

AGENDA ITEM 5

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1. Ayotunde Sokale to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:

Gosbrook Road Pedestrian Crossing

Would the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport please update me on the timetable for taking forward the provision of the pedestrian crossing facility on Gosbrook Road, following the decision to allocate CIL funding to this scheme ?

REPLY by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Ms Sokale for her question.

The allocation of CIL monies was only approved by Policy Committee on 26th November and consequently none of the traffic schemes feature within the previously agreed 2017/18 work programme.

Officers are now reviewing all schemes that received funding and will submit a report with a draft programme to the 18th March meeting of the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee.

In delivering any scheme the Council has a detailed investigation and design process that also considers procurement of equipment to ensure best value is achieved.

Changes to the public highway are also typically subject to formal consultation, either in the form of a public statutory consultation or public notice. These processes all require funding therefore the recommended scheme for Gosbrook Road is still subject to development work. This will progress the current concept scheme to a feasible and deliverable scheme. This is the same for all other proposals being delivered through the recently agreed CIL funding allocation.

Once the detailed design has been completed our statutory requirements will need to be fulfilled prior to any further works.

The forthcoming March SEPT report, as previously mentioned, will enable officers to develop a detailed programme for the Committee to agree. The further statutory processes and final scheme approval will then be managed through our Traffic Management Sub-Committee which meets 5 times a year.

I recognise the importance of this scheme to Lower Caversham and its importance in improving road safety as well as strengthening connectivity to the new Christchurch Pedestrian/Cycle Bridge.

2. Roger Lightfoot to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:
Council's Leisure Procurement Project

According to a report agreed at Policy Committee in October 2016 the timetable (Appendix 2 chart Reading Leisure Project Timeline [copy attached]) for the Council's Leisure Procurement

Project should have seen a new leisure services contract awarded at the end of 2017 and a new operator taking over existing facilities in May 2018.

Please will you give an update on the current status of this project, and inform the meeting and Reading Council Tax Payers

1. What stage the procurement process has currently reached;
2. How many bidders are currently in the running for the contract award;
3. When the contract is expected to be awarded;
4. The reasons why the original project timetable has not been met;
5. How much to date has been spent on the contract process ?

If you are unable provide a clear and concise answer to each of these points you may only be discrediting the Council in the eyes of Council Tax payers - and swimmers

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

Thank you for your question Mr Lightfoot.

In fact it is very timely as from today (22 January), the Council is inviting interested leisure operators to submit their detailed proposals for enhancing leisure provision in the town.

These submissions will be evaluated in April, with dialogue taking place with the potential operators during June and the deadline for final submissions in early July. The contract would be awarded in September and commence from January 2020 following a mobilisation period.

I believe that answers your questions at one and three above.

With regard to question 4 and the acknowledged slippage from the original timetable I would refer you to a response to a similar question that you asked at Full Council on the 23rd January 2018, and a report to a meeting of Full Council in June 2018 that stated "It is anticipated that new facilitieswill come on stream approximately 18 months after the award of contract..... although because of the complexities of major construction projects this timetable cannot be guaranteed at this stage." In this context I am very pleased to be able to confirm the timetable as set out above.

I am not in a position to answer your question relating to the number of bidders as this would potentially compromise the competitiveness of the process but I can confirm that we have engaged the interest of leading national operators.

Finally, I would hope that you welcome the Council's commitment to investing in the region of thirty million pounds in new and improved leisure facilities, including a new competition pool at Rivermead and a new pool at Palmer Park Stadium.

**3. Roger Lightfoot to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:
Preferred Bidder for Arthur Hill Pool**

At a recent meeting you told me that due diligence and financial checks etc are still being carried out by the Council's preferred bidder for Arthur Hill pool. Is this still being undertaken ?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

Thank you for your question Mr. Lightfoot.

I can indeed confirm that due diligence by the prospective purchaser is close to being completed.

Further than that, Reading Borough Council is now in a position to confirm that it has agreed to sell the Arthur Hill site to its preferred bidder, the Reading based OOK Developments.

The announcement follows a detailed bidding process earlier this year, with the preferred bidder agreed in closed session at a meeting of the Council's Policy Committee in July. The name of the preferred bidder had not been made public up to this point because it remained commercially confidential.

As Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport I am particularly pleased to see this sale approaching completion as we will be investing the sum equivalent of the sale receipt of the Arthur Hill site into our planned new leisure facilities in Reading.

4. Ginnette Hargreaves-Lees to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport: Drug Related Deaths

The Lead Councillor will be aware that Reading has the fourth highest rate of deaths from heroin and morphine abuse in England and the highest death rate of any inland urban area.

