

QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor Whitham to ask the Chair:

Tackling Congestion and Boosting Air Quality with new Powers

From December 2021, Councils will be able to use new powers to enforce traffic offences such as banned turns, box junctions and driving in formal cycle lanes. This should help Reading Council to improve connectivity, boost active travel, and increase air quality by reducing congestion. When does Reading Council expect the first fine to be issued ?

REPLY by the Chair of the Traffic Management Sub-Committee.

I invite Councillor Page, the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport to make the response on my behalf.

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

I thank Councillor Whitham for his question.

I welcome the fact that the Government has at last accepted the need for these powers to be activated outside of London. However, as explained below and contrary to Government statements, these powers will certainly not be available to us in December 2021.

Whilst London authorities have been able to undertake these enforcement activities for many years, Reading Borough Council has been lobbying for the enactment of these powers outside of London - they are, after all, part of the Traffic Management Act 2004. The Government had said that they intended to bring in new regulations to allow civil enforcement of a range of moving traffic offences by December 2021, which are currently enforceable only by the Police.

The Government has still to publish draft guidance for consultation ahead of the necessary new statutory instruments and regulations coming into force. Only after this will local authorities be able to apply for a 'designation order'. The Government is not now expected to approve the first designation orders until the end of March 2022 at the very earliest.

Officers are developing a strategy that will lead to a roll-out of enforcement on key areas of the network and are committed to commencing these activities as early as possible in the next financial year.

It is important at this stage to manage expectations. There is a considerable amount of work to be conducted in order to prepare for this implementation, much of which is dependant on the release of information and guidance from the Government - timescales are therefore uncertain. Roll-out of enforcement will be dependant on identifying funding for the infrastructure and back office resources, and implementation must be prioritised where the benefits will be greatest.

These powers have been long-awaited and are expected to significantly help the Council to influence better driver behaviour. This will lead to improved traffic flow and the reduction of risks around junctions, which will particularly benefit public transport providers, cyclists and pedestrians, influencing changes to sustainable transport modes and active travel options and deliver an improvement in air quality across Reading.

ENDS