoring of the new plan. In addition to this, the Community Safety Partnership will revert back to holding annual Community Safety Conferences to promote the work of the partnership and provide feedback to residents about what action is being taken to tackle crime and disorder in the town.
- 3.5 A Community Safety and Serious Violence action plan is being written by key CSP partners and will be presented for approval by the Community Safety Partnership at its Executive Group in February 2023. The plan will be overseen by the Community Safety Partnership Executive Group, with the proposal to set up a number of delivery groups to responsibility for the delivery of the action plan.

- 3.6 The Community Safety Partnership acknowledges that the Strategy will be published at a time when public finances are considerably impacted and when there are resourcing challenges across the partnership, both factors of which impact on its response to tackling crime and disorder across Reading. In addition to the this, the reduction in the contribution of the Thames Valley Police & Crime Commissioner's Community Safety fund to Reading between 2022 and 2025 requires the Community Safety Partnership to review how it uses this funding to tackle issues of crime and disorder and to target its use more effectively to ensure value for money, whilst tackling the priorities identified in the new strategy. In response to these challenges, the Partnership is committed to developing a realistic and achievable delivery plan and to ensure more effective and efficient use of the resources each agency has to tackle crime and disorder collaboratively.

4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Due to the statutory requirements placed on Community Safety Partnerships, the options are limited to producing a strategic assessment, consulting on priorities and producing a strategic plan. As the Committee that oversees scrutiny for the Community Safety Partnership, it is proposed that the strategy is adopted.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The purpose of this section is to ensure that proposals contained in reports support the Council's vision and Corporate Plan priorities:

Reading Borough Council's vision is:

To help Reading realise its potential - and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.

- 5.2 This area of work will contribute towards the Thriving Neighbourhoods priority, with a focus on reducing crime and to create safer communities and neighbourhoods for residents of Reading.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no environmental or climate implications arising from this report.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 Community Safety Partnerships are required to consult on its proposed priorities prior to publishing strategies and plans.
- 7.2 The Council undertakes a Community Safety Survey every two years to gather views from local residents about community safety issues and fear of crime. The last survey was conducted late 2021 and, with the results being used to inform the Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategic Assessment which has informed this strategy and its priorities.
- 7.3 Community Engagement and how the Community Safety Partnership communicates with local residents and businesses has been identified as an area for development for the Partnership and underpinning all of the priorities set out in the strategy is the need to improve how the partnership engages and communicates. A specific Delivery Group has already been introduced to oversee this work with an immediate action to refresh the Community Safety Partnership's branding.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed (appendix C) in respect to the draft strategy. It is considered that the priorities within the strategy could have positive differential impact on groups with the following protected characteristics:

- Racial
- Disability
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Religious belief

8.2 No Negative impact was recorded on any group.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, sets out a statutory requirement for key responsible authorities, including local authorities, to work together to reduce crime and disorder, anti-social behaviour and minimise re-offending in local areas.

9.2 Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act of 2006 that requires the Local Authority to have a committee with the power:

- To review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions.
- To make reports or recommendations to the local authority with respect to the discharge of those functions.

9.3 The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 places a Serious Violence Duty on local partnerships to work together to share data and intelligence, formulate an evidence-based analysis of the problem and then produce a strategy detailing how they will respond to those particular issues. In addition, section 6(1) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which sets out the strategies Community Safety Partnerships must formulate and implement, has been amended to explicitly include serious violence.

9.4. The Policing and Crime Act 2009, which came into effect from the 1 April 2010, placed a new duty on CSPs to implement a strategy to reduce reoffending by adult and young offenders.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee Report - June 2022: Community Safety Partnership Update.

11.2 Reading CSP's Community Safety Plan 2019 - 2022.

Reading's Community Safety Partnership

Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy 2022 - 2025

Strapline - our vision?
New Logo

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Forward

It gives us great pleasure in introducing Reading's new 3-year Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy. This strategy builds upon with work undertaken by Reading's Community Safety Partnership since its formation.

No one agency can tackle crime, particularly in the current economic climate. In Reading, we believe that crime and its causes can only be tackled through partnership working, with a public health approach.

In addition to statutory requirements of Community Safety Partnerships to undertake strategic assessments and produce plans setting out how they will address issues of crime and disorder in their local areas, the introduction of the new Serious Violence Duty sets out further requirements for local areas to have a dedicated focus and plan for tackling serious violence. Our Partnership has already taken steps to prepare for this new Duty following a number of devastating knife related deaths in Reading over the last 2 years and the partnership is committed to tackling knife crime and ensuring the prevention of further loss of life and serious injury.

Through consultation, listening to local communities and capturing the voices of young people in a way that we haven't before, we are able to hear first-hand their concerns and what action they would like to happen in order to improve the quality of their neighbourhoods. These concerns, together with the lessons learned, the success and good practice from previous strategies, have also fed into the latest strategic assessment, ensuring that Reading's residents influence the priorities we have identified.

Superintendent Steve Raffield
Reading Local Police Commander

Cllr Karen Rowland
Lead Councillor for
Environmental Services
and Community Safety

1. Introduction.

The Partnership.

Reading's Community Safety Partnership consists of Reading Borough Council, Thames Valley Police (Reading Local Police Area), The Probation Service (South Central), Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Buckingham, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System (BOB ICS), Brighter Futures for Children and representatives from Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, along with a range of partners from Reading's thriving Voluntary and Community Sector.

Our Duties.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 place a number of duties on local authorities, the police and key partners to develop and implement strategies and plans setting out how they will tackle community safety and serious violence issues in their local areas (see appendix a). Reading's Community Safety Partnership Executive Group oversees the delivery of these core functions and has oversight of each Community Safety Plan.

Delivery of our duties - where we are.

The delivery of Reading's Community Safety Strategy 2018 -2022, which ended in 2022, was hampered by the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, however, the Partnership has continued to work together to tackle issues that are of most concern to local residents.

The delivery of Reading's previous Community Safety Plans have been overseen by Reading's Community Safety Partnership Executive Group, since the partnership's formation, however, in the last 2 years, this group has not functioned as effectively as expected, due to the COVID pandemic and a several changes of the Executive Group Chair.

In response to this, the Executive Group conducted a review in 2021 of how it operates, which resulted in the strengthening of the Executive Group's Terms of Reference and the determination to embed a consistent approach to carrying out robust strategic assessments and developing and delivering outcome focussed plans to ensuring the whole partnership are involved in making Reading a safer place.

As a result of this refresh, the CSP also solidified its overarching responsibilities and oversight of the following Boards:

- **Prevent Management Board**
- **Domestic Abuse Partnership Board, including Reading related Domestic Homicide Reviews**

- Youth Justice Partnership Board
- Serious Violence Steering Group

The Partnership has also aligned itself with the following Boards to support the delivery of outcomes to address combined priorities:

- One Reading Partnership
- Health and Wellbeing Board
- Berkshire West Safeguarding Childrens Board
- Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel

2. What has happened across the partnership to tackle issues of crime and disorder in the last 3 years

- Installed knife amnesty bins in key locations in the town to encourage people to surrender bladed articles.
- The Council's Public Health Team commissioned a comprehensive drug & alcohol service which has ambition for sustained recovery and is visible for individuals, families and communities by working in partnership with a range of stakeholders in Reading.
- The Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Team led on the local delivery of ASB Awareness Week over the last 2 years, which now forms part of its annual programme of activities. Each week included a range of activities take place in Reading during ASB week, including Love Your Neighbourhood Events and promotional activity about how to report ASB
- Key partners, including Reading Council and Thames Valley Police introduced a Serious Violence Steering Group to implement and monitor a public health approach across the partnership to reduce violent crime in the town.
- In response to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Reading's Domestic Abuse Steering Group reformed to become a Partnership Board and is responsible for the delivery of the new Domestic Abuse & Safe Accommodation Strategy 2023 - 2026. The membership of this group is extensive, with representation from both voluntary and community sector and statutory partners.
- 1000 Taxi Drivers have been delivered Exploitation Training by Brighter Futures for Children
- The Community Alcohol Partnership has conducted Retailer Test purchasing and Free Training - Using these operations to check that Retailers are adhering to the Law around not Selling Alcohol to young people and offering them free training to help them be compliant.
- One Reading Children and Young People's Partnership developed an Extra Familial Harm Strategy, which set out how the partnership will respond to increasingly complex challenges that young people face outside of their home in wider contexts. This strategy has since been

- reproduced by the Young Voices group as a version for young people.
- Reading Borough Council, Thames Valley Police and the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner implemented initiatives to tackle neighbourhood crime in 2 areas of the town following a successful Safer Streets 2 bid.
- Op Operation Rusk is the Thames Valley Police response to several incidents of serious violence in Tilehurst. The police are working with partners to tackle street dealers, drug lines and those responsible for violent crime. This is long-term work to improve the quality of life for local residents.
- Project Vigilant is a ground-breaking initiative led by Thames Valley Police. We are using a range of tactics and working closely with other agencies, especially in Reading town centre, to tackle those perpetrators who commit violence against women and girls.
- Reading's delivery of the Prevent Duty was assessed by the Home Office to be performing well across the benchmarks of the Duty and considered it an example of good practice for an unfunded area in 2022.
-

3. Reading's Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy 2023 - 2026.

Our Approach.

Reading's Community Safety Partnership has taken the decision to combine its Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategies due to the priorities and activities required to address them being so closely linked. In preparing this strategy, extensive work has been undertaken to understand crime levels and patterns and where possible, underlying causes of these issues, which have helped inform the development of the priorities for Reading's Community Safety Partnership over the next three years.

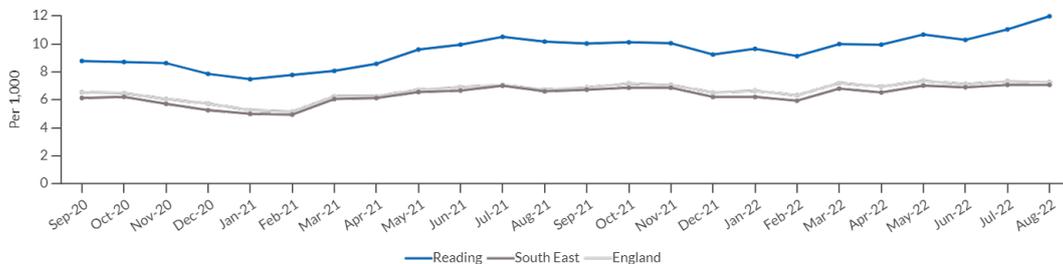
In developing our priorities, we have also taken into consideration other strategies and plans, at both a local, Thames Valley Wide and regional level to ensure that we are aligned and there is not duplication of activity and more importantly, there are not gaps in addressing the issues that we have identified as being a priority.

At a glance - What we know about our Borough

	<p>Total estimated population of Reading 174,200 (Census 2021)</p>
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	<p>Total estimated number of households 67,700 (Census 2021)</p>
	<p>Reading has a strong economy with a highly skilled workforce, based on technology, professional services and science. Its job density measurement in 2020 was 1.2 jobs per resident aged between 16-64.</p>
<p>Graphic to be selected.</p>	<p>10 neighbourhoods in Reading are within the most deprived 20% in England</p> <p>5 of which are within the most deprived 10%</p>
	<p>Total number of crimes (Sep-21 - Aug-22) 19,741 (122 per 1,000 persons)</p>

Crime Rates per 1000 population.



Reading’s Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategic Assessment.

The Community Safety Partnership undertook a Strategic Assessment during the spring and summer of 2022, which has informed us about the crime and anti-social behaviour issues, trends and emerging themes, that have informed the development of this strategy.

The Strategic Assessment highlighted that crime in Reading decreased in 2020/21 by 11% compared to the previous year, reversing a previously persistent upward trend. This reduction is likely to be attributable to nationwide lockdowns and restrictions imposed in response to the coronavirus pandemic to varying degrees throughout 2020/21. However, it is

impossible to quantify the level of 'hidden' crime that occurred during this period.

Although Reading is one of the 3 top crime generating CSP areas in Thames Valley Community Safety Partnership, the CSP is consistently around average when its crime levels are compared to other similar Community Safety Partnership areas across the country, therefore, crime levels are not importunately higher compared to similar areas.

Violence against the person, despite a small decrease, is now the highest volume crime type in Reading, following continued decreases in Acquisitive crime, however, acquisitive crimes, including theft from person, robbery & domestic burglary, are still the second highest recorded crime types in Reading. Public disorder and Drugs offences are the only crime types to increase despite the coronavirus pandemic related restrictions imposed.

Serious violence incidents are also increasing year on year, with Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) and Assault without Injury incidents increasing. Although the proportion of recorded crime in Reading that is recorded as a knife crime is just 2%, the number of recorded knife crimes has increased in 2020/21.

At the time of writing the Strategic Assessment, Reading had the second highest levels of serious violence in the Thames Valley and the highest levels in Berkshire. The number of serious violence incidents recorded by the police have increased year on year, include several homicides in 2020/21, and A&E admissions due to violence have increased in Reading despite national and regional decreases.

Knife carrying among young people has anecdotally been linked to self-preservation and fear of victimization, rather than links with gangs. 24% of under 18s suspected of serious violence had been a suspect of a police investigation in the previous 2 years, while 21% of victims of serious violence had also been a suspect and had flags indicating adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Hate crime hasn't changed significantly, despite efforts to improve reporting and recording practices, however 80% are recorded as crimes. These crimes vary according to the targeted community, with Transgender, Black, and White British victims most likely to experience Violence than other victims.

Reading is currently designated as a low-risk area in terms of the terrorist threat in the UK. However, it is imperative to be aware that due to the nature of terrorism attacks which are most likely to be self-initiated attacks, such as the tragic terrorist attack in Forbury Gardens in June 2020, no area is risk free.

