

AGENDA ITEM: 6

QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

1. Councillor Josh Williams to ask the Lead Councillor for Health, Wellbeing and Sport: Paying for Leisure Investment

Green Councillors, concerned that Labour had never published their plans to pay for the £40 million investment in Leisure, requested a briefing from the Finance Team. That briefing has told us that with the contract with GLL there will be plenty of money to pay for this investment over the next 25 years, which is great news. Can the Lead Councillor confirm the long-term plan to pay for Leisure investment, and confirm that there will be plenty of money from the GLL contract ?

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

Thank you for the question Councillor Williams. I must admit I am a bit puzzled and concerned I may have misunderstood your question as this Labour council has repeatedly explained how our £40million investment in leisure services is going to be paid for in numerous reports to this council and, indeed, in the budget papers here tonight. I have also tried to explain verbally, on a number of occasions, in response to questions and when proposing that investment at meetings.

That said this seems like a good moment to lay out clearly why our investment and partnership with GLL are such good value for the people of Reading and maybe Green councillors will retract their previous opposition to this exciting programme that, as well as much else, will deliver a popular state of the art community pool and revamped leisure centre in the heart of Park ward.

The report to Policy Committee on 20 January 2020 that approved the £40m investment in leisure facilities included a detailed financial analysis of the estimated costs of the project, including the cost of financing the capital expenditure.

Following Policy Committee approval, the financing costs for the capital investment were added to the Treasury Management (TM) budget in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. That increase in the TM budget was funded by the ongoing revenue savings to be delivered by the scheme.

As detailed in the original Policy Committee report, the Council was previously paying £803k per year in order to run and maintain the centres - a cost that would have equated to £20.075m over the 25 years of the contract.

In addition, the terms of the contract will result in GLL making payments to the Council from 2024/25. The net payments are estimated to amount to £16.6m over 25 years.

When these two funding streams are added together this amounts to £36.675m.

The capital financing cost will include the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) charge to the revenue budget for the use of the asset. This charge will be spread over the estimated life of the asset in line with the Council's MRP policy. The charge will commence in the year following the capital expenditure being incurred and will be based on the actual expenditure net of funding from other sources, such as CIL or Sport England grant. The cost over 25 years is estimated at between £20.5m and £22.2m.

In addition, if the council needs to borrow in order to fund the capital expenditure, we will incur interest on that borrowing. It is unlikely that borrowing will be required but if it is then we estimate the interest payments to be between £6m and £8m, depending upon the amount to be borrowed and the interest rate to be paid.

As you can see, this means that the savings generated by the project are more than enough to pay for the cost of financing the capital expenditure.

This £40m investment will transform our leisure offer by delivering modern leisure facilities including a new flagship leisure centre at Rivermead and a brand new swimming pool at Palmer Park delivered in partnership with our new leisure provider, Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL). This partnership has already delivered a new health and fitness suite, reception and studio at South Reading Leisure Centre and two phases of improvement at Meadway Sports Centre commence next month.

As a result of these improvements we are expecting to see an increase in the numbers of visits to our leisure centres by 40%, improved health and wellbeing outcomes and tailored services to the needs of people who will benefit most from participating in physical activity and is a key element of this council's actions to reduce health inequalities in our town.

I know Green councillors share Reading Labour's opposition to the massive cuts to government funding of local government that commenced with the Conservative / Liberal Democrat Coalition of 2010. As a consequence councils across England have been closing leisure centres and public pools with experts concerned that there will be many more pools lost in the coming years. As a result of sometimes hard decisions taken reluctantly to ensure Reading Council's finances are stabilised, decisions Green councillors continually voted against, we are in a position to deliver these great new leisure facilities and the kind of investment in our town we see in tonight's budget. Thankfully for Reading this Labour council has faced up to reality and is delivering for our town. Green councillors who continually oppose without a credible alternative plan would do well to reflect upon that.

**2. Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities:
When will Doorstep Glass Recycling be introduced?**

Green Councillors have long campaigned for doorstep glass recycling. This would be good for the planet and tidy up the town. We currently have bottle banks and some flats currently get glass recycling. But at the moment many glass bottles will unfortunately not be recycled. Can the Lead Councillor please confirm when this scheme will be expanded to every doorstep in Reading?

REPLY by Councillor Barnett-Ward Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities.

This question is covered by the glass recycling FAQs on the re3 website Glass-Recycling-FAQ.pdf (fccenvironment.co.uk) but I am of course happy to take the opportunity to go into more detail in this response.

Reading's Labour councillors are committed to maximising recycling and minimising the amount of Reading's waste that is sent to landfill. Our successful introduction of food waste collections has reduced residual waste collections by 30% and taken Reading's recycling rate over 50% for the first time ever.

Glass recycling is an important part of the overall waste management service and is well used by many residents. It represents up to 5% of an overall RBC recycling rate, for the year to date, of 51%. Bottle banks allow residents to recycle at a time that suits them: a total of 210

banks at 51 sites across the borough as well as the Household Waste Recycling Centre at Smallmead. However, Reading Labour Councillors know that some residents, particularly those with mobility issues or who do not have a car, would find a kerbside collection helpful. We are therefore in discussion with our Re3 partner authorities about introducing a kerbside glass collection.