Across Europe, facilities that offer medical supervision for addicts are dramatically reducing drug-related deaths - these facilities are called drug consumption rooms. These rooms do not exist in the UK, where drug addicts are mainly confined to back streets, crack houses and hostel bedrooms. While European overdose rates are falling, the UK now has the worst drug death rate across the continent: one in three of the approximate 8,000 people who die as a result of drugs in Europe will do so in Britain.

Under current legislation there is no legal framework for the provision of drug consumption rooms in the UK. A Home Office spokesperson has said that drug dependency must be prevented through treatment and recovery. Such services, however, are in decline. Would the Lead Councillor agree that it is time for the legislation to be changed so that drug consumption rooms can be introduced in areas of high need and would Reading Borough Council work with our MP's to introduce this change ?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

Thank you Ms Hargreaves-Lees for your question about what is an extremely important and worrying issue for our town. As a point of accuracy I should say that Burnley does have a higher death rate on the latest figures but Reading is fourth highest in England and this is unacceptable. Experts describe a perfect storm of issues that contributes to high levels of drugs deaths including more people using multiple drugs at the same time, unpredictably strong prescription drugs flooding the market and decades long addicts in fragile and failing health.

Reading has recently adopted its new Drug and Alcohol Strategy and one of its key priorities is reducing the number of drug related deaths by identifying effective interventions and harm prevention initiatives, including the provision of take home naloxone. Naloxone, also known as Narcan, is a drug that can limit the effect of opioids and reduce the risk of overdose. One of other ways we will seek to achieve a reduction in deaths will be by reviewing drug related

deaths on a quarterly basis via a Substance Misuse Death Overview Panel as well as monitoring national information.

We will be continuing and strengthening our partnership work with health, police, community and voluntary sector to further build relationships with drug users and to ensure they are provided with information and support to protect them, as far as possible, from further harm.

Our drugs treatment teams are showing themselves increasingly effective at supporting people to beat drug addiction with Reading having some of the best results at helping people become drug free compared to similar local authorities.

In terms of your specific question, yes I would agree that it is time for national legislation to catch up with the increasingly strong evidence that stronger harm minimisation strategies with approaches like medical supervision and drug consumption room can have a big impact on reducing deaths.

As a council and with police partners we are open to exploring innovative strategies. Council officers and Chief Inspector Jason Kew from Thames Valley Police attended the Drugs, Alcohol and Justice Cross-Party Parliamentary Group on 5th December and drug consumption rooms were discussed, otherwise known as supervised drug consumption facilities, where illicit drugs can be used under the supervision of trained staff and have been operating in Europe for the last three decades.

These facilities primarily aim to reduce the acute risks of disease transmission through unhygienic injecting, prevent drug-related overdose deaths and connect high-risk drug users with addiction treatment and other health and social services. Evidence was shared by Glasgow where it is proving to be an approach which is highly beneficial. This has been ruled out in England to date but as the evidence of effectiveness improves it is hoped that it will be promoted here too. Reading Borough Council would like to work with our MPs explore legislative change. Our drugs and alcohol commissioner has been invited to attend the next Cross-Party Parliamentary group in January where it is envisaged that this discussion will continue.

5. Richard Stainthorp to ask the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation: Arts Awards

Could the Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation please tell me how many young people have completed Arts Awards since the Cultural Education Partnership started ?

REPLY by Councillor Hacker Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation.

Thank you for your question Mr Stainthorp.

Reading's Cultural Education Partnership started in January 2016. It aims to allow every child and young person in Reading to have the opportunity to aspire, achieve and participate in high quality arts and culture.

As you know Richard, Arts Award is a range of unique qualifications that supports anyone aged up to 25 to grow as artists and arts leaders, inspiring them to connect with and take part in the wider arts world through taking challenges in an art form - from fashion to digital art, pottery to poetry.

As part of its Deliver Plan the Partnership set a target of supporting **750** children and young people to gain accreditation in an Arts Award by August 2019. This was considered a challenging target but I am really pleased to report that the Partnership can already take credit for achieving **1,355** Arts Awards by the end of November 2018 (out of a total in Reading of 1,444).

Readipop alone are responsible for delivering 828 of these through their work in schools and young people, with other partners Jelly, the Museum of English Rural Life, Reading Rep., Reading College, the Rock Academy, the Library Service and Reading Museum also collaborating and contributing to the overall total.