What you told us: Community Safety & Residents Surveys.

The bi-annual Community Safety Survey was conducted between 25 October 2021 to 3 December 2021 using the online consultation and survey tool, Citizen Space. The key headlines from the survey were:

- The perception of the level of crime had increase, with 49% of the responders stating that they believed levels of crime are high or very high. This has increase from 33% in 2019 and 23% in 2017.
- 50% said they felt crime had increased over the last 2 years compared with 42% in 2019 and 34% in 2017.
- Top 5 borough-wide priorities identified by residents are
 1. Drugs
 2. Parking issues
 3. Motorbike and vehicle nuisance
 4. Flytipping
 5. Burglary.

In addition to these formal surveys, Reading's Safer Streets project team conducted a short perception survey in preparation for its Safer Streets 4 bid to determine how safe people feel in the Town Centre. Over 500 people responded to the survey with the majority of people identifying anti-social behaviour - including illegal drug activity and sexual harassment - in key hotspot areas of the town centre. Many of the respondents stated they did not feel safe in the daytime and night-time, due to harassment and intimidation. During this consultation piece, the Project Group held conversations with local businesses, many of whom said their staff did not feel safe walking alone to car parks or sometimes even through the town centre.

Regional priorities:

South Central Probation Reducing Reoffending plan 2022 - 2025

The South Central Reducing Reoffending Plan sets out the key objectives and outcomes for the Prison and Probation Service in the South Central region intends to deliver over the next three years to reduce reoffending. Its priorities are:

- Training, skills and work
- Drugs and alcohol addiction
- Family, accommodation and readjustment to society
- Public security through engagement and compliance

Thames Valley's Police and Criminal Justice Plan 2021 - 2025.

Thames Valley's Police and Crime Commissioner, Matthew Barber, published his 4-year Police and Criminal Justice Plan in 2021. The Plan sets out 5 priorities that the Police and Crime Commissioner will focus on, with victims at the heart of these priorities:

- Strong Local Policing - preventing crime and protecting communities
- Fighting Serious Organised Crime - protecting vulnerable people
- Improving the criminal justice system - reducing reoffending
- Fighting fraud and cyber-crime - fighting modern crimes
- Tackling illegal encampments - enforcing with partners.

This strategy and plan align with the priorities set out in Thames Valley's Police and Criminal Justice Plan.

Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit.

The Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit (TVVRU) was set up in 2019 as one of 20 across England and Wales in those areas with the highest levels of serious violence. The TVVRU has identified its core function as providing leadership and strategic coordination of the local response to serious violence, working with a wide partnership across Thames Valley to do this.

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan 2019 - 2023.

This plan sets out Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's high-level activity for the duration of the plan, which is underpinned by the following commitments:

- We will provide education and advice on how to prevent fires and other emergencies.
- We will ensure a swift and appropriate response when called to emergencies.
- We will provide advice, consultation and enforcement in relation to fire safety standards in buildings.
- We will seek opportunities to contribute to a broader safety, health and wellbeing agenda, whilst delivering our core functions.
- We will ensure that RBFAS provides good value for money.
- We will work with Central Government and key stakeholders in the interests of the people of Royal Berkshire.

4. Priorities for the next 3 years.

Based on our needs assessment, what local residents have told us and what the wider partnership plans have set out, Reading's Community Safety Partnership has identified the following priorities for this strategy.

- Reduce crime in the top crime-generating neighbourhoods
- Improve the way the Community Safety Partnership works with communities to tackle anti-social behaviour and hate crime.
- Reduce community-based drug related activity.
- Reduce knife violence, including the carrying of blades and their use in crime.
- Tackle organised crime gangs transporting illegal drugs across Reading's borders, also known as 'county lines' offending.
- Improve safety for women in public places and reduce sexually focused crimes and anti-social behaviour.
- Develop a strategy and plan to reduce persistent offending.

How will we tackle our Priorities?

This Strategy will be accompanied by a Community Safety & Serious Violence Plan, which will be delivered through a number of delivery groups, reporting into the Community Safety Partnership Executive Group. The Community Safety Partnership acknowledges that this Strategy is being launched at a time, when public finances are considerably impacted and when there are resourcing challenges across the partnership, both factors of which impact on its response to tackling crime and disorder across Reading. In response to these challenges, the Partnership is committed delivering a realistic and achievable plan and to ensure more effective and efficient use of the resources each agency has to tackle crime and disorder collaboratively.

Underpinning all of these priorities is the need to embed a strong communication strategy to ensure that residents feel well informed about what is happening to tackle issues of crime and disorder and promote reporting mechanisms and make best use of data available to the partnership to ensure resources are effectively utilised to achieve successful outcomes for these outcomes.

5. Reading Community Safety Partnership's Approach.

As a partnership, we have refined our approach to tackling the priorities that have been identified in this strategy and our approach will be underpinned by following principles:

Public Health Approach	<p>Reading’s Community Safety Partnership adopts the World Health Organisation’s definition of a public health approach to reducing violence:</p> <p>‘Seeks to improve the health and safety of all individuals by addressing underlying risk factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will become a victim or a perpetrator of violence. By definition, public health aims to provide the maximum benefit for the largest number of people. Programmes for primary prevention of violence based on the public health approach are designed to expose a broad segment of a population to prevention measures and to reduce and prevent violence at a population-level.’</p>
Improved Community Engagement and Communication	<p>The partnership is committed to improving how it communicates and engages with local residents in relation to crime and serious violence, ensuring information about how to report crime, anti-social, what action is being taken to tackle these issues and how local communities can be part of the problem solving approach is readily available.</p>
Effective partnership collaboration	<p>The partnership will ensure effective collaboration and information sharing to tackle issues of crime and serious violence and have in place problem solving forums to allow for this approach.</p>
Victim Support	<p>The partnership is committed to ensuring victims are supported and that signposting to support services is clear and accessible.</p>
Continuing to be a Trauma Informed Town	<p>The partnership will continue to support the aim to make Reading a Trauma Informed Town, ensuring that staff across the agencies are aware of the wider impact of trauma and that all efforts are</p>

	made to prevent the re-traumatisation of individuals in service settings that are there to support and heal clients.
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Whilst we will maintain the use of delivery mechanisms, there will be more of a focus on task and finish groups to achieve our outcomes. The structure of the CSP and its associated meetings are set out as follows.

(Meeting structure to be inserted).

6. Governance and measuring success.

The Community Safety Partnership Executive Group will oversee the delivery of this strategy and its associated plan. The launch of this strategy will see the introduction of a new Performance Group which will oversee the action plan and task and finish and delivery groups that will lead on their respective elements of the action plan, as well as monitor crime levels, trends and the overall performance across the work of the CSP.

The CSP will report into Reading Borough Council’s Housing, Neighbourhood and Leisure Committee at least annually basis to provide an update on its activity and performance.

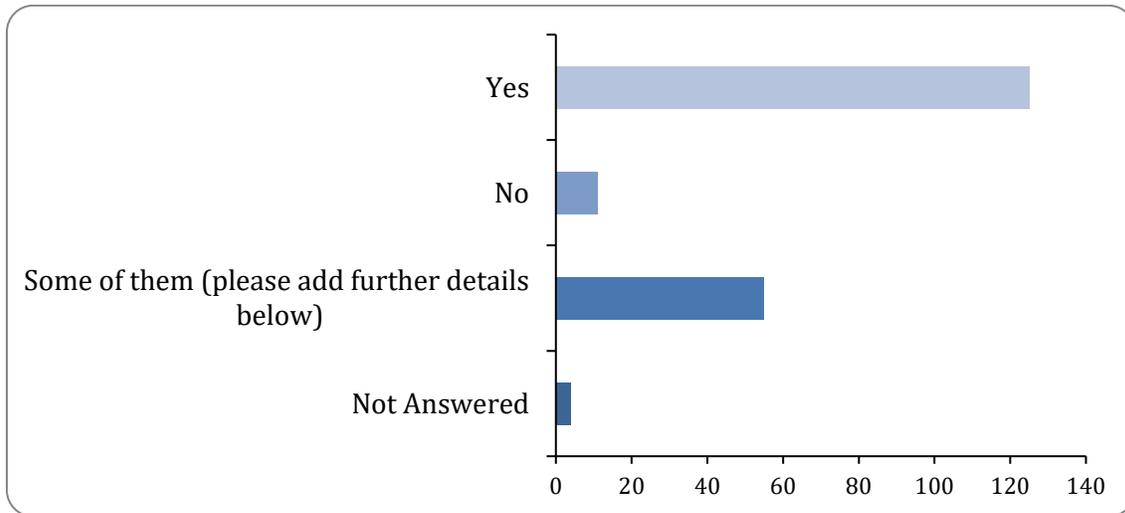
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Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy Consultation

Consultation link: <https://consult.reading.gov.uk/dens/community-safety>

1: The priorities for tackling community safety and serious violence in Reading are outlined in the in the previous section. Do you think these priorities are right?

There were 191 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Yes	125	64.10%
No	11	5.64%
Some of them (please add further details below)	55	28.21%
Not Answered	4	2.05%

Right Priority Comments

There were 97 comments made about this:

- A high number of people felt that road safety should be included as a priority, including dangerous driving (including e-scooters and motorbikes), speeding and flouting of the Highway Code.
- Many people agree that reducing drug activity (including organised crime gangs and 'county line' offending) is correct but some respondents think alcohol should be specifically referenced in the priorities.
- Many people agree that tackling anti-social behaviour is a priority, including aggressive begging and street harassment/scamming
- A number of people refer to the streets needing to be cleaner so that people feel safer and low-level crime is less likely to happen. This links to comments on

tackling the low-level crime and a 'zero-tolerance' approach to anti-social behaviour, fly-tipping and dangerous driving.

2: What do you think is the most important thing that we should be doing to make Reading a safer place?

There were 188 responses to this part of the question:

- A great number of comments were requesting more police having a visible presence and playing an active role in neighbourhoods.
- Many comments referred to the need for better education about crime for young people, better opportunities for young people and more services and support including safe spaces.
- A lot of respondents felt tackling drugs and having a zero tolerance for anti-social behaviour is important.
- A lot of comments referred to improving the streets so they are cleaner, brighter and more welcoming which would encourage more people to feel safe and discourage criminals.

3: What is the most important thing that we should be doing to reduce serious and violent crime?

There were 187 responses to this part of the question. Many were similar to responses to Q2 with respondents focusing on the need for more police resources, better enforcement and education.

4: What actions or measures would you like us to take to address these community safety priorities?

There were 169 responses to this part of the question. The majority of respondents commented on:

- Improving partnership working, increasing police resources and engaging more effectively with the community. 'Visibility' is a word that comes up a lot – being visible and present on the streets. Many people want to see more of an active police presence, on foot and across the borough, who can intervene on low level crime issues.
- A lot of respondents also highlighted the need for youth services and facilities including safe community spaces.
- There was also a high number of comments on improving CCTV and more support to rehabilitate addicts.

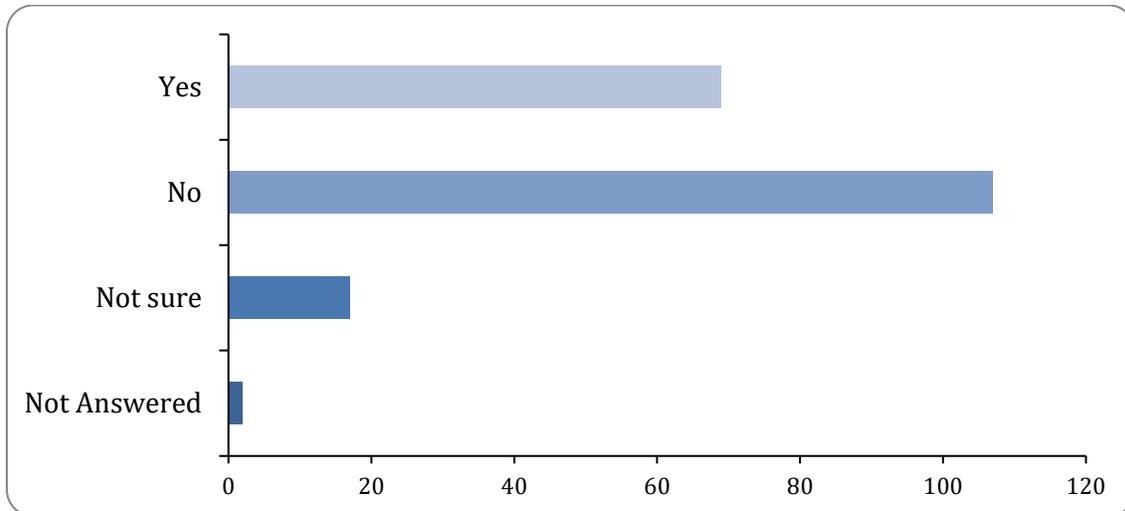
5: Do you think there is anything missing from these priorities?

There were 124 responses to this part of the question. All the comments were grouped together under topics and the most popular responses to the question were:

- **Road safety** – a large number of people who responded to this question felt that that dangerous driving (speeding, driving under the influence, anti-social use of e-scooters and motorbikes) and bike theft should be included as a priority. The Community Safety Survey held in 2021 also found road safety, particularly motorbike and vehicle nuisance to be a key concern – it was ranked number 3 out of the top 5 issues across the borough.
- **Environmental issues** – after road safety the majority of comments focused on a need to improve local environments to make them more welcoming and reduce petty crime, through reducing fly-tipping, littering, repairing disused buildings, improving lighting and covering over offensive graffiti/tagging. People commented on wanting to feel a sense of pride in Reading's public spaces which would improve the perception of safety.
- Many of the comments focused on a need for more neighborhood police resources and more police presence on the streets.
- Other comments included tackling unauthorised encampments and homelessness; reducing begging/harassment; including alcohol within the drugs priority; providing support for women who commit crimes and better education (both in terms of services and supporting parents/community leaders) as a means of prevention.

