

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

18 MAY 2020

PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 1

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

New Swimming Pools

is work continuing on the new pools during the Coronavirus lockdown by staff working from home if necessary, or is it completely suspended, and has the Council prepared a new timetable for constructing the pools yet ?

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

Staff from across the council have shown exceptional dedication to react to the current crisis; many have been redeployed to help residents and keep critical services operational.

As you can imagine the Council has rightly been focussed on dealing with the emergency response to Covid-19 and it is understandable that the crisis has had an impact in relation to the delivery of major projects, including the strategic leisure contract. GLL has had to close all their leisure centres across the country and their attention has been focused on their own financial sustainability as well as the wellbeing of their staff.

In addition to this there is a huge amount of uncertainty about when and how our leisure centres can be re-opened for use and what form that might take.

Notwithstanding these substantial issues, negotiations have continued to take place but further discussions will need to be held in order for the council to answer your question regarding a revised timetable.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 2

Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Increase in Sustainable Transport

The Mayor of London and other far-sighted local authority leaders in Manchester, Glasgow, and Portsmouth have announced schemes to widen footpaths, create dedicated cycle lanes, and dramatically reduce road traffic, possibly on a permanent basis, to help maintain social distancing and help their cities recover from the coronavirus epidemic.

What plans does Reading Borough Council have to reduce traffic and increase sustainable transport to help the Borough emerge from quarantine arrangements ?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport):

I thank Mr Burt for his question and would refer him to the attached answer I am giving Cllr White this evening. (see below attached).

COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Promoting Walking and Cycling

Can the Lead Councillor update me on what quick wins have been identified to promote walking and cycling given the need for social distancing and promoting road safety ?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport):

I thank Cllr White for his timely question.

This evening we are bringing forward a range of proposals to promote and support pedestrian and cycle movements in response to the need to provide space for social distancing, as people start to go back to work and the lockdown restrictions are gradually eased. I attach below a copy of the press release issued on 15th May which contains summary details of the schemes along with links to the relevant reports and consultations.

We have identified limited Council funding to implement a number of these schemes in the short-term, whilst we await details of the £250m fund announced by the Government to support local authorities in delivering these schemes.

I would stress that the Government has been strong on rhetoric around additional funding but, as of today, absolutely no specific details have been provided about how local authorities can access any of this funding. Any claims that 'funding has been provided' is therefore not the case. The initiatives we are taking locally in the next few weeks are being funded from our own existing very limited resources, that have been even further depleted by the latest COVID 19 crisis. Unless the Government makes additional funding available our ability to progress further schemes is severely hindered.

Therefore, further proposals are set out within the report for the medium-term should Government funding be forthcoming. All these schemes will complement, and are in line with, our emerging strategies including the new Local Transport Plan and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.

The proposals not only respond to the current crisis and the economic recovery of the town, but will also support the Council's wider climate change and health and wellbeing objectives.

ENDS

[Reading Council News] Council to Create More Space for Pedestrians and Cyclists

PLANS have been published to re-allocate road space in parts of Reading to make walking and cycling easier and safer.

With social distancing measures likely to remain in place for some considerable time in response to the Covid 19 pandemic, the Council has moved to design a series of schemes to create more space for pedestrians and cyclists, which recognises the severe restrictions on the capacity of local public transport.

This follows the very recent Government guidance of 9th May in which the Secretary of State said: "The Government therefore expects local authorities to make significant changes to their road layouts to give more space to cyclists and pedestrians. Such changes will help embed altered behaviours and demonstrate the positive effects of active travel"

The guidance also says: "Measures should be taken as swiftly as possible, and in any event within weeks, given the urgent need to change travel habits before the restart takes full effect."

Figures show a significant drop in car use in Reading during the lockdown. Traffic has fallen to around 35% of usual levels and there has been an increase in walking and cycling, particularly in local communities. Roadside monitoring locations on the Oxford Road and on Caversham Road show between a 32-39% reduction in Nitrogen Dioxide in recent weeks.

