

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

27 APRIL 2020

### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:

#### Personal Protective Equipment

My Green Party colleagues and I think that all parties should be working together, constructively at this time and my questions are asked in that way.

I share the concerns of medical staff, carers and others about the lack of Personal Protective Equipment. Can I be updated on the current situation in Reading, how many days of supply do we have left and has everyone who needs it got it ?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin (Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport):

Thank you Councillor White for your important and timely question.

Clearly during this pandemic it is important that all possible steps are taken to minimise the spread of infection from person to person whilst also ensuring our frontline health, social care and wider "Key worker" workforce are protected whilst undertaking their vital roles. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is an important part of this work. It should be remembered though that PPE is only effective when combined with good hand hygiene, good respiratory hygiene and

effective infection control practice. That is why we have ensured locally our public health team have provided consistent and timely infection control advice, based on Public Health England (PHE) guidance, within our own council services and more widely into the local health and care system.

Regarding PPE particularly, we have again taken the approach in Reading to unapologetically ensure our local PPE advice and provision has mirrored the guidance provide by Public Health England. This has ensured our local practice is based on the latest science and evidence and that PPE supplies are used appropriately in the settings where they are required. At each point in this pandemic we have ensured the latest guidance has been clearly communicated to the breadth of front-line workers who might require some form of PPE to ensure their safety in performing their role. We have worked closely with local trade union representatives to support this messaging and advice.

In regard to the distribution of PPE, we have again followed the national process for ensuring staff have the right PPE available at the right time to safely perform their duties. We have worked in close partnership with the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum and military planners to ensure Reading services get access to their allocated PPE supply. Our procurement team have worked tirelessly with local and national suppliers to establish an expanded supply chain for Reading to source the full range of PPE required at this time. We have also established an Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) at our Civic Offices so that PPE supplies can be received, recorded and distributed to the frontline in an effective and timely

way. This EOC now acts not only as the distribution point for PPE to our own frontline Council teams and services but, is also available to support wider services in Reading whose usual PPE supply chain has been exhausted. This has ensured that as a town we have been able to keep many vital services open and running safely through timely provision of PPE. Our EOC also closely monitors usage in all internal and external services PPE is distributed to so that consumption rates are well understood.

With respect to all social care visits delivered under our contractual agreements and private funded service users there is a commitment from Central Government to supply the required PPE to health and social care providers through emergency stock supplied by the Local Resilience Forum. In practice however, from our experience over recent weeks, it is evident that these stocks are not sufficient to supply providers with enough quantities and there is a focus on supplying stocks only for the forthcoming days of operation.

In terms of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> parts of your question I can confirm that we are confident, with the non-NHS PPE supply we are co-ordinating, that everyone who needs PPE does have it. In terms of days of supply we hold then this is a very difficult question to answer. If we were only considering our staff then we probably hold several weeks.

I would like to thank council officers who have worked tirelessly to ensure that locally we have not suffered some of the significant frontline PPE shortages that other areas have suffered. We must also extend our thanks to local businesses, schools and colleges who have manufactured or donated PPE to the Council for social care workers and others involved in essential council services.

We have suffered the same problems seen nationally with a shortage of nationally coordinated PPE supplies and a lack of clarity about what and when we might receive supplies. This has led to huge challenges as to how to plan effectively. The shortage of PPE has been compounded by confusion nationally on how local authorities should be accessing PPE and a lack of clarity on the correct method of distribution in each area.

At our Health and Wellbeing Board mtg of 13<sup>th</sup> March I said in a reply to a public question "I am very concerned that the government is taking an alarmingly complacent approach to dealing with the biggest public health crisis to face us in a century. In my view wanton cuts to public services by national government since 2010, together with a chronically underfunded NHS barely able to cope before the outbreak of COVID-19 leave the UK in a precarious position to deal with this pandemic."

Unfortunately, I have not been able to change my view on this. The recent Sunday Times investigation into the inadequate preparations for this pandemic found numerous errors in ensuring the UK was prepared with enough PPE. It was a key part of our national pandemic plan that the NHS would be able to draw upon "just in case" stockpiles of PPE. But, over the past decade, as underfunding of the NHS led to other immediate challenges taking precedence not enough money was spent on replenishing PPE stockpiles which had dwindled and become out of date. Furthermore, on February 24, the UK government shipped 279,000 items of PPE to China following a request for help. As if this wasn't enough it wasn't until April 1 that the government accepted offers of help from the British Healthcare Trades

Association. Its chief executive saying "orders undoubtedly went overseas instead of to the NHS because of the missed opportunities."

National problems have been well documented but have been brought very close to home by the tragic death from Covid-19 of Dr Peter Tun, an associate specialist in neurorehabilitation at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. In response to pleas from Dr Tun for PPE for his department he was informed "these supplies are not widely available and need to be used sensibly for those staff most at risk."

I know we are all immensely grateful to front-line staff in Reading risking their health in order to care for us and ensure vital services continue. Examples like Dr Tun's tragic death show why the work the council is doing to secure PPE is so vital.