6: Have you heard of the Community Safety Partnership?

There were 193 responses to this part of the question.

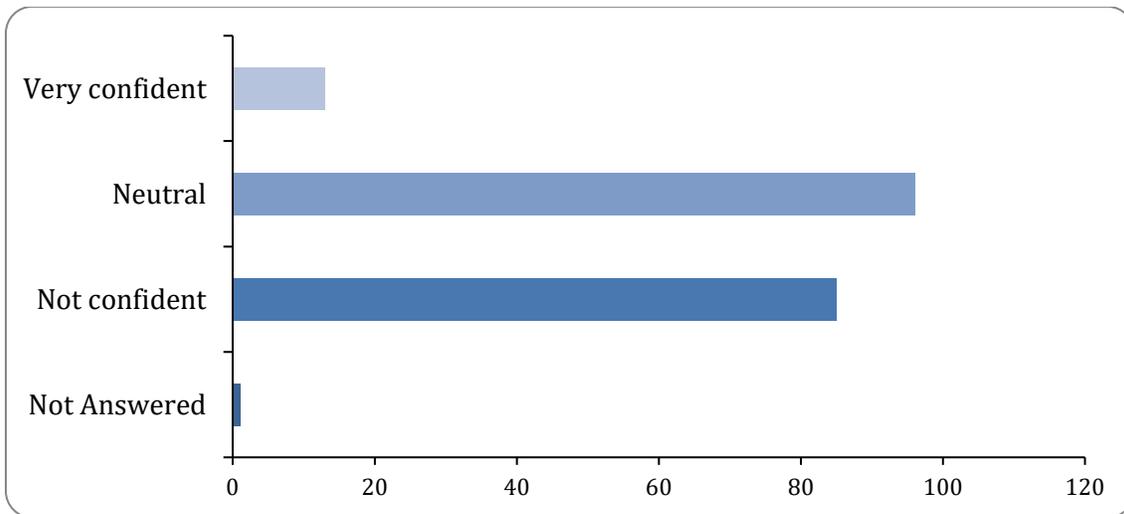


Option	Total	Percent
Yes	69	35.38%

No	107	54.87%
Not sure	17	8.72%
Not Answered	2	1.03%

7: How confident are you that the relevant partner agencies work together to prevent and tackle crime and disorder in Reading?

There were 194 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Very confident	13	6.67%
Neutral	96	49.23%
Not confident	85	43.59%
Not Answered	1	0.51%

Appendix C

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

For advice on this document please contact Clare Muir on 72119 or email Clare.Muir@reading.gov.uk.

Please contact the Project Management Office at pmo@reading.gov.uk for advice and/or support to complete this form from a project perspective.

Name of proposal/activity/policy to be assessed: **Reading Community Safety Partnership - Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy 2023 - 2026**
Directorate: DEGNS
Service: Housing & Communities

Name: Jo Middlemass
Job Title: Community Partnerships Service Manager
Date of assessment: 1/11/2022

Version History

Version	Reason	Author	Date	Approved By
1	Initial version	Jo Middlemass	01/11/22	

Scope your proposal

- **What is the aim of your policy or new service/what changes are you proposing?**
-

Reading Community Safety Partnership's Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy 2023 - 2026.

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has a statutory duty to develop, implement, and publish a community safety strategy and serious violence strategy that sets out its priorities and how it plans to meet these priorities, these include:

Reduce crime in the top crime-generating neighbourhoods

Improve the way the Community Safety Partnership works with communities to tackle anti-social behaviour and hate crime.

Reduce community-based drug related activity.

Reduce knife violence, including the carrying of blades and their use in crime.

Tackle organised crime gangs transporting illegal drugs across Reading's borders, also known as 'county lines' offending.

Improve safety for women in public places and reduce sexually focused crimes and anti-social behaviour.

Develop a strategy and plan to reduce persistent offending.

- **Who will benefit from this proposal and how?**
-

Residents, businesses visitors and those who come to Reading to work through a focussed and collaborative approach to preventing and tackling the priorities identified through the Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategic Assessment.

- **What outcomes does the change aim to achieve and for whom?**
-

This strategy aims to reduce the impact of crime, including serious violence, Hate Crime and anti-social behaviour across the borough and improve the safety and well-being of those living and working in Reading.

This will have greater impact in Reading most deprived areas and some of our most vulnerable groups and individuals, for example those at risk of harm includes vulnerable young people, women and girls and those who experience hate crime.

- **Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?**
-

Victims/those at risk of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Organisations in the town, statutory and voluntary, supporting those at risk or are victims of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Those who are perpetrators of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Assess whether an EqlA is Relevant

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; advancing equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

- Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some groups may be affected differently than others (due to race, disability, sex, gender, sexuality, age, religious belief or due to belonging to the Armed Forces community)? Make reference to the known demographic profile of the service user group, your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc.

Yes - as identified in the CSP's Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategic Assessment 2022.

- Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Make reference to your complaints, consultation, feedback, media reports locally/nationally.

No

If the answer is **Yes** to any of the above, you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment.

If **No** you **MUST** complete this statement.

An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant because:

N/A -

23/11/2022

X Jo Middlemass

Completing Officer

Signed by: Middlemass, Joanne

23/11/2022

X Zelda Wolfle

Lead Officer

Signed by: Middlemass, Joanne

Assess the Impact of the Proposal

Your assessment must include:

- **Consultation**
- **Collection and Assessment of Data**
- **Judgement about whether the impact is negative or positive**

Think about who does and doesn't use the service? Is the take up representative of the community? What do different minority groups think? (You might think your policy, project or service is accessible and addressing the needs of these groups, but asking them might give you a totally different view). Does it really meet their varied needs? Are some groups less likely to get a good service?

How do your proposals relate to other services - will your proposals have knock on effects on other services elsewhere? Are there proposals being made for other services that relate to yours and could lead to a cumulative impact?

This is a partnership strategy to tackle crime and serious violence and will cross over a number of services in terms of ensuring that crime is prevented, if crimes occur, victims are supported and safeguarded and that appropriate action is taken against perpetrators, in particular to reduce reoffending. It aligns with other key plans across the council and partnership. All partners impacted will be involved in developing the action plan to respond to tackling the identified priorities.

Consultation

How have you consulted with or do you plan to consult with relevant groups and experts. If you haven't already completed a Consultation form do it now. The checklist helps you make sure you follow good consultation practice.

[Consultation manager form - Reading Borough Council Dash](#)

Relevant groups/experts	How were/will the views of these groups be obtained	Date when contacted

<p>Agencies supporting those who experience crime or anti social behaviour, statutory or voluntary.</p> <p>Safeguarding Boards</p> <p>Service Users</p> <p>Community Safety Partnership members</p> <p>Member of Reading Voluntary Action</p> <p>ACRE</p>	<p>The consultation adopted a number of different approaches reflective of the stakeholders whose views are sought.</p> <p>Discussions and meetings with colleagues</p> <p>Targeted emails</p> <p>Attendance and discussion at relevant internal and partner meetings</p> <p>Online survey and information</p>	<p>A period of public consultation about the proposed priorities was conducted between 25th July and 5th September 2022.</p>
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Collect and Assess your Data

Using information from Census, residents survey data, service monitoring data, satisfaction or complaints, feedback, consultation, research, your knowledge and the knowledge of people in your team, staff groups etc. describe how the proposal could impact on each group. Include both positive and negative impacts.

(Please delete relevant ticks)

- Describe how this proposal could impact on racial groups
 - Is there a negative impact? No
-

The Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategic Assessment highlights that people from Black and Mixed ethnic backgrounds are significantly over-represented in the suspect population, while people from Asian ethnic backgrounds are significantly under-represented when compared to the Reading population. This disproportionate representation is also true for recorded victims, although the difference from the population is less extreme.

Both victims and offenders of recorded knife crime are predominantly male (78% and 86% respectively) and disproportionately from minority ethnic backgrounds (34% knife crime victims v 25% all victims of crime and 42% knife crime suspects v 27% all suspects of crime). These variations are consistent with previous years. The CS & SV Action Plan will seek to address these factors.

A priority has been identified to have a renewed focus on Hate Crime, to ensure that victims are aware of the reporting mechanisms and support available to those who experience incidents of hate.

- Describe how this proposal could impact on Sex and Gender identity (include pregnancy and maternity, marriage, gender re-assignment)
 - Is there a negative impact? No
-

The Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategic Assessment highlights males are more likely to be victims of Acquisitive Crime, whereas females are more likely to be victims of Violent and Sexual Crime, although Non-Domestic Violence has more male victims than female victims.

The strategy has identified a priority to tackle violence against women and girls in response to this.

A priority has also been identified to have a renewed focus on Hate Crime, to ensure that victims are aware of the reporting mechanisms and support available to those who experience incidents of hate.

- Describe how this proposal could impact on Disability
- Is there a negative impact? No

A priority has been identified to have a renewed focus on Hate Crime, to ensure that victims are aware of the reporting mechanisms and support available to those who experience incidents of hate.

- Describe how this proposal could impact on Sexual orientation (cover civil partnership)
- Is there a negative impact? No

A priority has been identified to have a renewed focus on Hate Crime, to ensure that victims are aware of the reporting mechanisms and support available to those who experience incidents of hate.

- Describe how this proposal could impact on age
- Is there a negative impact? No

The Community Safety and Serious Violence strategic assessment highlights the victim-suspect age profile in Reading has changed over the last 3 years, with increases in younger suspects (aged 13-21) and decreases in young adult victims (19-29), although these are increasing again.

The focus on reducing knife crime will have a particular focus on young people to ensure they are not at risk of being victims of or being offenders of knife related incidents.

- Describe how this proposal could impact on Religious belief

- **Is there a negative impact? No**
-

A priority has been identified to have a renewed focus on Hate Crime, to ensure that victims are aware of the reporting mechanisms and support available to those who experience incidents of hate.

- **Describe how this proposal could impact on the Armed Forces community (including reservists and veterans and their families)**
 - **Is there a negative impact? No**
-

No impact identified.

Make a Decision

If the impact is negative then you must consider whether you can legally justify it. If not you must set out how you will reduce or eliminate the impact. If you are not sure what the impact will be you MUST assume that there could be a negative impact. You may have to do further consultation or test out your proposal and monitor the impact before full implementation.

(Delete numbers below which don't apply)

1. No negative impact identified - Go to sign off

- How will you monitor for adverse impact in the future?

The Community Safety Partnership will monitor through a new performance group and will revisit its strategic assessment on an annual basis to ensure that there is no negative impact.

23/11/2022

23/11/2022

X Jo Middlemass

X Zelda Wolfle

Completing Officer
Signed by: Middlemass, Joanne

Lead Officer
Signed by: Middlemass, Joanne

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee		
DATE:	4 th January 2023		
TITLE:	Housing Ombudsman's revised Complaints Handling Code		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	Cllr Emberson	PORTFOLIO:	Housing
SERVICE:	Housing	WARDS:	Boroughwide
LEAD OFFICER:	Sarah Tapliss	TEL:	0118 9373203
JOB TITLE:	Strategic Housing Service Manager	E-MAIL:	sarah.tapliss@reading.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This is an information report regarding changes to legislation and Government Guidance that impacts on a Social Landlord's response to a complaint, Reading Borough Council Housing Services' compliance with the new Complaints Handling Code published by the Housing Ombudsman, and any changes in process required.
- 1.2 Appendix 1 - Reading Borough Council Housing Service's Complaints Handling Code Self-Assessment.
- 1.3 Appendix 2 - RBC Corporate Complaints Policy
- 1.4 Appendix 3 - Housing Complaints Leaflet

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Committee note the requirements of the revised Complaints Handling Code from the Housing Ombudsman and Reading Borough Council Housing Service's associated Self- Assessment.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Housing Act 1996 created the Housing Ombudsman and as defined by section 51(2) of the Act, all Social Landlords are required to be members of the approved scheme. The Housing Ombudsman is expected to intervene when tenants are dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint to their landlord, ensure disputes are resolved and residents receive redress where appropriate.
- 3.2 The Government published "The Charter for Social Housing Residents - Social Housing White Paper"¹ in 2020 which outlines seven principles that every social housing tenant should expect from their landlord. One of those principles is:

"To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly, with access to a strong Ombudsman who will give you swift and fair redress when needed."

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper>

3.3 Housing Ombudsman - Revised Complaints Handling Code

In March 2022, as part of the enactment of the Social Housing white paper, the Housing Ombudsman published an updated Complaints Handling Code (CHC) for all Social Landlords, which came into effect on the 1st October 2022. A replacement Housing Ombudsman Scheme was also implemented on the same day, and compliance with the CHC is a mandatory requirement for membership to the scheme.

3.4 Key elements of the CHC are:

- Universal definition of a complaint
- Providing easy access to the complaints procedure and ensuring residents are aware of it, including their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service
- The structure of the complaints procedure - only two stages are necessary and clear timeframes set out for responses
- Ensuring fairness in complaint handling with a resident-focused process
- Taking action to put things right and appropriate remedies
- Creating a positive complaint handling culture through continuous learning and improvement
- Demonstrating learning in annual reports
- Annual self-assessment against the Code.

3.5 It is also now required that a landlord's performance in relation to complaints will be reported to a 'Governing Body' on an annual basis. Complaints performance is already reported quarterly to the Lead Member for Housing and will now also be included in the Annual Housing Update and Works Programme report to Housing Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee by the Assistant Director for Housing and Communities each March.

3.6 Compliance with CHC and overall performance and learning from complaints will be a key focus of the Inspections by the Housing Regulator proposed within the Social Housing Regulation Bill 2022.