Reading Borough Council is moving swiftly to introduce a series of schemes – both temporary and possibly permanent in the long term – which sit alongside the Council's existing commitment of supporting the recovery of the local economy, tackling the climate emergency by creating a net zero carbon Reading by 2030 and the new Local Transport Strategy, which prioritises tackling poor air quality and congestion. The proposed schemes will also benefit the health and wellbeing of local residents by making it easier for them to walk or cycle when getting around town.

Reading's proposals will be considered at a Policy Committee meeting on Monday (May 18th) . If agreed, a number of schemes will be introduced at pace over the coming weeks. They are:

- Gosbrook Road and Westfield Road: Due to narrowness of pavements, make Gosbrook Road (Westfield Road to Prospect Street) one way and Westfield Road one way (southbound) from Henley Road junction to Gosbrook Road, to increase capacity for walking and cycling. Target of approx June 22nd for introduction. Potential for permanent arrangement with consultation.
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In addition to the major new schemes above, the Council is proposing bringing forward implementation of a number of permanent smaller schemes which have already been earmarked in the Council's current Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. These are:

- Oxford Road: Delivery of new cycle and bus lanes, previously consulted on as part of the Oxford Road corridor study.
- Whitley Street Local Centre: Remove one traffic lane outbound and reallocate it to cyclists, alongside other improvements for pedestrians.
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- Redlands Road: Introduce southbound cycle lane (uphill) and cycle priority measures at Christchurch Green junction.

The full details of all the proposed schemes can be found in Monday's Policy Committee Report

<https://democracy.reading.gov.uk/documents/s12753/Reading%20Active%20Travel.pdf>

Councillor Tony Page, Reading's Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, said:

"While the long term effect of the pandemic is yet unknown, we do know that in the short term people's travel behaviours have of course changed. It is important we move to accommodate that and make it easier and safer for people to walk and cycle as they continue to socially distance.

"These proposals are a combination of major new schemes and initiatives which were already in development, that we now think are appropriate to bring forward. Once implemented we would of course monitor their success carefully. It is very likely schemes will need some adjustment over time before we can then consider making them permanent.

"Looking further forward, car use is down in Reading, whilst air quality is up. It is possible these trends will remain, with more people opting to work from home. The coronavirus pandemic, alongside the Climate Emergency, has increased the focus on sustainable travel everywhere. This sits alongside our priorities of supporting the economic recovery of Reading, to create a new zero carbon Reading by 2030 as part of our commitment to tackling the climate emergency, and the Council's new Local Transport Plan, currently being consulted on, and which includes both improving air quality and cutting congestion as key themes."

Councillor Page added: "Whilst I warmly welcome the Secretary of State's Guidance, and his personal enthusiasm, I very much regret the failure of the Department for Transport to announce any details of how ambitious local authorities such as Reading can submit funding bids. There's little value in constantly repeating that money has been allocated to support cycling and walking schemes when we cannot bid for it. The Council's resources are already heavily stretched by the current health emergency and we have only very limited ability to fund from our own resources the schemes identified in this report."

The Government's new statutory guidance on the reallocation of road space is particularly focused on areas with high levels of public transport use. It is therefore particularly relevant to Reading, which has the third highest bus usage in the UK outside of London.

In order to ensure that the proposed schemes can be delivered without delay, the Council is recommending using its approved Capital Programme funding for transport projects to initially fund them. As part of its guidance, the Government has indicated schemes could be funded from its new £250 million Active Travel Fund, but a bidding process for this pot of money has yet to be confirmed. It is the Council's intention to use capital funding to get the schemes quickly implemented, and then claim back the money through the Government's Active Travel Fund, once the bidding process is open and the Government provides clarity on the process for local authorities.

Initial proposals going to Policy Committee on May 18 represent the first tranche of schemes, with further initiatives planned for the future.