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### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care:

#### Coronavirus and Care Home Deaths

News outlets are tragically reporting that there is growing evidence that the number of deaths linked to coronavirus in UK care homes may be far higher than those recorded so far. Can the Council confirm what the current situation is in Reading and what action the Council is taking to protect our older residents in care homes and sheltered accommodation ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Jones (Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care):

At the present time it appears that around 85% of coronavirus related deaths occur in hospital, 10% occurring in care homes and 5% in other community settings.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has started publishing death data by LA area and currently this is available for deaths registered up to the 10<sup>th</sup> April.

At that date in Reading we had seen 29 Covid-19 deaths in Reading and 6 of these have been in care homes.

We expect the Care Quality Commission to start publishing more timely data on deaths in care homes from Wednesday, 29<sup>th</sup> April and we will monitor this closely for more detailed local insight.

The council has built on our existing strong working relationships with Public Health England, the local NHS CCG, our own Adults Social Care team and care homes in Reading.

In particular regular contact is being maintained with care homes across the town to ensure timely access to infection control advice, testing of residents and staff with symptoms, and PPE for staff is all readily available. This ensures that all possible steps are taken to minimise the risk of death when infection within our care homes occurs.

Finally, I pay tribute to all the staff and volunteers, individuals and organisations, who are helping Reading residents make their way through these truly unprecedented circumstances.

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### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 3

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Children:

#### Looking after our Vulnerable Children

Child protection referrals have plummeted by more than 50% in some areas of England, raising concerns about the welfare of vulnerable children during the coronavirus outbreak. Can I get the referral figures for Reading, and what extra action is Brighter Futures for Children taking to keep our children safe?

REPLY by Councillor Terry (Lead Councillor for Children):

Every concern made known to Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC); through the Single Point of Access (CSPoA) is referred to as a contact. There has been a 60% reduction in the number of contacts received in Brighter Futures for Children. In January/February 2020 BFfC received about a 1000 contacts a month. Over the last three weeks this has reduced as follows:

30.03.20 - 74  
06.04.20 - 96  
13.04.20 - 116

The number of referrals to Children Social Care have reduced by 50%. In January/February 2020 on average 240 referrals were received per month. Over the last three weeks this has reduced as follows:

30.03.20 - 10  
06.04.20 - 29  
13.04.20 - 31

The Berkshire West Safeguarding Partnership (Reading/BFfC, West Berkshire and Wokingham, Thames Valley Police and CCG) has noted this decline and has raised awareness via social media campaigns to encourage and empower the community to note and act on keeping children safe.

BFfC have risk assessed and RAG rated our children open to Early Help, Social Care and SEND.

Red = Significant risk, serious injury/death  
Amber = Moderate risk to emotional and physical wellbeing  
Green = Low risk of any harm coming to the child

In Social Care there were; as of 20.04.20, 1425 children that were RAG rated:

RED - 258 children  
AMBER - 318 children  
GREEN - 849 children

Under assessment with no RAG rate yet: 161

All children rated RED are visited face to face, by a social worker on a fortnightly basis or as specified in their plans. Screening questions are asked before making the visit and again prior to entering households to inform the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Shielded or self-isolating or symptomatic families are visited by social workers using PPE.

- All children rated AMBER are visited fortnightly; virtually.
- All children rated GREEN are visited virtually, three weekly
- All RED, AMBER and GREEN rated families are contacted on a weekly basis via telephone calls.

A weekly Risk Panel has been created to keep a robust monitoring system in place in respect to the decision making and managerial oversight of risk for the RED rated children. The Panel is chaired by the Director of Social Care. This panel scrutinises the risk assessments undertaken and records decision making on the child's electronic record (MOSAIC). These panels consider the child's school attendance and identify any barriers to a child attending school. This has led to assisting children to attend school through making transport available to them and skilfully supporting parents to alleviate their anxieties.

Service provision for these children has not reduced.

Child Protection Conferences and Looked After Children Reviews continue to take place within statutory frameworks and are completed virtually. Court hearings take place virtually and weekly legal Gateway meetings and Panels continue to be held, where children are considered in respect to the risk posed to them and if legal intervention is needed.

Social Work Managers review children rated AMBER and GREEN after the virtual visit to review and check that an accurate RAG rating remains in place. If risk is escalating a risk assessment is undertaken and escalated to the Risk Panel for further consideration.

There are weekly telephone conference briefings and discussions with the Primary and Secondary Head Teachers by the Director of Children's Services and Director of Education to provide support and to discuss children being provided with education with a particular focus on making sure the right children are in school.

Child Protection Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers ensure that school attendance is part of a child's plan to safeguard them.

Families have been contacted to discuss school attendance by their social workers.

The Education Welfare Officers are providing a crucial link with schools to also encourage school attendance.

BFFC is collating weekly data on school attendance so that we understand which children are attending and so that there is intelligence to follow up those who are not in school.

Through these monitoring systems children are safeguarded as best as possible during these unprecedented times.