3.7 Building Safety Act 2022

In addition to the revised CHC and Housing Ombudsman Scheme, The Building Safety Act 2022 removed the 'Democratic Filter' from the Housing Ombudsman's referral expectations. Therefore, tenants are no longer required to go to a designated person or wait 8 weeks after receiving a response from the landlord before approaching the Ombudsman. Tenants are now able to make a referral at any time and it will be investigated by the Ombudsman as soon as the Landlord's internal processes have been resolved.

4.1 **READING BOROUGH COUNCIL SELF- ASSESSMENT AND PROCESS CHANGES**

A key requirement for all Social Landlords is the annual completion and publication of a self-assessment against the CHC. Reading Borough Council's Housing Services' self-assessment is attached in Appendix A.

4.2 The self- assessment prompted a few minor updates to the Reading Borough Council Complaints Policy, information leaflet and template letters used for complaints regarding the Housing Service.

4.3 The revisions required were:

- Complaint leaflet and webpage updated to provide information on the Housing Ombudsman Scheme.
- Template letters for complaints updated to include details on how to contact the Housing Ombudsman, including when there are disputes regarding timelines for extensions.
- Details of the Housing Ombudsman included in tenant newsletters.

- Regular monitoring programme introduced by HCMT to ensure quality of response, follow through on remedies proposed and learning from complaints/ themes.
- 4.2 The assessment indicates that we are compliant with the Code in all but two areas, however, non-compliance is permissible for Local Authority Landlords in these two areas as long as they are working in line with a Corporate Complaints Procedure.
- 4.3 The areas of non-compliance are:
- The timeframes in which complaints are expected to be responded to - The Code requires that complaints are responded to in 10 working days, the Council's Policy is 20 working days.
 - The inclusion of Stage 0 - The Code states that there should not be a stage 0, but it is included as an internal complaint management step to encourage early resolution of complaints for the tenant. At Stage 0 the tenant is contacted by telephone and a follow up written response is provided. This does not replace the stage 1 if the tenant still requires a Stage 1 response.
- 4.4 The Council is required to publish the Self-Assessment on our Website.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 Reading Borough Council's vision is:

To help Reading realise its potential - and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.

- 5.2 Compliance with the CHC would ensure that tenants have a clear process for raising concerns regarding the Housing Service and are able to challenge a decision or outcome. Combined with high quality responses to the complaints and learning that is embedded into service delivery, monitored at a senior level, these processes will further support the Tenants' Voice being a valued part of shaping the Housing Service going forward.
- 5.3 Full details of the Council's [Corporate Plan](#) are available on the website and include information on the projects which will deliver these priorities.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This report has no Climate or Environmental implications.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 7.1 No consultation is required as compliance with the CHC is mandatory. The Self-Assessment is required to be published on the Council's webpage.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 No Equality Impact Assessment is required however it is expected that compliance with the CHC will improve the process for making a complaint about their landlord for all tenants and ensure an appropriate and timely response is received.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Housing Ombudsman Scheme is approved by the Secretary of State under section 51 of, and Schedule 2 to, the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Localism Act 2011 and the Building Safety Act 2022 (the Act). The Act requires social landlords, as defined by section 51(2) of the Act, to be members of an approved scheme. The purpose of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme is to enable tenants and other individuals to have complaints about social landlords investigated by a Housing Ombudsman.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 *Housing Ombudsman - Complaints Handling Code* : <https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk/landlords-info/complaint-handling-code/>

Appendix 1

Appendix B – Self-Assessment Form

This self-assessment form should be completed by the complaints officer and discussed at the landlord’s governing body annually.

Evidence should be included to support all statements with additional commentary as necessary.

Explanations must also be provided where a mandatory ‘must’ requirement is not met to set out the rationale for the alternative approach adopted and why this delivers a better outcome.

Section 1 - Definition of a complaint

Mandatory ‘must’ requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
1.2	A complaint must be defined as: <i>‘an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents.</i>	Yes	Copy of complaints leaflet
1.3	The resident does not have to use the word ‘complaint’ for it to be treated as such. A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative must still be handled in line with the landlord’s complaints policy.	Yes	The word ‘complaint’ does not need to be used. We require consent to be given to accept a complaint from a third party.
1.6	... if further enquiries are needed to resolve the matter, or if the resident requests it, the issue must be logged as a complaint.	Yes	If issues are not resolved informally, a formal complaint investigation takes place.
1.7	A landlord must accept a complaint unless there is a valid reason not to do so.	Yes	We accept complaints unless there is a valid reason.
1.8	A complaints policy must clearly set out the circumstances in which a matter will not be considered, and these circumstances should be fair and reasonable to residents.	Yes	In the policy on our website at 2.1.9 https://www.reading.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints/corporate-complaints-procedure/

1.9	If a landlord decides not to accept a complaint, a detailed explanation must be provided to the resident setting out the reasons why the matter is not suitable for the complaints process and the right to take that decision to the Ombudsman.	Yes	See 1.8 above
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Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
1.4	Landlords should recognise the difference between a service request , where a resident may be unhappy with a situation that they wish to have rectified, and a complaint about the service they have/have not received.	Yes	Cases are triaged at first contact to distinguish between these
1.5	Survey feedback may not necessarily need to be treated as a complaint, though, where possible, the person completing the survey should be made aware of how they can pursue their dissatisfaction as a complaint if they wish to.	Yes	Explained in letter regarding Tenant Satisfaction Survey

Section 2 - Accessibility and awareness

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
2.1	Landlords must make it easy for residents to complain by providing different channels through which residents can make a complaint such as in person, over the telephone, in writing, by email and digitally. While the Ombudsman recognises that it may not be feasible for a landlord to use all of the potential channels, there must be more than one route of access into the complaints system.	Yes	We offer all of these channels.

2.3	Landlords must make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format for all residents. This will detail the number of stages involved, what will happen at each stage and the timeframes for responding.	Yes	We have an electronic leaflet, a physical leaflet and a website
2.4	Landlord websites, if they exist, must include information on how to raise a complaint. The complaints policy and process must be easy to find on the website.	Yes	https://www.reading.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints/
2.5	Landlords must comply with the Equality Act 2010 and may need to adapt normal policies, procedures, or processes to accommodate an individual's needs. Landlords must satisfy themselves that their policy sets out how they will respond to reasonable adjustments requests in line with the Equality Act and that complaints handlers have had appropriate training to deal with such requests.	Yes	All staff must undergo Equality and Diversity training.
2.6	Landlords must publicise the complaints policy and process, the Complaint Handling Code and the Housing Ombudsman Scheme in leaflets, posters, newsletters, online and as part of regular correspondence with residents.	Yes	All paperwork revised from October 22
2.7	Landlords must provide residents with contact information for the Ombudsman as part of its regular correspondence with residents.	Yes	All paperwork revised from October 2022 See above
2.8	Landlords must provide early advice to residents regarding their right to access the Housing Ombudsman Service throughout their complaint, not only when the landlord's complaints process is exhausted.	Yes	Added to stage 1 acknowledgement letter from October 22.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
2.2	Where a landlord has set up channels to communicate with its residents via social media, then it should expect to receive complaints via those channels. Policies should contain details of the steps that will be taken when a complaint is received via social media and how confidentiality and privacy will be maintained.	Yes	The policy is generic for all channels of complaint communication

Section 3 - Complaint handling personnel

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
3.1	Landlords must have a person or team assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling to ensure complaints receive the necessary attention, and that these are reported to the governing body. This Code will refer to that person or team as the "complaints officer".	Yes	Customer Relations Team deal with all complaints that come to the Council. Reports are generated quarterly to the Housing Management Team.
3.2	...the complaint handler appointed must have appropriate complaint handling skills and no conflicts of interest.	Yes	Team has undergone training conducted by the Housing Ombudsman. If a member of the team knows the complainant they hand it to another team member

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
3.3	Complaint handlers should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be able to act sensitively and fairly • be trained to handle complaints and deal with distressed and upset residents • have access to staff at all levels to facilitate quick 	Yes	Contact Centre and Customer Relations Team have training specific to handling upset residents. CRT can make recommendations to operational teams and staff at all levels re

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> resolution of complaints have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes quickly and fairly. 		Resolution.
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Section 4 - Complaint handling principles

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
4.1	Any decision to try and resolve a concern must be taken in agreement with the resident and a landlord's audit trail/records should be able to demonstrate this. Landlords must ensure that efforts to resolve a resident's concerns do not obstruct access to the complaints procedure or result in any unreasonable delay. It is not appropriate to have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'pre-complaint stage') as this causes unnecessary confusion for residents. When a complaint is made, it must be acknowledged and logged at stage one of the complaints procedure within five days of receipt.	Partial	RBC has a stage 0, but code includes flexibility for Local Authority Landlords to work in line with the corporate scheme.
4.2	Within the complaint acknowledgement, landlords must set out their understanding of the complaint and the outcomes the resident is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification and the full definition agreed between both parties.	Yes	CRT team will clarify complaint in the acknowledgement and say that the investigating officer will follow up for any further issues.
4.6	A complaint investigation must be conducted in an impartial manner.	Yes	The response is checked by CRT for impartiality

4.7	<p>The complaint handler must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deal with complaints on their merits • act independently and have an open mind • take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest • consider all information and evidence carefully • keep the complaint confidential as far as possible, with information only disclosed if necessary to properly investigate the matter. 	Yes	Responses are QA by the CRT
4.11	Landlords must adhere to any reasonable arrangements agreed with residents in terms of frequency and method of communication	Yes	Responses are QA by the CRT
4.12	<p>The resident, and if applicable any staff member who is the subject of the complaint, must also be given a fair chance to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set out their position • comment on any adverse findings before a final decision is made. 	Yes	Responses and investigations are QA by the CRT.
4.13	A landlord must include in its complaints policy its timescales for a resident to request escalation of a complaint	Yes	https://www.reading.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints/corporate-complaints-procedure/
4.14	A landlord must not unreasonably refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure and must have clear and valid reasons for taking that course of action. Reasons for declining to escalate a complaint must be clearly set out in a landlord's complaints policy and must be the same as the reasons for not accepting a complaint.	Yes	Policy updated
4.15	A full record must be kept of the complaint, any review and the outcomes at each stage. This must include the original complaint and the date received, all	Yes	All correspondence between all relevant parties relating to complaints is saved

	correspondence with the resident, correspondence with other parties and any reports or surveys prepared.		
4.18	Landlords must have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from residents and/or their representatives when pursuing a complaint.	Yes	See What we expect from you: https://www.reading.gov.uk/contact-us/customer-care/

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
4.3	Landlords should manage residents' expectations from the outset, being clear where a desired outcome is unreasonable or unrealistic	Yes	Quality reviewed by senior managers - regular audits will be completed
4.4	A complaint should be resolved at the earliest possible opportunity, having assessed what evidence is needed to fully consider the issues, what outcome would resolve the matter for the resident and whether there are any urgent actions required.	Yes	Quality reviewed by senior managers - regular audits will be completed
4.5	Landlords should give residents the opportunity to have a representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the landlord where this is reasonable.	Yes	CRT will deal with third party with consent and complainant can be accompanied to a complaint meeting if necessary.
4.8	Where a key issue of a complaint relates to the parties' legal obligations landlords should clearly set out their understanding of the obligations of both parties.	Yes	Quality reviewed by senior managers - regular audits will be completed
4.9	Communication with the resident should not generally identify individual members of staff or contractors.	Yes	Generally, only mentioned where a specific officer is mentioned in the complaint.
4.10	Landlords should keep residents regularly updated about the progress of the investigation.	Yes	Any delays are communicated to the complainant.
4.16	Landlords should seek feedback from residents in relation to the landlord's complaint handling as part of the drive to encourage a positive complaint and	Yes	Tenant Satisfaction Survey

	learning culture.		
4.17	Landlords should recognise the impact that being complained about can have on future service delivery. Landlords should ensure that staff are supported and engaged in the complaints process, including the learning that can be gained	Yes	Learning action plans in place. HCMT to do an annual review of key trends. Complaints training available on the Learning Pool. Bite size training being delivered within the Housing Service to encourage a more focused approach to responding to complaints.
4.19	Any restrictions placed on a resident's contact due to unacceptable behaviour should be appropriate to their needs and should demonstrate regard for the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.	Yes	RBC has a policy in place to manage unacceptable behavior from customers, this is currently being reviewed.