Notes To Editor:

The Draft Local Transport Strategy and consultation form is available at www.reading.gov.uk/transport2036. The closing date for comments is Sunday 30th August. People can also comment on the Reading Climate Change Partnership's new Reading Climate Emergency Strategy at www.reading.gov.uk/climateconsultation. Consultation runs until 31st May 2020.

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POLICY COMMITTEE

18 MAY 2020

PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 3

Peter Burt to ask the Leader of the Council:

Policy Committee

Under what constitutional and statutory provisions has the Council decided to suspend normal Policy Committee arrangements and establish the emergency substitute Committee comprising of yourself, the Deputy Leader of the Council, and the Leader of the Opposition, and when will arrangements for reconvening the full Policy Committee be introduced ?

REPLY by Councillor Brock (Leader of the Council):

The arrangements for calling a Policy Committee, which can operate with only three members, are set out in Article 7.7 of the Council's Constitution. These provisions do not prevent the full Policy Committee from meeting, it merely reduces the quorum to allow decisions to be taken urgently by a reduced number of members, where necessary.

I can confirm that it has not been necessary for the Policy Committee to meet using these provisions with the three members mentioned in your question as the Government made legal and regulatory changes to allow for remote meetings - something that had not been previously permissible. Online meetings are now allowed, in accordance with Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 [the Act] and 'the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020'. As such, a reduced membership Policy Committee has now been appointed. A smaller committee size assists the smooth running of remote online meetings.

The membership of the online Policy Committee includes all political groups represented on the Council. The Labour Group sacrificed one of its allocated seats to the Liberal Democrat Group in order to allow them representation on the reduced-size Committee. In addition, in an attempt to protect those Groups with only one Policy Committee member, Group Leaders are entitled to nominate a substitute in the event that their appointed member is unable to attend. The full-size Policy Committee is likely to reconvene when physical meetings are possible and practical.

Absolutely all of this information could have been found in the report that accompanied the first online Policy Committee, held on 27 April 2020.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

18 MAY 2020

PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 4

Rebecca Curtayne to ask the Leader of the Council:

Covid-19 - Adult Social Care

How many adult safeguarding referrals have there been since the lockdown. Are these below usual numbers for this time period ?

How many new adult social care needs assessments have been carried out during the lockdown and how have these been carried out?

Office for National Statistics figures based on CQC data show Reading has the highest number of care home resident deaths of all Berkshire LAs. Does the Council understand why this might be the case and what steps is the Council taking to protect the most vulnerable, who have no family, friends or advocates visiting them at this time ?

REPLY by Councillor Brock (Leader of the Council):

In the last 6 weeks since 'lockdown' up to the 11th May there have been 91 Safeguarding Concerns raised to Adult Social Care. This compares to 121 for the same period last year so there has been a reduction. This is comparable across our unitary partners in West Berkshire due to less activity in the community as a whole. We continue to work with all partners across the Health and Social Care economy to raise awareness of safeguarding during this time (through meetings, videos, Safeguarding Board etc).

With regard to referrals and assessments - there have been 322 contacts made with Adult Social care since 18th March - 112 of which have resulted in a full care assessment. These assessments have been carried out in hospital, at home, on the telephone or via virtual apps where appropriate. With provider services still working face to face in terms of care provision (i.e. Community Reablement Team) we have been able to see every new individual in receipt of care in their own home environment.

Finally, with regard to care home resident deaths it is important to understand the data. The data published via the CQC that is mentioned gives an initial early indication of what is happening in our local care homes. However, it is unvalidated at the time it is published and known to have some accuracy errors. One week later the Office for National Statistics publish formal death statistics that are based on death registrations and certificates for deaths in all settings (including care homes). This is the most reliable source of information, and the data- currently available up to the 1st May shows that Reading has a lower number of deaths in care homes than neighbouring LAs.

