

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

|                         |   |                   |                                      |
|-------------------------|---|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>TO:</b>              | <b>COUNCIL</b>  |                   |                                      |
| <b>DATE:</b>            | <b>19 OCTOBER 2021</b>  |                   |                                      |
| <b>TITLE:</b>           | <b>READING'S BID FOR CITY STATUS</b>                                      |                   |                                      |
| <b>LEAD COUNCILLOR:</b> | <b>CLLR BROCK</b>   | <b>PORTFOLIO:</b> | <b>LEADERSHIP</b>                    |
| <b>SERVICE:</b>         | <b>DEGNS</b>  | <b>WARDS:</b>     | <b>ALL</b>                           |
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#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks endorsement for submission of a bid for City status by Reading Borough Council as part of a competition launched by the Government to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022. Appendix 1 to the report presents an outline bid which sets out some of the key points in support of Reading's bid. As further detailed drafting, refinements, factual corrections and updates to take account of new information may be required subsequent to the Council meeting and prior to the deadline for submission of bids on 8 December 2021, delegated authority is sought for officers to complete and submit the final bid text, in consultation with the Civic Board.
- 1.2 There is one Appendix to this Report - outline content of Reading's bid for City status.

#### 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 It is recommended that Council:
  - (i) Endorse the submission of a bid for City status by the deadline of 8 December 2021 based on the outline content attached in Appendix 1;
  - (ii) Delegate authority to the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services to refine and agree the final bid text and content in consultation with the Civic Board.

#### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 In recent decades, the Government has periodically held a competition for the award of the honorary title of City status. The last such competition was held in 2012 to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and, earlier this year, the Government announced that it would hold a similar competition to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022.

- 3.2 There are no specific criteria for City status, though the application form includes set headings which applicants are expected to address. Contrary to popular perception, a large population is not a pre-requisite for City status, and neither is the presence of a Cathedral.

#### 4. THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 **Current Position:** Reading is a great place with many of the characteristics of a City, and our plans for recovery, regeneration and tackling inequalities could receive a significant boost from the prestige and opportunities to promote Reading which City status would bring. Reading has many of the characteristics and roles associated with a City and City status would recognise its wider impact and significance in the Thames valley sub-region. Bidding for City status is also one way of showing that we value the fact that the residents and businesses of Reading make it such an attractive, vibrant and welcoming place to live, work and visit.

- 4.2 City status is principally about prestige and recognition of our significance by the outside world, all of which can help with efforts to promote and position Reading positively. In the event of a successful bid, over time the way Reading sees itself and is presented to the rest of the world would increasingly reflect a City identity as organisations seek to take advantage of the opportunities which it brings. Ultimately, we would anticipate that it would boost our plans for regeneration bringing economic and other benefits.

- 4.3 City status does not bring a guarantee of economic success - research by Prof Steve Musson at the University of Reading shows that while many new Cities have seen benefits, it has not been true for all. This suggests that new cities need a clear vision and plan to make the most of the opportunities - and Reading's 2050 vision for a 'smart, sustainable' future sets out where we want to get to while our Local Plan, emerging Town Centre Strategy and regeneration projects set out a road map to work towards this vision.

- 4.4 Reading has bid for City status on previous occasions but despite being unsuccessful, the process of bidding has provided an opportunity to work with our partners to celebrate Reading as a place, to draw attention to its rich history and heritage, and to speak to a wider audience about what makes Reading a great place, as well as to promote our plans for the future. In this context, while securing City status is obviously the ultimate aim of bidding, there are benefits associated with bidding which make it a worthwhile process regardless of the outcome. The costs of bidding are also minimal - the application process is straightforward and the bid has been compiled by existing officers in line with Government guidance that undue expense should not be incurred by local authorities bidding for City status.

- 4.4 Much has happened in the decade since the last City status competition, and Reading can point to a track record of delivering innovative projects and plans which existed only on paper at the time of the previous bid for City status in 2012. These achievements will be cited within Reading's bid in support of our case.

- 4.2 **Options Proposed:** based on the above it is recommended that a bid for City status be submitted.

- 4.3 **Other Options Considered:** the only other option would be to not submit a bid which would obviously mean that the potential benefits of City status could not be secured.

#### 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'*. While City status confers no specific financial or other material benefit, the prestige

and external recognition associated with City status would support the Council's strategic aims as follows:

- **Healthy environment:** the bid will highlight Reading's environmental assets and strong commitment to tackling climate change - a successful bid for City status would indirectly support efforts to improve our environment by potentially attracting support and investment for our efforts in these areas.
- **Thriving Communities:** the bid will draw attention to inequalities which we experience in Reading - a successful bid would indirectly support efforts to address inequalities by boosting our plans for economic recovery and inclusive growth.
- **Inclusive economy:** the bid will celebrate and draw attention to Reading's cultural heritage and plans for culture-led regeneration to spread the benefits of growth more widely - a successful bid would enable improved marketing of Reading as a destination, thus improving the prospects for these plans coming to fruition.

## 6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no environmental climate change implications arising from the decision. The bidding process does, however, provide an opportunity to highlight Reading's commitments to respond to the climate emergency alongside the actions and innovations being taken to respond, and this will be reflected in the bid text - indeed it represents a key part of Reading's case for why it should be considered for City status.

## 7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way".

7.2 In compiling the bid, the views of the wider community are being taken into account in a number of ways:

- A Consultative Panel of key stakeholders has been created (chaired by the Leader of the Council) to advise on the bid;
- A wider Stakeholder Reference Group, comprising a wide range of community and voluntary sector groups and interests, has been identified and contacted with an invitation to input to the process
- A survey being conducted as part of a place-branding exercise led by Reading UK, the University, Reading Voluntary Action and RBC has been used to seek wider input from businesses and residents across Reading

## 8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 There are no equalities impacts arising from the decision so an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not considered necessary. The bidding process does, however, provide an opportunity to celebrate the diversity of the community in Reading and the contribution this makes to our sense of place and civic pride - this will be reflected in the bid text and indeed represents a key part of Reading's case for why it should be considered for City status.

## 9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no legal implications arising from the decision as City status is an honorary title. Given the period of time between the Council meeting and the deadline for submission of bids, delegated authority is being sought to draft and refine the main bid text.

## 10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no financial implications arising from the decision. In the event of a successful bid, some changes e.g. to signage, may be considered. Assuming that a relatively small number of signs may be needed this could be incorporated in the sign replacement programme and met from within existing budgets to ensure good value for money.

## 11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 No unpublished documents have been used in the preparation of this report. Published documents used in the preparation of this report include:

- *Reading 2050 Vision*
- Reading Borough Council *Corporate Plan 2020/21*
- *Powered by People* (Reading's economic recovery and renewal strategy)