Section 5 - Complaint stages

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Stage 1

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.1	Landlords must respond to the complaint <u>within 10 working days</u> of the complaint being logged. Exceptionally, landlords may provide an explanation to the resident containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This should not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.	No	Our complaint policy is 20 working days as it is the same corporate policy across the Council. Exemption allowed for Local Authority Landlords as long as we work in line with the Corporate Policy.
5.5	A complaint response must be sent to the resident when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue, are completed. Outstanding actions must still be tracked and actioned expeditiously with regular updates provided to the resident.	Yes	This is normal practice, however sometimes the resident asks for the response to be delayed until all actions are complete.
5.6	Landlords must address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate.	Yes	Responses are checked by the CRT to ensure all points are covered.
5.8	Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage one in clear, plain language:	Yes	This is all covered in the standard template

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint stage • the decision on the complaint • the reasons for any decisions made • the details of any remedy offered to put things right • details of any outstanding actions • details of how to escalate the matter to stage two if the resident is not satisfied with the answer 		
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Stage 2

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.9	If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the resident's satisfaction at stage one it must be progressed to stage two of the landlord's procedure, unless an exclusion ground now applies. In instances where a landlord declines to escalate a complaint it must clearly communicate in writing its reasons for not escalating as well as the resident's right to approach the Ombudsman about its decision.	Yes	We clearly explain if we are not going to escalate the complaint and provide the Ombudsman details.
5.10	On receipt of the escalation request, landlords must set out their understanding of issues outstanding and the outcomes the resident is seeking. If any aspect of the complaint is unclear, the resident must be asked for clarification and the full definition agreed between both parties.	Yes	The investigating officer must meet or speak to the complainant to establish the scope of the Stage 2 request
5.11	Landlords must only escalate a complaint to stage two once it has completed stage one and at the request of the resident.	Yes	This is our corporate policy
5.12	The person considering the complaint at stage two, must not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage one.	Yes	Head of Service allocates to a manager who has not been involved directly

5.13	Landlords must respond to the stage two complaint within 20 working days of the complaint being escalated. Exceptionally, landlords may provide an explanation to the resident containing a clear timeframe for when the response will be received. This should not exceed a further 10 days without good reason.	No	Our corporate policy is 30 working days as it is a Council-wide policy – code allows local authority landlords to work in line with Corporate Policies.
5.16	<p>Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage two in clear, plain language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint stage • the complaint definition • the decision on the complaint • the reasons for any decisions made • the details of any remedy offered to put things right • details of any outstanding actions <p>and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if the landlord has a third stage, details of how to escalate the matter to stage three • if this was the final stage, details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service if the resident remains dissatisfied. 	Yes	<p>Complainants receive the full investigation report and the adjudication letter from the Head of Service.</p> <p>We do not have a third stage</p>

Stage 3

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.17	Two stage landlord complaint procedures are ideal. This ensures that the complaint process is not unduly long. If landlords strongly believe a third stage is necessary, they must set out their reasons for this as part of their self-assessment. A process with more than three stages is not acceptable under any circumstances.	N/A	
5.20	<p>Landlords must confirm the following in writing to the resident at the completion of stage three in clear, plain language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint stage 	N/A	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint definition • the decision on the complaint • the reasons for any decisions made • the details of any remedy offered to put things right • details of any outstanding actions • details of how to escalate the matter to the Housing Ombudsman Service if the resident remains dissatisfied 		
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Best practice ‘should’ requirements

Stage 1

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.2	If an extension beyond 20 working days is required to enable the landlord to respond to the complaint fully, this should be agreed by both parties.	Yes	We communicate this with the complainant and endeavor to get their agreement. This is recorded by the complaints team.
5.3	Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, landlords should provide the Housing Ombudsman’s contact details so the resident can challenge the landlord’s plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of a landlord’s response.	Yes	Process updated from October 2022 - complaints team will refer them back to the ombudsman details.
5.4	Where the problem is a recurring issue, the landlord should consider any older reports as part of the background to the complaint if this will help to resolve the issue for the resident.	Yes	Previous history is passed to the investigator and their IT systems would have the relevant information too.
5.7	Where residents raise additional complaints during the investigation, these should be incorporated into the stage one response if they are relevant and the stage one response has not been issued. Where the stage one response has been issued, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the complaint should be logged as a new complaint.	Yes	Any additional points are passed to the investigating officer for inclusion. If they are not relevant then these are logged as new complaints.

Stage 2

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.14	If an extension beyond 10 working days is required to enable the landlord to respond to the complaint fully, this should be agreed by both parties.	Yes	Investigators agree any extension beyond 30 working days with complainants.
5.15	Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, landlords should provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the resident can challenge the landlord's plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of a landlord's response	Yes	Paperwork updated form October 2022

Stage 3

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
5.18	Complaints should only go to a third stage if the resident has actively requested a third stage review of their complaint. Where a third stage is in place and has been requested, landlords must respond to the stage three complaint <u>within 20 working days</u> of the complaint being escalated. Additional time will only be justified if related to convening a panel. An explanation and a date for when the stage three response will be received should be provided to the resident.	N/A	
5.19	Where agreement over an extension period cannot be reached, landlords should provide the Housing Ombudsman's contact details so the resident can challenge the landlord's plan for responding and/or the proposed timeliness of a landlord's response.	N/A	

Section 6 - Putting things right

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
6.1	Effective dispute resolution requires a process designed to resolve complaints. Where something has gone wrong a landlord must acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right.	Yes	Included in the complaint response
6.2	Any remedy offered must reflect the extent of any service failures and the level of detriment caused to the resident as a result. A landlord must carefully manage the expectations of residents and not promise anything that cannot be delivered or would cause unfairness to other residents.	Yes	Monitored by HCMT from October 2022
6.5	The remedy offer must clearly set out what will happen and by when, in agreement with the resident where appropriate. Any remedy proposed must be followed through to completion.	Yes	Monitored by HCMT from October 2022
6.6	In awarding compensation, a landlord must consider whether any statutory payments are due, if any quantifiable losses have been incurred, the time and trouble a resident has been put to as well as any distress and inconvenience caused.	Yes	Recommendations are made by CRT if necessary.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
6.3	Landlords should look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether anything needs to be 'put right' in terms of process or systems to the benefit of all residents.	Yes	Learning Action Plans are completed and monitored by Housing Management Team
6.7	In some cases, a resident may have a legal entitlement to redress. The landlord should still offer a resolution where possible, obtaining legal advice as to how any offer of resolution should be worded.	Yes	Monitored by Complaints team.

Section 7 - Continuous learning and improvement

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
7.2	Accountability and transparency are integral to a positive complaint handling culture. Landlords must report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints in their annual report and more frequently to their residents, staff and scrutiny panels.	Yes	Reports are produced quarterly and annually.

Best practice 'should' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
7.3	A member of the governing body should be appointed to have lead responsibility for complaints to support a positive complaint handling culture. This role will be responsible for ensuring the governing body receives regular information on complaints that provides insight to the governing body on the landlord's complaint handling performance.	Yes	Chair of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee.
7.4	As a minimum, governing bodies should receive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular updates on the volume, categories and outcome of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance including compliance with the Ombudsman's orders Regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling, The annual performance report produced by the Ombudsman, where applicable Individual complaint outcomes where necessary, including where the Ombudsman made findings of severe maladministration or referrals to regulatory bodies. The implementation of management responses should be tracked to ensure they are delivered to agreed timescales. The annual self-assessment against the Complaint Handling Code for scrutiny and challenge. 	Yes	We do weekly, two weekly monitoring reports and also provide quarterly annual data to all of the above to lead member. We continue the process of self-assessment in 22/23. Annual report to be taken to committee.

7.5	Any themes or trends should be assessed by senior management to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks or policies and procedures that require revision. They should also be used to inform staff and contractor training.	Yes	Process to be updated in October 2022
7.6	Landlords should have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all employees that reflects the need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a collaborative and co-operative approach towards resolving complaints, working with colleagues across teams and departments • take collective responsibility for any shortfalls identified through complaints rather than blaming others • act within the Professional Standards for engaging with complaints as set by the Chartered Institute of Housing. 	Yes	CRT manage all the complaints and have oversight and work collaboratively with the service and management team to ensure customers are responded to in accordance with our complaints' procedure.

Section 8 - Self-assessment and compliance

Mandatory 'must' requirements

Code section	Code requirement	Comply: Yes/No	Evidence, commentary and any explanations
8.1	Landlords must carry out an annual self-assessment against the Code to ensure their complaint handling remains in line with its requirements.	Yes	Assessment presented to HNL committee annually
8.2	Landlords must also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure and/or change in procedures.	Yes	Process to be updated from October 2022
8.3	Following each self-assessment, a landlord must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • report the outcome of their self-assessment to their governing body. In the case of local authorities, self-assessment outcomes should be reported to elected members • publish the outcome of their assessment on their website if they have one, or otherwise make accessible to residents • include the self-assessment in their annual report section on complaints handling performance 	Yes	Assessment presented to HNL committee annually

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**TWO STAGE
CORPORATE COMPLAINTS
PROCEDURE**

FINAL

(Valid from 02/01/2013 -

Reviewed 01/12/2020)

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

1. 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The formal process divides into 2 stages. The first of these provides an opportunity for a local resolution of any problems which may arise and it is expected that the majority of complaints will be sorted out at this level. Where the problems cannot be resolved to the complainant's satisfaction at a local level, stage 2 of the process involves the investigation of the complaint by a more senior member of staff.
- 1.2 However, to the public, the notification of quite simple matters eg, pot hole in highway or non-functioning street lamp, could be considered as a complaint. These should be treated as comments or observations - the complaints' procedure will not be activated until the defect observed has not been rectified within the "standard time". This is a preliminary process to the complaints' procedure. However, all such calls or comments should be recorded.
- 1.3 The standard definition of a complaint is:

"Any expression of dissatisfaction that requires a response".

2 Complaints' Procedure

2.1 Stage 1 - Local/Informal Resolution of Complaints

- 2.1.1 Where a complaint is received by a member of staff it must be recorded, even if it can be resolved informally. The record should show the substance of the complaint, what action was taken to resolve it and whether or not the service user is satisfied with the outcome. Where possible, and practical, the person should be asked to sign the record to confirm it is correct. In order that complaints can be tracked a copy should be sent to the Customer Relations

Team as soon as possible after the complaint has been made, whether or not it has been resolved. The original should be appropriately filed by the supervisor concerned.

- 2.1.2 If the complaint is not resolved at the time at which it is made, then, except for minor issues, the line manager should be informed. Every effort should be made to respond to the complaint within **5 working days**. In any event, a letter of acknowledgement or other response (orally or by phone or email) shall be sent out to the complainant within **5 working days**.
- 2.1.3 The line manager should review the complaints file regularly, and take the lead in advising staff in relation to handling of complaints. The line manager should always ensure that members of staff are made aware of complaints made about them or their actions
- 2.1.4 Every effort should be made to resolve the complaint or representation as speedily as possible and to the complainant's satisfaction, within **20 working days**. The response to the complainant should be recorded, however briefly, and the Customer Relations Team should also be informed to allow monitoring of the complaints' process.
- 2.1.5 The response to the complainant should advise them that, should they remain dissatisfied, they can
 - a ask for their complaint to be investigated by a more senior officer, or
 - b refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman, who will investigate alleged maladministration by a local authority.

A time limit (14 days would be reasonable) should be suggested for them to request an investigation by senior officer, after which it will be assumed that they are satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, or have referred the matter to the Ombudsman. Complaints from RBC Tenants will be advised where appropriate to contact a Designated Officer or Housing Ombudsman.

- 2.1.6 Complaints revolving around Council policy will effectively be completed at Stage 1. Although recorded as complaints, there is no scope for investigating matters of policy. However, complainants can be advised to raise the issue with their ward councillors.
- 2.1.7 A complaint that has already been dealt with at all stages of the procedure will not be re-investigated.

- 2.1.8 A complaint will not be considered if it is made more than one year after the grounds to make the representation arose. In these cases, the Customer Relations Team should write to advise the complainant that their complaint cannot be considered, explaining the reasons why and advise the complainant of their right to approach the Local Government & Social Ombudsman or Housing Ombudsman.
- 2.1.9 Discretion in deciding whether to consider complaints where to do so would prejudice any of the following investigations will be outside of scope. In these cases, the Customer Relations Team should write to advise the complainant that their complaint cannot be considered, explaining the reasons why and advise the complainant of their right to approach the Local Government & Social Ombudsman or Housing Ombudsman.
- Court proceedings;
 - Tribunals;
 - Disciplinary proceedings; or
 - Criminal proceedings.
- 2.1.10 Anonymous complaints will be recorded and referred to the Customer Relations Team. Anonymous complaints fall outside of the scope of the complaints procedure.

2.2. Stage 2 - Formal Investigation

- 2.2.1 When it has not proved possible to resolve the complaint, and the complainant remains dissatisfied, the complainant can ask for their complaint to be investigated by a more senior officer. They must put their request to the Investigating Officer or the Customer Relations Manager. This is Stage 2 of the complaints' procedure.
- 2.2.2 All complaints which proceed to Stage 2 must be immediately notified to the Head of Service and to the Customer Relations Team using the form. An acknowledgement must be sent to the complainant within **5 working days**.
- 2.2.3 The Head of Service will appoint a manager to carry out an investigation.
- 2.2.4 The Investigating Officer will meet with the complainant and agree their complaint, which should be recorded in writing. Following the investigation they will submit a report to the Head of Service. The

Head of Service will ensure that a written response is made to a Stage 2 complaint, **within 30 working days** of its receipt, enclosing a copy of the Investigating Officer's report.

- 2.2.5 The Service Manager/Head of Service is responsible for ensuring the quality of the report and response to the complainant. Copies of the Investigating Officer's report and the written response to the complainant must be sent to the Customer Relations Team.
- 2.2.6 Should a complainant remain dissatisfied with the decision or actions of the Directorate the final course of action which they may take is to contact the Local Government Ombudsman/Housing Ombudsman.

29.11.12

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Complaints About Landlord Services: Summary

1. TELL US WHEN SOMETHING GOES WRONG

If you are unhappy about the standard of service we provide or the way you were treated by a member of our staff tell your Neighbourhood Officer or their manager as soon as possible.

We aim to work with you to try to agree a way forward and sort things out within 5 working days.

No further action

YES

Are you satisfied with the outcome?

NO

No further action

YES

Are you satisfied with the outcome?

NO

2. If we can't agree a solution or if your complaint is more serious or complicated you can **MAKE A FORMAL COMPLAINT**. The person investigating your complaint will talk to everyone involved to try and agree a way forward that is reasonable and fair. We aim to complete this stage within 20 working

3. If we haven't been able to agree a way forward you can **ASK FOR A REVIEW** - we will ask a more senior member of staff to look into your complaint again. They will work with everyone involved to try to agree a way forward that is reasonable and fair. We aim to complete this stage within 30 working days.