However, we are not complacent about the local situation and support for these most vulnerable residents. In fact, rather than draw distinctions

between LA areas we are working closer than ever across geographical and organisational boundaries to ensure we provide the best support we can. This includes partnership working with the NHS care home support team for Berkshire West and Public Health England's local expert team to provide infection control advice, testing and appropriate PPE.

Furthermore, we are working with our local care homes, advocacy services and family members to provide opportunities for people to see residents. Sometimes this has been possible by arranging safe spaces in outdoor areas and some through technology. We continue to look at how we can best support the providers and those in care homes through ongoing and frequent dialogue.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

18 MAY 2020

PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 5

Rebecca Curtayne to ask the Lead Councillor for Health Wellbeing & Sport:

Covid-19 - BAME Populations

ONS figures show BAME populations at greater risk of dying with Covid-19 compared with White populations. What steps can the Council take to ensure Reading's diverse community is protected at this time ?

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

Thank you for your question on a vitally important matter. We know that whilst Covid-19 can affect people from all walks of life, as the pandemic develops, we are increasingly understanding that its impact will not be felt equally by all sectors of society. We know that for example; older people, that men, and that those from lower socio-economic groups all have higher death rates than average. The evidence around ethnicity and risk of death is still emerging. The figures you quote from the ONS do indicate the rate is higher in some BAME groups, however, their analysis has not been able to fully account for factors such as occupation type or prevalence of underlying health conditions which we know do vary between different ethnic groups.

It is therefore unclear at this time exactly what impact ethnicity has on the risk of dying from Covid-19 and whether this is a direct or indirect link. For this reason Public Health England have launched an urgent review of this issue and the results will be published by the end of this month.

In Reading we have been working very closely with our different communities to ensure we support all residents, including those of ethnic minority groups. For example this includes support offered by the One Reading Hub through strong partnership work with Reading Voluntary Action and other voluntary sector groups, and supporting the local Muslim community over how to celebrate Ramadan safely. We have also tried to ensure that information provided by the council is available in a range of languages as easily as possible. As the results from Public Health England's review are published we will ensure we take forward the relevant recommended actions here in Reading.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

18 MAY 2020

COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor White to ask the Leader of the Council:

Domestic Violence on the Increase

Women's Aid reported a 41% increase in users visiting its Live Chat between 26 March and 1 April compared to the previous week. My Green Party colleagues share concerns that people will be trapped in abusive households unless alternative accommodation is provided to them. Can the Lead Councillor update me on how accommodation is being made available to women in need and provide figures comparing the current situation to last year ?

REPLY by Councillor Brock (Leader of Council):

Both nationally and locally there has been concern that there could be a significant increase in Domestic Abuse incidents as a result of the household arrangements brought about by the Covid 19 pandemic lock down. The national figures announced by Woman's Aid in relation to their national Live Chat, and the 49% increase in calls reported by Refuge to the National Domestic Abuse helpline, have validated this concern.

Partners have been meeting regularly to monitor the local position and respond accordingly. Unexpectedly, however, the local data has not matched the national statistics - either in Reading or across the West of Berkshire - in that, after an initial dip in referrals, figures are now holding steady at the levels consistent with this time of year. Within the 5-week period between the 6th April and the 10th May 2020 there were 132 Reading calls to the helpline, and 43 referrals to Berkshire Women's Aid (BWA) outreach service. Last year, the average was 152 calls per month to the helpline and 40 outreach referrals.

This trend is consistent across support services; Brighter Futures for Children, Housing services, and calls to Thames Valley Police. BWA have spoken to other local Women's Aid organisations across the country and they too are finding that there has been no spike in figures. Local support service providers have collectively asked the National Helpline for a breakdown of the calls in terms of type of request and geographical location so that they can unpick why there is a discrepancy.