I think this is a phenomenal achievement and great for Reading's young people and for the individuals who have achieved their awards. I am very pleased to also announce that on Wednesday 6th February 2019, the Council on behalf of the Reading Cultural Education Partnership is hosting the first annual Reading Arts Award Celebration at South Street Arts Centre. This event is for any child or young person that achieved an Arts Award qualification in 2018.

For info.

Artswork the 'bridge' organisation for Arts Council England has confirmed the following Arts Award data for Reading.

Discover	Explore	Bronze	Silver	TOTAL
1277	99	25	43	1444

(January 2016 - November 2018)

The Cultural Education Partnership can take account for **1355** of these qualifications via partnership working and various financial investments. Organisation and delivery breakdown is as follows;

Number of Arts Award	Organisation
823	Readipop
436	Jelly in partnership with The Museum of Rural Life, Reading library Service and The Rock Academy
63	Reading Rep in partnership with Reading College
6	Reading Museum

6. John Hoggett to ask the Leader of the Council:
Meetings in Closed Session

Over the year 2018, how many Council committee or sub-committee meetings included discussion of agenda items which were closed to the public ?

For each case, what was the topic discussed in closed session and what was the reason for secrecy ?

REPLY by Councillor Lovelock Leader of the Council.

Thank you for your question Mr Hoggett.

All matters discussed in closed session are recorded in the public minute of the meeting, together with the reason for doing so. These are published on Reading Borough Council's website. You can search for the information you are asking for through the following links:

<http://www.reading.gov.uk/meetings/>

<http://committee.reading.gov.uk/COMMITTEE/WEBSERVER/CUSTOM/LIBRARY.ASP?LVDir=/COMMITTEE/&P2=1&w=1280&h=1024&c=32&token=41215&HU=http://www.reading.gov.uk+council+councillors-and-committees+committees+committee-minutes-library+>

As background, Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 allows local authorities to exclude the press and public from meetings where either 'Confidential' or 'Exempt' information is being considered. In this context, confidential information is defined as information given to the Council by a Government Department on terms which forbid its public disclosure or information which cannot be publicly disclosed by Court Order, and so is rarely used. Exempt information is defined in the relevant Paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A (as amended) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended). The categories of exempt information are set out in the Access to Information Rules in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution, and below for your reference:

- 1) Information relating to any individual
- 2) Information that is likely to reveal the identity of an individual
- 3) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)
- 4) Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority
- 5) Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings
- 6) Information which reveals the authority proposes:
 - a. To give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
 - b. To make an order or direction under any enactment
- 7) Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

The published minute records which category of exemption was applied in each case.

During a year there will be many meetings where the press and public are excluded for all or part of the meeting. For instance the Licensing Applications Sub-Committee 3, which meets regularly, considers “Applications for the Grant and Renewal of Private Hire Vehicle Driver Licences and Hackney Carriage Driver’s Licences” at each of its meetings with the press and public excluded under paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and sometimes 7. Similarly, the Personnel Committee considers “Early Retirements and Redundancies” at virtually every meeting and excludes the press and public for this item under paragraphs 1 and 2. The Traffic Management Sub-Committee usually considers a number of applications for discretionary parking permits, which are also exempt under paragraphs 1 and 2. Policy Committee meetings often have a number of exempt items usually relating to contractual arrangements and land and property matters, for which members of the press and public are excluded under paragraph 3. On occasion, these matters are considered at other standing committees of the Council or by Council itself. Planning Applications Committee may consider enforcement action from time to time under paragraphs 6 and 7.

On occasion the Policy Committee will consider two reports about the same issue: one report is heard in Part 1 (open session) and the other in Part 2 (closed session) usually in order to allow councillors to receive financial information in private, whilst enabling the decision to be taken in public.

The Minutes of decisions made in private session are made available for public inspection on the Council’s website but not the reports associated with these Part 2 items.

**7. Peter Burt to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport:
Reading Sport and Leisure**

Which consultants and contractors are assisting the Council in the tender process for the outsourcing of Reading Sport and Leisure, and to date how much has been paid to each consultancy ?

REPLY by Councillor Hoskin Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport.

Thank you for your question Mr Burt.

You are right in assuming that the Council is utilising external expertise and additional capacity to ensure that a multi-million pound long-term investment to radically upgrade the town’s leisure facilities delivers the best possible affordable outcome. This is, of course, far more cost-effective and practical than maintaining this expertise in-house.

We have appointed advisors in three key areas to supplement in-house resources and these, along with spend to date, are:

Project Management - Cohesion Consulting with a spend of £68,976

Leisure Procurement Specialists - Max Associates with a spend of £40,000

Legal Advisors - initially Hampshire County Council with a spend of £62,479 and more recently Blake Morgan LLP with spend of £11,197.