This is the end of the Council's complaints procedure

4. IF YOU ARE STILL DISSATISFIED WITH THE OUTCOME YOU CAN CHOOSE TO:

REFER YOUR COMPLAINT TO THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN

They will look at the way we investigated your complaint TO make sure we have:

- Acted legally
- Followed our policies and procedures correctly
- Acted fairly and reasonably They may try to mediate a solution.

Your local ward councillor can help you, you can find their details on the Council website

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	4 JANUARY 2023		
TITLE:	HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE (HSHAZ) PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR ADELE BARNETT-WARD	PORTFOLIO:	CULTURE AND LEISURE
SERVICE:	CULTURE	WARDS:	ABBEY & COLEY
LEAD OFFICER:	CHRISTELLE BEAUPOUX	TEL:	07973 973224
JOB TITLE:	CULTURE AND HERITAGE PROJECTS MANAGER	E-MAIL:	Christelle.beaupoux@reading.gov

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the HNL Committee with information on the achievements of the High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) programme over the past two and half years and what it aims to deliver in the remaining 16 months of the programme, despite the covid19 impacts and the current economic crisis.
- 1.2 In 2020 Historic England (HE) awarded the Council with up to £806,500, with the Council match-funding £808,500, to deliver a £1.6 million implementation programme in three of Reading's conservation areas over 4 years. The programme began 1 April 2020 and ends 31 March 2024.
- 1.3 The Council's project funding is aimed at the retail high street areas of three conservation areas: Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road, St Mary's Butts/Castle Street, and Market Place/London Street. The Oxford Road character area within the Castle Hill/Russell Street/Oxford Road area is the top priority for the funding within the Reading Heritage Action Zone.
- 1.4 Further to the Policy Committee report on the 20 July 2020 agreeing to commit the funds to deliver the HSHAZ programme and an update report on the progress of the programme for the HNL Committee on the 15 December 2020, this report summaries the key achievements and the next steps of this major conservation, cultural and community engagement programme that will end on the 31 March 2024.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

That Committee notes and agrees:

- 2.1 The achievements of the programme so far detailed in section 4.
- 2.2 The remaining elements and workplan agreed for the programme detailed in section 5.
- 2.3 The risks identified that might hinder achievement detailed in section 6.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The context in which the Council is delivering this programme is very different from when the bid was submitted in 2019. The impact of the coronavirus is far reaching and has had major effects on high streets, including local businesses and their communities. However, the HSHAZ programme continues to play an important role in the recovery of our high streets.

3.2 The HSHAZ has three strands to the programme.

Conservation Strand aims

The Reading HSHAZ Conservation Strand aims to improve the physical condition and viability of the high streets within the three conservation areas:

- By identifying those properties most at risk and engaging with property owners to help them to restore the buildings, to show them how to maintain the buildings and to share best practice. We want to see premises viably and fully occupied and footfall and customer satisfaction increasing.
- By developing a comprehensive strategy to improve the public realm across the HSHAZ. The outcome will be a better experience and sense of place for those living or working in or visiting the town centre.
- By supporting local businesses, the economy and local community and cultural initiatives by creating a positive sense of place through contributing to the heritage of their high street. The repair and reinstatement of the public realm, where this would significantly improve the high street and help to reinforce the commercial appeal and local distinctiveness of an area, based on detailed historical and townscape analysis.

Community Engagement Strand

The Reading HSHAZ Community Engagement Strand aims to meaningfully inform and engage with communities and stakeholders with a strong focus on the local communities in the most deprived areas. The Community Engagement Strand will:

- Inform and actively engage with a wide range of local communities and stakeholders on the Reading's HSHAZ programme to ensure, as far as possible, they have every opportunity to express their views to the project team at the design stage and before decisions are finalised.
- Ensure that the views and the needs of the local community are embedded within Reading's HSHAZ programme;
- Actively involve the communities and key interest parties in the enhancement of their local heritage to renew their sense of pride, identity, and ownership in developing the town's future.

Encourage the taking of an active and collaborative role with the programme and training opportunities, through which the community and local businesses are learning new skills, good practice and are becoming more resilient, creating a more prosperous and better maintained neighbourhood.

Cultural Programme strand

The Reading HSHAZ Cultural Programme Strand aims to support communities to co-create new work with artists and creative practitioners that is relevant, authentic and genuinely participatory for people. The Cultural Programme Strand within the three conservation areas will:

- Reveal hidden histories and the lives of the communities past and present.

- Create informative and creative outputs that uncover and celebrate those histories.
- Accomplish this by giving a voice to the community at the heart of these areas to tell these stories.
- Establish trusted open platforms, with strong local communities' partnerships, encouraging a long-lasting legacy.

The delivery of this programme has been impacted by the covid pandemic, the pressure on staffing, delay of staff appointment due to covid and delay in activities delivery due to the lockdown, supplier chain and contractors' shortage delaying conservation works and the current economic crisis. Despite these challenges, the programme has delivered successfully on the above aims and objectives over the past year and half through the key outputs and activities detailed below.

4. ACHIEVEMENTS OF PROGRAMME TO DATE

4.1 Building Rescue and Shop Front improvements achievements:

- Purcell Architects were appointed to undertake a comprehensive feasibility study on shop fronts and historic building within the three conservation areas, including building condition surveys identifying short term and long-term repairs, recommendations and estimated costs, which was completed in 2021. From this study, 28 buildings were shortlisted for a detailed condition survey. Following training and consultation sessions carried out by Purcell Architects with local businesses, despite the covid impacts and the economic pressures, we received 11 expressions of interest from property/business owners. Currently, 10 buildings/shop owners have signed a legal agreement to proceed with the architectural survey and the repairs on their properties.
- The HSHAZ will fund to the repair and conservation of 4 town centre monuments: Soane Monument, Jubilee Cross and Zinzan Tomb in St Mary's Churchyard and Queen Victoria statue in Town Hall Square, in collaboration with The Conservation Area Assessment Committee (CAAC), the Reading Civic Society (RCS) and Environmental and Commercial Services. Cliveden Conservation is currently undertaking schedule of works and costing for the repair and conservation of these 4 monuments.

4.2 Public realm achievements:

- 10 street name plates are added in conservation areas where they were missing or need to be replaced.
- A community engagement study was commissioned from Feria Urbanism, who conducted a series of on-site public engagement drop-in events across the three conservation areas in Reading town centre - Oxford Road, St Mary's Butts & Castle Street and Market Place & London Street. The purpose of these events was to gather information from people in the street to better understand what changes people would like to see to the public realm in these three heritage areas. The engagement activities included:
 - a. consultation sessions took place in Urban Room in Broad Street Mall;
 - b. audio recordings, street surveys, interviews and workshops took place on the high streets of HAZ;
 - c. A time specific online survey of short questions for each specific areas integrated into the website for leaving feedback.

Feria Urbanism has now gathered all the information and feedback from the engagement activities from more than 150 people and is now producing a report that would be presented for recommendations and will form the basis of a stage two feasibility study for key public realm improvements implementation within the HSHAZ

areas. The HSHAZ team will need to brief other relevant council's departments on the medium and long-term recommendations outside of the HSHAZ funded programme.

4.3 Town Centre Historic Area Assessment

An Historic Area Assessment (HAA) of the town centre has been completed by Built Heritage Consultancy in collaboration with Archway Heritage and Ultranyx. The purpose of the study is to identify the significance of Reading's historic environment, its character and heritage assets, and to signpost issues and opportunities that have the potential to change its character.

- 5 workshops have taken place in partnership with Reading CAAC, Reading Civic Society (RCS), Reading Economy and Destination Agency (REDA), and Reading Museum.
- 2 workshops have taken place with Urban Place Lab who were carrying out the Town Centre Strategy Review to share experiences.
- Character areas are identified within the town centre.
- Changes to the boundaries of existing conservation areas are proposed.
- New conservation areas are proposed to be designated.
- Needs for public realm improvements are identified.

4.4 Community Engagement achievements:

The aim of this community engagement and cultural pilot project was to engage with the Oxford Road communities, to explore people's real stories of Oxford Road and to link them with their local heritage and rich multicultural history. For more information about the project delivered as part of the Cultural Pilot and the initial Community Engagement programme. Please see the short film below: [cultural pilot and community engagement programme video](#).

- Initial projects included:
 - a) Oxford Road Stories with the University of Reading Community Researchers
 - b) AZUCIT [Welcome to Oxford Road Mural](#) and [ITV coverage of the arts works](#)
 - c) Untold's Oxford Road Chronicles podcast and film- [Untold's Oxford Road Chronicles](#)
 - d) Reside Dance's Moving Stories project.
- Two new audio trails. Sound UK, working with local Reading artists and volunteers, have created 2 self-guided audio tours. The first trail covers the Market Place/London Street HSHAZ area with a particular focus on the 'biscuit' heritage of this area. The second trail focus on the history and heritage of the St Mary's Butts/Castle Street HSHAZ area. [Reading Audio Trails - Reading Borough Council](#)

The community project with Baker Street Productions in partnership with community researchers from the University of Reading, Human Geography Department and groups that meet at Life Spring Church has culminated in the creation of a new exhibition 'Lifespring Stories'. This uncovers the hidden stories of the people who are the 'life' of the Oxford Road, this celebrating 'Lifespring Stories' through audio and visual media; During the summer the exhibition toured to the Turbine House at the Riverside Museum at Blake's Lock and the University of Reading. This free exhibition is now permanently hosted in the foyer of the Lifespring Church, at the Pavilion, on Oxford Road. The posters are hanging up the staircase where photos of movie stars would have been in the early days of the building when it was an Art Deco Cinema. For accessibility purposes, members of the public can ask for a Listening Catalogue, so they can enjoy the exhibition without going on the stairs. For people who are not able to get to the Pavilion, a smaller 'touring' exhibition will be coming to some other Reading's locations, such as the libraries and The Biscuit Factory in October and November 2022. [Lifespring Stories | What's On Reading \(whatsonreading.com\)](#)

- Three piloting pop up arts activities in Dusseldorf Way during the summer of 2022, to explore the diverse communities in this area and to offer opportunities to people who not normally engage with arts, culture and heritage activities a safe environment to explore creative thinking and crafts. These activities were being piloted as part of the Community Engagement Public Realm work to explore what type of activities and events, the local communities would like to see in the future and be involved in.

4.5 Cultural Programme achievements:

- Pilot phase projects which included:
 - a) Oxford Road Stories with the University of Reading Community Researchers, the project delivered an online community exhibition [Oxford Road Stories](#)
 - b) Caroline Streatfield's [Hidden Recipes From My Ancestral Home | What's On Reading \(whatsonreading.com\)](#)
 - c) Baker Street Productions Look, Hear - Discover Oxford Road audio piece [Look, Hear - Discover Oxford Road | What's On Reading \(whatsonreading.com\)](#)
 - d) Gemma Anusa's [Through your eyes](#) mural.
- Market Place/London Street and Castle Street/St Marys Butts Activity 1. Market Place/London Road Hidden Histories was delivered by Museum Partnership Reading (MPR) between January and April 2022. Information, images, documents and objects relating to Market Place were gathered by the MPR Cultural Activities Facilitator through partnership working and the volunteering of time from Reading Museum, The Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading Archives, and Local History at Reading Library. These informed the creation of eight workshops delivered to over 50 people. As part of these workshops participants had the opportunity to handle objects from Reading Museum Stuart Life loan box, look at old images of the area and take part in a hands-on creative experience.
- The Cultural Programme Oxford Road commissioned two £9K grants projects that have been delivered.
 - The Oxford Road Times newspaper was launched on Saturday 27th August covering the project from two local visual artists, Lisa-Marie Gibbs and Philip Newcombe, who have been working together to deliver a series of workshops with members of the Oxford Road community looking at how objects hold our own personal and collective stories. Using sound recording, sculpture, text and other forms of art, the workshops allowed participants to discover 'hidden stories' and as a collective bring these stories of the people and place of the Oxford Road to life. This project has culminated in the creation of a unique community newspaper, celebrating the diverse and rich culture of the Oxford Road is now available from 'The Oxford Road Times' is a one off, limited-edition, free newspaper, telling the stories, and highlighting the creativity, of the Oxford Road. 250 copies of the newspaper have been distributed in newsagents, shops, libraries and outlets along and near the Oxford Road in West Reading. Within its pages is documentation of a range of happenings, events and workshops that the artists delivered with various community groups in the area during the summer of 2022. Highlights include 'Bearing Witness to Grey' a study of the colours found in between the IDR and West Reading Bridge, and 'Mango rains', seven stories from seven local people delving into different voices and personal histories. It also includes an insert inside the paper: Postcards from the Oxford Road. For more information and background on the project visit The Oxford Road Times instagram @oxfordroadtimes.
 - Reside Dance are working in partnership with The Federation of Oxford Road Community School and Wilson Primary School, to deliver an after-school arts programme with Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils and their families. Through this project participants will explore connections to the Oxford Road, the area that they live in, recognising the link between redeveloping a sense of home, belonging and civic pride, and improved physical and mental health.

- Oxford Road Projects - up to four £4K grants community call out and artist/creative practitioner projects to develop local community groups and artists creative opportunities and develop new projects with local people that celebrates the history and diverse cultures of the area. The projects will offer local community members the opportunity to take part in creative and cultural activities together that:
 - are inspired by the history of the area and celebrates the diverse cultures of the Oxford Road
 - are co-created with them involving them in the design and delivery of the activities
 - enables them to work with an artist or creative practitioner to co-create work that is meaningful and relevant to them and the local community.