Two of the main concerns when entering lock down were that people would struggle to reach out to support services over the phone due to the continued presence of a perpetrator, and that people would feel that they needed to remain at home within an abusive situation as alternative options would not be available. To mitigate this, partners have increased the promotion of local services, linking in with the #youarenotalone campaign by the Home Office. Within this we have included 4 key messages about where to seek support, including BWA, the Housing service, Brighter Futures for Children, and Thames Valley Police. This has

advertised the online methods for contacting services as well as the message to press 55 after calling 999 if you are unable to talk.

The position continues to be monitored regularly, and services continue to plan for any significant increase in referrals as lock down is eased. Throughout lock down, emergency alternative accommodation provision has been available to people who require it and BWA have had vacancies within their refuge provision that continue to be advertised. The Housing service has continued to operate a phone line to support people into alternative emergency accommodation. As part of our emergency planning, BWA have also sourced an opportunity to open four additional refuge spaces should there be an increase in demand.

The current situation in relation to Domestic Abuse in Reading remains stable and demand is being met. We continue to monitor demand closely and are modelling future required provision, anticipating a potential surge in demand post-lock down.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Promoting Walking and Cycling

Can the Lead Councillor update me on what quick wins have been identified to promote walking and cycling given the need for social distancing and promoting road safety ?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport):

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I would stress that the Government has been strong on rhetoric around additional funding but, as of today, absolutely no specific details have been provided about how local authorities can access any of this funding. Any claims that 'funding has been provided' is therefore not the case. The initiatives we are taking locally in the next few weeks are being funded from our own existing very limited resources, that have been even further depleted by the latest COVID 19 crisis. Unless the Government makes additional funding available our ability to progress further schemes is severely hindered.

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"These proposals are a combination of major new schemes and initiatives which were already in development, that we now think are appropriate to bring forward. Once implemented we would of course monitor their success carefully. It is very likely schemes will need some adjustment over time before we can then consider making them permanent.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 3

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

A Green Recovery

If the new normal following the coronavirus lockdown is to be fairer, healthier and more sustainable some planning work must continue - where resources permit - on a green recovery. This should include planning schemes to insulate more homes and improve the air we all breathe. Can the Lead Councillor update me on work to ensure that the new normal is greener than before ?

REPLY by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport):

I thank Cllr White for his question.

With so much of the Council's attention and resources devoted to the Covid-19 response in recent weeks, there has inevitably been some impact on progress with other corporate priorities.

We are, however, very mindful of the need to ensure that, as we recover from the impacts of Covid-19, we close the gaps in opportunity and wealth which exist in the borough, promote healthy communities and deliver on our net zero carbon and other environmental ambitions.

Notwithstanding the huge efforts required by staff across the organisation to deal with Covid-19, which has seen many staff redeployed from their substantive roles, we have continued to make progress with work to ensure that our environmental and climate change commitments are met.

For example:

- The Council's new Climate Action Programme Board, comprising senior officers in all Directorates under the leadership of the Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, held its first meeting on 4th May to maintain the momentum for our work in this area. A range of projects, including on housing retrofit, zero carbon procurement and zero carbon skills, were commissioned at this meeting.
- Urgent attention has been given to how the needs of cyclists and pedestrians could be better met across Reading so that some of the improvements in air quality and reductions in transport related emissions which we have seen in recent weeks can be sustained. A detailed paper on our proposals is presented to Policy Committee this evening on the immediate actions we intend to take using funds within the Council's Capital Programme. Further measures can come forward should we receive

funds and support from the Government. Lastly, we have recently commenced consultation on our new draft Local Transport Plan which seeks to achieve similar ends.

- We are working with partners, for example in the business community via the Reading UK CIC, to ensure that our aspirations for more inclusive, cleaner and greener growth are embedded in wider plans for recovery of the Reading economy.

It has become apparent that a return to 'business as usual' is unlikely to be possible, even if it were wholly desirable.

As we seek to recover from the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic I can assure Cllr White that delivering a green recovery will remain a priority for the Council.