- Delivery of Market Place/London Street and St Marys Butts/Castle Street Activity 2 (being delivered by Museum Partnership Reading) and links have been made with relevant partners such as Public Health and the Holiday Activity Fund scheme. Three objects handling and printing making sessions were delivered over the summer - two at Central Library and one at Whitley community centre linked to HAF. The feedback from participants was very positive - The best comment was an initially reluctant participant at Whitley who said 'it was the fastest hour of his life!'. The events provided a place for vulnerable adults, children and young people and families the opportunity to join in with a creative workshop that is inspired by the history and heritage of the two conservation areas as part of support activity that they already attend such as the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF). The aims are to provide an improved experience for those that seek support by providing an inviting atmosphere and opportunity to join in with something positive and fun and vulnerable people feel a part of the community by being involved with the creation of artwork for the HSHAZ areas and/or consultation on the project during events.

- The development and the creation of a monitoring evaluation framework with a flexible toolkit for partners. The HSHAZ evaluation plan aims to ensure that evaluation:
 - a) a. measures how well the programme has met its objectives
 - b) is standardised and comparable across the different community and cultural programmes
 - c) is easy to implement
 - d) represents the views of staff, partners, visitors and participants across all programme activity.

The HSHAZ framework and toolkit has been devised following the objectives and outcomes for Reading HSHAZ and shows what success will look like. It is based on The Audience Agency's evaluation framework for the wider HSHAZ scheme and supports the overall objectives for Reading HSAZ:

- Enhance the understanding of local heritage to reveal Reading's hidden histories and to give the community a sense of pride and ownership in developing the town's future
- Improve the physical condition of Reading's three high street Conservation Areas by restoring distinctive and historic character buildings that are most at risk
- Improve the public realm within the three Conservation Areas to provide a better place to be for people shopping, working, living and visiting these areas
- Help local businesses and residents to thrive by appreciating, maintaining and improving the value that their property contributes to the heritage and viability of the high streets.

5. REMAINING DELIVERY PLAN

Over the remaining 16 months and final stage of the programme, the plan and milestones for the various strands are as set out below.

5.1 Conservation strand

Building Rescue and Shop Front Improvement:

To be delivered by end of March 2023:

- Purcell Architects and other specialist architects to undertake detailed surveys of relevant properties between October and November 2022. Those surveys will provide detailed drawings and costing of the works.
- Any planning applications for relevant properties should be submitted and determined between October and December 2022, with the aim of the work starting in the new year.
- Repair/restoration works to be carried out to the selected 4 monuments, once costing has been ascertained by Cliveden conservation.

To be delivered by end of March 2024:

- Contractors to be appointed by individual property owners for construction works (building rescue and shopfront improvement) on site.

5.2 Public Realm Improvements:

To be delivered by 31 March 2023:

- Six additional lighting lamps to be installed in St Mary's Churchyard in matching style with the existing lamp posts. Heritage statement is submitted to Oxford Dioceses.
- Ten bins to be added or replaced in conservation areas.
- Design and Feasibility Study for Public Realm Improvements to be completed by Feria Urbanism before starting with the implementation.

To deliver by end of March 2024:

- Strategic Projects such as wayfinding strategy, archaeological desk-based assessment, topographical surveys to be carried out along with the project proposals by Feria Urbanism.
- Improvement works to be carried out in the HSHAZ public realm following feasibility studies.

5.3 Community Engagement and cultural Programme:

To be delivered by the end of March 2023:

- Co-creation by members of community groups of a temporary display at Reading Museum, that will showcase some of the key recent outputs of the HSHAZ community engagement and cultural programme; telling the story of how local communities are leading and responding to creative activity; highlighting the vibrant everyday life, the rich cultural diversity and the fascinating hidden heritages of Reading high streets.
- Preparation of the evaluation of Lifespring Stories exhibition and the exploration of the legacy of this project through an exhibition catalogue, an online exhibition on the Reading Museum website.

- Evaluate and investigate the legacy of The Oxford Road Times Newspaper project with artists, partners and the communities.

To be delivered by end of March 2024:

- To provide a web-based platform that offers information and guidance to support community groups and organisations in setting up and running their own arts and cultural projects with their local communities, Work in partnership with Culture Mix.
- Implementation of recommendations from Community Engagement Public Realm Report which has been develop in partnership with FERIA Urbanism e.g. community gardening/planting Oxford Road HSHAZ.
- To commission a series of photos that document the three HSHAZ conservation areas and identified buildings within them as they are now before vital conservation work takes place. These photos will help showcase the impact of the conservation works on the buildings and shop fronts. Giving the local people and businesses a sense of pride in the areas. The images will be presented to the public and will formed part of the legacy and the archive of the project

5.4 Culture Programme Strand:

To be delivered by end of March 2023:

- Support delivery of three £4K Oxford Road projects including:
 - a) selection of applicants and awarding of grants process
 - b) project planning with grant recipients
 - c) monitoring of project session delivery in line with project application, project schedule and project budget
 - d) evaluation of projects
- To deliver the final stage of the Market Place/London Street and Castle Street/St Marys Butts Activity 2. Initial positive meetings with local community organisations about delivering in partnership between October and April 2023.
- Provide the cultural programme evaluation report for year 3 to HE.
- Investigate the legacy of the HSHAZ programme beyond the funding of the project.

To be delivered by end of March 2024:

- Market Place/London Street and Castle Street/St Marys Butts Activity 3. A series of physical installations/pop-up exhibitions/street art on the public realm.
- Remaining five meetings of Cultural Consortium.
- Ongoing Historic England Cultural Programme monitoring and reporting.
- Communication and promotion of the conservation work through such things as the creation of a film to highlight and share the conservation work before, during and after the work is being carried out.
- Cultural Programme final evaluation report.

6. REMAINING PLAN: RISKS

The covid pandemic and its major effects and the current economic problems have already impacted on the delivery of the project plan resulting in underspend in year 2 (2021/22). The Council underspend budget had been carried forward to year 3 (2022/23). However, due to DCMS funding policy, HE is unable to move unspent funding to following financial years or to extend the life of the programme. This means that HE will not provide any flexibility in the event of underspend this year (2022/23) or in the final year (2023/24).

This puts huge pressure on the team to deliver the projects within the agreed timescale. Taken in combination with the covid impacts on the HSHAZ activities that were postponed and cancelled during 2020 and up to June 2021, to comply with the government's restrictions and social distancing and external factors such as supplier chain and contractors' shortage, the capital works that could not progress during the periods of lockdown and restrictions. These projects are now competing for supplies and contractors across the wider construction sector. This has especially created a competitive demand for specialist contractors, in a market which was already stretched before the pandemic. These external barriers may impact on the year 3 delivery plan and a further year of underspend. This would lead to the reduction of the scope of the programme. Officers are working hard to avoid any significant underspend by engaging with property owners/tenants and other partners to achieve as much as we can within this financial year and make use of the HE budget before the RBC match funding.

We also have been without project officers since July and recruitment for their replacement is still to be completed. It is anticipated that posts will be filled by the time of the HNL Committee meeting, but if the appointments are delayed this will lead to less delivery capacity on the programme.

7. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

7.1 The HSHAZ programme is one of the major council projects listed in the Council's Corporate Plan. The aims and objectives of the HSHAZ programme contribute to the Corporate Plan themes, for example:

- **Healthy Environment-** through the physical interventions to buildings, shop fronts and public realm, supporting the conversion of historic buildings and the improvement of the shared spaces within the conservation areas is working towards making Reading a nicer, greener, more attractive place to live that is easy to travel around, and having a tangible impact on physical and mental health and life expectancy of the local resident.
- **Thriving communities-** The HSHAZ community engagement and cultural programme aims to prioritising the needs of the most marginalised groups and the most vulnerable adults and children in our communities through culture activities. All the HSHAZ planned activities aim to celebrate the diverse communities of the conservation areas through arts, culture and heritage. The programme aims to reach as many communities as possible and to ensure our activities are as accessible and inclusive as possible.
- **Inclusive Economy** -The HSHAZ programme aim to enhance our cultural heritage of the conservations areas and to support local communities and local businesses through grants, opportunities to learn new skills, making the community more resilient, creating a more prosperous and better place for people to work, live and enjoy during this difficult economic crisis.

HSHAZ Programme is also linked with Reading local plan, the emerging town centre strategy review and transport strategy and responds well to the objectives of the climate change strategy.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 In terms of climate implications, the HSHAZ programme has at its heart the principle of making better use of the heritage assets of the town, and helps to secure the future of existing buildings within the conservation area. By making physical interventions to

repair, maintain and improve buildings at this stage, the programme avoids the need for more extensive development works in the future, which would be likely to result in more significant emissions. Physical works as part of this programme, as for any such works, will generate emissions but the long-term implications are expected to be positive for the reasons set out above. In addition, achieving the aims of the HSHAZ in improving footfall within these streets and assisting the recovery of the high street will ensure that more people use the central area for shops and services, in locations highly accessible by means other than the private car.

8.2 In terms of the quality of the environment, the HSHAZ has as one of its key aims the improvement of the public realm, and the physical works outlined in this report will therefore contribute to a higher quality environment within the town centre conservation areas.

9. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

9.1 The aims and objectives of the HSHAZ programme are to meaningfully inform and positively engage with communities and stakeholders with a strong focus on local community inclusion in the most deprived areas. All the activities within the various strands delivered so far have been developed through strong communities' engagement focus.

The HSHAZ Programme Community Engagement Plan key objectives include:

- To inform and actively engage with a wide range of local communities and stakeholders on the Reading's HSHAZ programme proposals and to ensure, as far as possible, they have every opportunity to express their views to the project team at the design stage and before decisions are finalised;
- To ensure that the views and the needs of the local community are embedded within the Council's HSHAZ programme;
- To actively involve the communities and key interested parties in the enhancement of their local heritage to renew their sense of pride, identity, and ownership in developing the town's future;
- By taking an active and collaborative role with the programme and training opportunities, the community and local businesses are learning new skills, good practice and are becoming more resilient, creating a more prosperous and better maintained neighbourhood.

10. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

10.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, 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.

10.2 The HSHAZ programme does not have a differential impact on: racial groups, gender, people with disabilities, people of a particular sexual orientation, people due to their age, or people due to their religious belief. The programme will promote equality of services/opportunity to all sectors of the community. The project will regularly engage, consult stakeholders and community and evaluate the various strands of the project. Activities will provide opportunities for enjoyment and learning for all regardless of ethnic origin, social background or financial means. All the HSHAZ

planned activities should celebrate the diverse communities of the conservation areas through arts, culture and heritage. The programme aims to reach as many communities as possible and to ensure our activities are as accessible and inclusive as possible.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no legal implication arising from this report. All procurement procedures will be considered at the time in line with the Council's contract procedure rules and relevant procurement legislation and relevant authority sought for each procurement and any future grants will be considered at the time in line with any relevant legislation in respect of grants including the Subsidy Control Act 2022 as it comes into force.

12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 No further financial implications arise from this report. The programme budget has been agreed in the Policy Committee report in July 2020 and in the update to HNL Committee in December 2020. There is the risk that if we cannot spend the year 3 (2022/23) HE allocated budget by the end of the financial year, we will not be able to draw down the full year allocation to HE and would have to reduce the scope of the programme delivery, as mentioned in section 6 of the report, however officers and steering group are aware of this and working to avoid this happening.

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READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	HOUSING NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE		
DATE:	4 JANUARY 2023		
TITLE:	STREET ART ADVISORY PANEL UPDATE		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR BARNETT-WARD, CLLR ROWLAND	PORTFOLIO:	LEISURE & CULTURE, ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES & COMMUNITY SAFETY
SERVICE:	CULTURE & ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	ZSUZSI LINDSAY	TEL:	07773 193215
JOB TITLE:	CULTURE PLACEMAKING OFFICER	E-MAIL:	ZSUZSI.LINDSAY@READING.GOV.UK

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee on the progress of the Street Art Advisory Panel and its next steps.
- 1.2 Actions are to note the progress of the Street Art Advisory Panel and approve the proposed process for adoption by the advisory panel.
- 1.3 The Street Art Advisory Panel has met three times this year and followed up via email.
- 1.4 It was set up in response to the growing interest in Street Art and an increase in its appearance after Banksy visited the town in 2021.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 To note the progress and next steps of the Street Art Advisory Panel.
- 2.2 To approve the process of identifying when a piece is street art as opposed to graffiti.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 At the November 2021 Housing, Neighbourhood and Leisure Committee meeting, it was agreed that the Street Art Advisory Panel could be set up to accomplish the aims as outlined in Appendix 4 of the CIL Enhanced Graffiti Removal Project Report.

3.2 The approved aims of the group are:

- *How street art and graffiti can be incorporated into the Reading's public art offering
- *The process of defining 'what street art is' as opposed to graffiti

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Current Position:

4.1.2 To date the Street Art Advisory Panel has met three times. Outputs include:

4.1.3 A street art definition has been agreed by the panel. This definition proposes that **Street art** is a non-permanent artform, generally created on surfaces in public places like exterior building walls, overpasses, bridges and junction boxes. Street art does not have to involve painting. It can be done with stickers spread over surfaces or by methods like yarn bombing, a process where artists cover things like trees and telephone poles with colourful fibres and knitting, examples of which can be seen in both Emmer Green and Caversham. As a non-permanent artform it is not expected that it will be maintained except for under exceptional circumstances. For example, if a piece of street art has been commissioned as part of a project where it is intended that the piece is permanent, or if a piece is deemed a part of Reading's social history or commentary and is therefore important to the town. (For example, the Black History Mural)

4.1.4 The proposed definition of graffiti has been based on wording in the Reading Borough Council Street Cleansing Policy where graffiti is defined as 'any picture, letter, sign or mark which has been painted, inscribed or affixed on a surface'. Further to this, the Street Art Advisory Panel has proposed that when a piece is described as graffiti, it does not fit the criteria of street art as described above, and/or fails against one or all the following categories:

- Content - the piece contains
 - Hate comments
 - Extremist sentiment
 - Anti-faith
 - Swear words
 - Advertising
 - Tagging - (where it is not deemed to be a 'signature' or part of a larger piece of street art)
- Context - the piece
 - Is in a conservation area
 - Is on a structure that may become structurally unsound if it remains in place
 - Is on a building that is of significant heritage importance

4.1.5 Where a piece is considered graffiti, the work will be addressed under the Council's established graffiti policy.

4.1.6 A proposed process for identifying street art vs graffiti has been drafted and trialled by the panel. A brief overview of the process is summarised below:

Stage	Description of Process
1	Referral received by the Street Art Advisory Panel from the community, RBC Colleagues, Councillors or Other (where the current Street Cleansing Policy doesn't apply it will go through the following process)
2	Evaluation by Panel members against criteria including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Content○ Context○ Consent○ Is it likely to cause structural damage?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is it heritage or conservation area or building? ○ Does it contain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hate comments ○ Extremist sentiment ○ Anti-faith ○ Swear words ○ Advertising ○ Tagging
3	<p>A quorum of 3 members of the Street Art Advisory Panel will complete the forms, a report will be created to be signed off by contributing Street Art Advisory Group panel members</p> <p>To ensure community representation, the relevant Ward Councillors will also be included in the advisory process. The quorum will not include the Lead Councillors, to ensure a wide range of views.</p>
4	<p>Report will be circulated to key stakeholders. The final decision will be taken by the Assistant Director for Culture in consultation with Lead Members and the panel's feedback.</p>
5	<p>Decision will be communicated back to the Street Art Advisory Panel and the individual who made the referral</p>
6	<p>Street Cleansing Team advised, and action taken to remove the piece if appropriate</p>

Please note: *There will be occasions where despite the recommendation of the Street Art Advisory Panel it will not be possible to remove work due to health & safety reasons or it being on private property, in line with the Council's Graffiti Policy.*

Draft Terms of Reference included in Appendix 1 for further information on process and decision making.

4.1.7 Examples of Street Art and Graffiti below:

Street Art



Examples of Graffiti in combination with street art:



Highlighted areas on the images are classed as graffiti.

4.1.8 Initial membership of the advisory panel has been recruited to and will continue to adapt as new key stakeholders are identified both within the community organisations (such as amenity societies and cultural groups) and the Council.

To date, the membership of the panel and those who have been consulted include:

- Reading Museum
- Jelly
- Open Hand Open Space
- A range of individual artists, specialising in visual arts
- RBC Officers representing Culture Development, Street Cleansing and Heritage
- Former Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation and Former Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities, currently Lead Councillor for Leisure and Culture and Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety

4.2 Next steps:

A trial was carried out in August 2022 using two existing pieces. Officers will create a report based on the outcomes from the trial. This report will be distributed to the Street Art Advisory Panel, to ensure that it is an accurate summary of their recommendations. It will then be passed on to key decision makers, in this case the Lead Councillors for Leisure and Culture, and Environmental Services and Community Safety, to inform their final decision.

Officers will also continue to work with Lead Councillors and the Street Art Advisory Panel on developing this process.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The purpose of this section is to ensure that proposals contained in reports support the Council's vision and Corporate Plan priorities:

Reading Borough Council's vision is:

To help Reading realise its potential - and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share the benefits of its success.

5.2 The Panel's Contribution to the Corporate Plan is as follows:

Healthy environment

- The panel will be looking at how Street Art can impact Reading's Climate Strategy, specifically through the paints that are used to create the pieces, as well as how the pieces are removed. Specifically, regarding pieces that are close to water.

Thriving Communities

- N/A

Inclusive economy

- The focus on ensuring that Street Art is considered in this way, supports Reading's placemaking ambitions as outlined in the corporate strategy.

5.3 Full details of the Council's [Corporate Plan](#) are available on the website and include information on the projects which will deliver these priorities.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct environmental or climate implications arising from this report. However, the panel will be looking at how Street Art can impact Reading's Climate Strategy, specifically through the paints that are used to create the pieces, as well as how the pieces are removed. Specifically, regarding street art that is close to water.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 Community consultation is a key part of the proposed process. The Street Art Advisory Panel is a blended membership made up of the cultural community, cross service RBC Officers and Councillors. Relevant Ward Councillors will be critical to ensuring that community opinion is appropriately captured. As such they will be advised to run their own community consultations to incorporate into the decision-making process.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

Appendix 1

DRAFT Street Art Advisory Panel - Terms of Reference v5

Context

The visit from Banksy in 2021 sparked the imagination of Reading, with a lot of interest and 'love' shown for the piece. It also resulted in a number of copycat pieces appearing around the town.

The current procedure for graffiti or street art is covered in 'The Street Cleansing Policy Appx 1'. This procedure outlines the circumstances and methods by '*which any picture, letter, sign or mark which has been painted, inscribed or affixed on a surface*' can be removed and where these can be removed from.

However, it does not give the Street Cleansing Team guidance on how to deal with street art that could be of value to Reading as a community and/or a town.

The Street Art Advisory Panel has been set up to support this need.

Purpose and Role of the Group

The purpose of this group will be to advise on:

- How street art and graffiti can be incorporated into the Reading's public art offering
- To set up an approved process to identify where a piece is street art as opposed to graffiti

Membership

Membership of this panel aims to reflect the variety of stakeholders in street art, including the visual art community, heritage representatives, highways and street care. Initially this group was brought together to approve these terms of reference and agree the process for identification of street art vs. graffiti. Moving forward, this group will only meet if required and will conduct most consultation online via email.

1. Representatives from Local visual art organisations and Amenity Societies (5 reps)
2. Lead Councillors for Environmental Services and Community Safety and Leisure and Culture (2 reps)
3. A member of the Street Care Team (1 rep) to advise on how they currently remove street art and any relevant experiences
4. Reading Business Improvement District (1 rep)
5. The conservation and heritage advisor for RBC (1 rep) to advise on how structures of historic importance and street art may or may not fit together
6. Ensure that the piece of artwork is not seen as a possible hazard on the highways (1 rep)
7. Reading Borough Council Coordinator (1 rep)

In addition to the above, appropriate Ward Councillors will be included in the consultation process to ensure that the community is represented.

Accountability

This group will meet to advise the council, and decision makers (Assistant Director for Culture) they will not be accountable for decisions made. They will meet as and when needed, to ensure that the group is reactive and supporting the needs of the community.

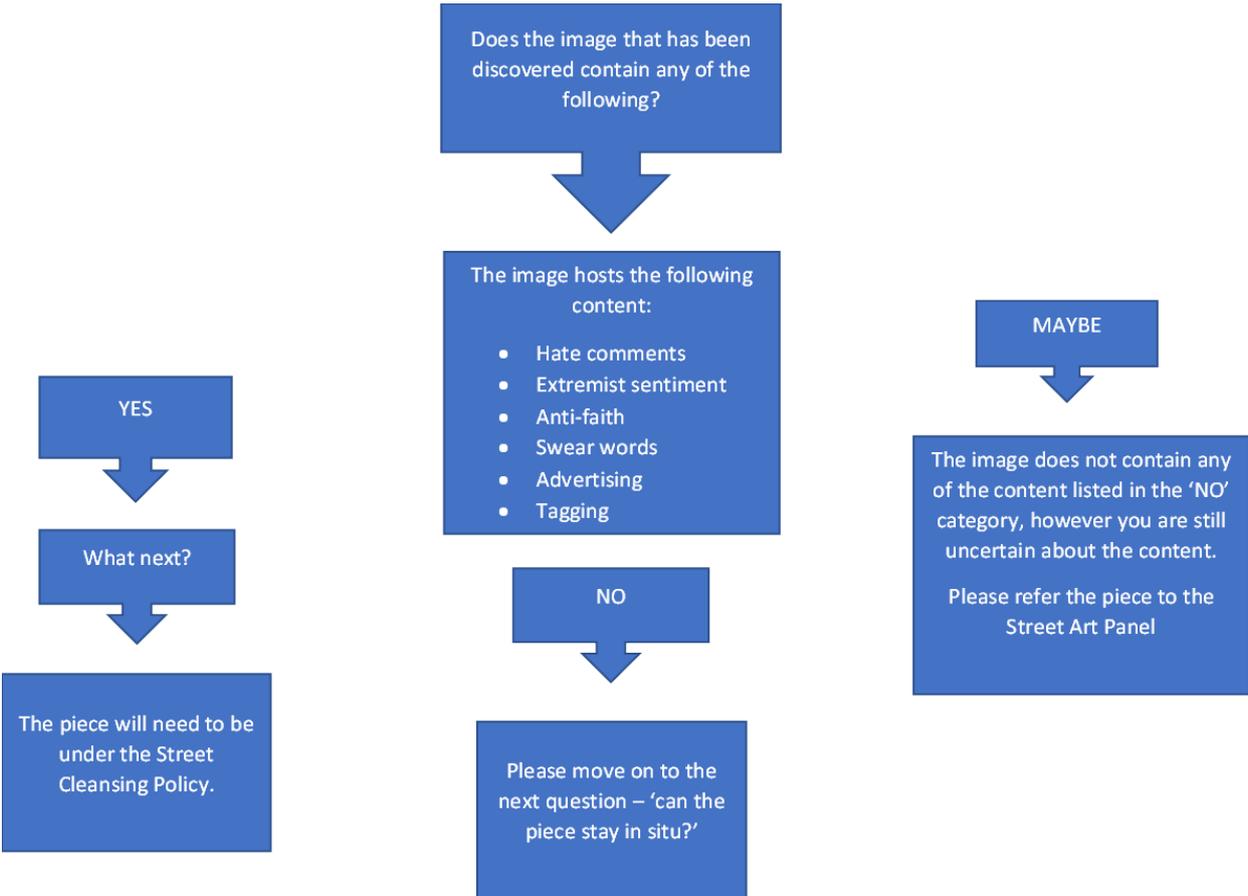
Ward Councillors will be critical to ensuring that community opinion is appropriately captured, as such they would be advised to run their own community consultations.

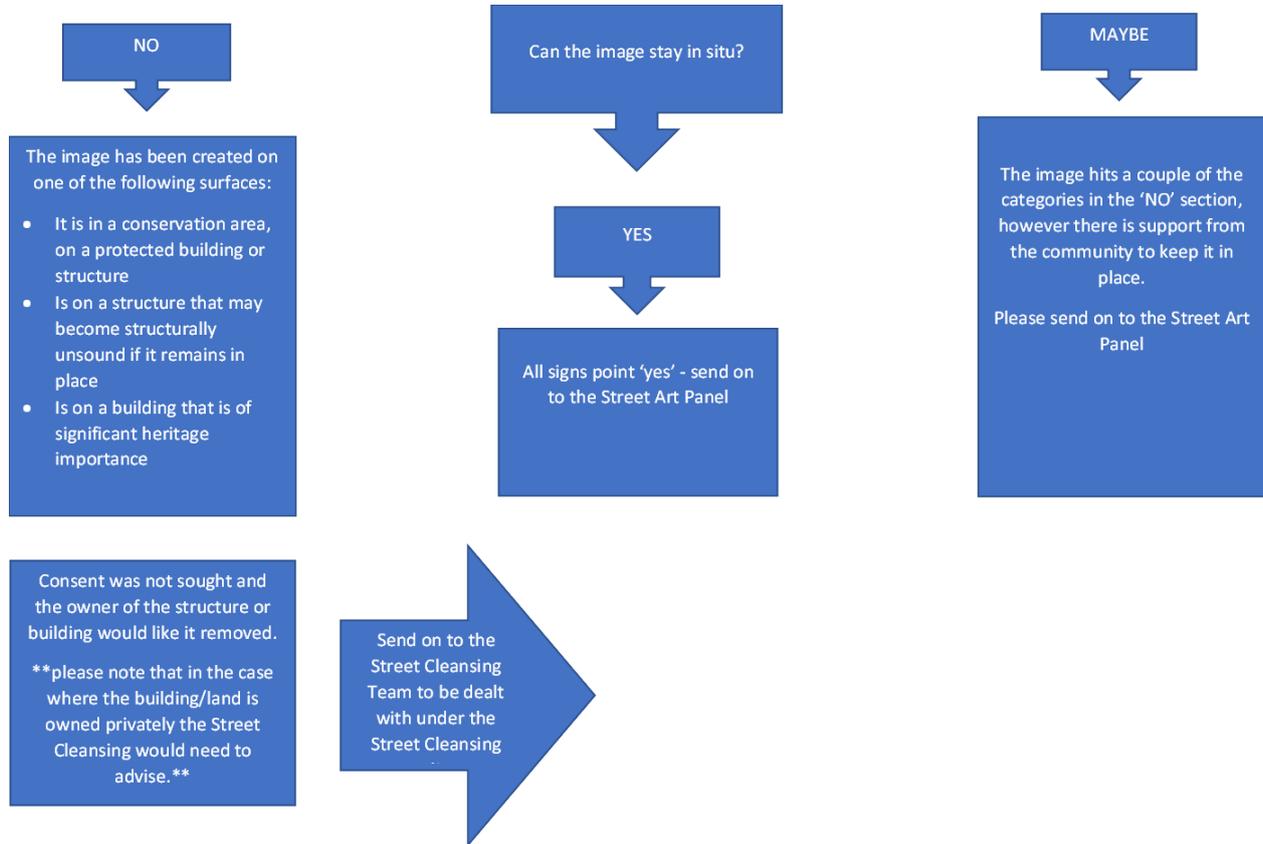
Decision Making

This group will be an advisory group only, final recommendations will be made by the Assistant Directors for Culture in consultation with Lead Members and the panel’s feedback.

Appendix 2 - Decision Flow Diagram

The flow diagram below will assist the panel in deciding whether a piece will need to be considered by the Street Art Panel or dealt with under the Street Cleansing Policy.





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