The Environment Act was passed on 15 November 2021. It introduces significant changes to the way waste and recycling will be collected and how those services are funded.

There are three broad areas of change, as follows:

1. Extended Producer Responsibility
2. Consistency of waste collection
3. Deposit Return Scheme

The Extended Producer Responsibility element of the Act promises to transfer the costs of collection and processing waste for recycling, hitherto being met through local authority budgets, to the private sector. Government has explained that some local authority transition costs, including where new services must be introduced to comply with the Act, will be met through this change in legislation.

The Consistency and Deposit Return Scheme elements promise to change which waste is captured for recycling and how it enters the recycling process. There is likely to be a requirement to collect glass alongside a range of other materials that the council already collects. However, the Deposit Return Scheme is also likely to capture glass, meaning there is a high level of uncertainty about how the two schemes would coexist and what volume of glass could be expected to be diverted from local authority collections to the deposit scheme.

Government has said that the specific detail of changes will be made clear in Secondary Legislation, which will be informed by data collected in the course of public consultations. Consultations were conducted last year but their results have yet to be published. It is likely that the complexity of the legislative package is the reason for ongoing delays in the specific details being announced.

Along with our partners, Bracknell Forest and Wokingham Borough, this council foresaw difficulties in preparing an efficient and affordable glass collection service while significant uncertainties remain about the required scope and funding of such a service.

If this council introduced a glass collection service now the additional vehicles and staff would be funded from the council budget with little or no chance of claiming-back those costs through any future 'producer pays' scheme. That would inevitably have a detrimental impact on other services for residents. Despite our proven commitment to increasing Reading's recycling rate, Reading's Labour Councillors are not prepared to take the financial risk of rushing out a kerbside glass collection before the Government clarify their position by publishing the secondary legislation.

The re3 Board, which has Cllr Page and myself as Reading's representatives, has resolved to address this precise question at the earliest opportunity. In December 2021 the Board stated:

That Members restate their commitment to preparing a service development programme, for kerbside glass collection, once there is clarity over the strategic status, scale and funding for such a service.

I will be glad to provide an update on the position of Reading Borough Council once the Government has published the crucial secondary legislation and officers (both RBC and in our re3 partnership) have been able to analyse the detail and develop a plan for compliance. In the meantime, the re3 partnership's recent change to allow mixed glass collections has helped to manage the busy post-Christmas period and will undoubtedly help the three councils to make the existing service more efficient whilst bottle banks are retained. Reading Labour Councillors will continue to take every opportunity to maximise recycling in the borough despite the restraints placed on us by Government delays.

3. Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Children:
Where will Council Youth Workers establish Youth Clubs ?

Green Councillors have previously opposed cuts to youth services. Many young people say having a safe place to go is really important to them. Please can the Lead Councillor update me on plans to restart Council youth clubs. When will this be happening and where ?

REPLY by Councillor Terry Lead Councillor for Children.

As Councillor White will no doubt know, and as was highlighted by analysis from the House of Commons library last summer, cuts to youth services in England since 2011 under successive Conservative governments have, on average, been 68% and a more recent report by the YMCA states that real-terms expenditure in England is down 74% since 2010/11. So, let's be clear from the start that, across the country, reductions in youth services are the result of the Tory Government under funding the whole of local government services.

Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) have responsibility for youth services and currently run 2 targeted youth clubs - Young Carers and ReachOUT (LGBT) - and these have restarted since the pandemic. There are no other youth clubs run by BFfC, with funding targeted towards the most vulnerable and 1-1 support.

RBC do not run any youth clubs, but the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) has funded BFfC to deliver an outreach project providing detached youth work 5 days a week and, additionally, support to voluntary groups to deliver their youth clubs by placing a paid P/T Youth Worker in 4 clubs. Although the details are subject to final agreement, they are likely to be Hexham Road, South Reading, Southcote and Coley as they already have plans to run a youth club or are already running one.

Therefore, while the voluntary and community sector will be still be responsible and run the youth clubs, BFfC will be working in partnership and supporting them to do this. BFfC will also deliver training to the voluntary and community sector to strengthen their confidence and ability to run youth clubs. BFfC are currently recruiting for these posts.

For both Councillor White's and all Councillors' information, I have included details below of the wide range of other youth services on offer across the Reading (I do not intend to read out all this additional information).

Youth Offer

Open access youth clubs/groups

There are currently 4 community run open access weekly youth clubs identified across Reading:

- Amersham Road: Weller Centre (Community led)
- Tilehurst Triangle: Junior Youth Club (up to 13)
- Coley: Grassroots Youth Club on Fridays
- Pakistani Community Centre

Schools

Schools offer a range of extra-curricular clubs and activities such as music, sports, drama, Duke of Edinburgh. The programmes vary in each school.

Uniformed Groups

There are over 18 uniformed groups listed on the Family Information Service, including scout groups, boys brigade, air, army and sea cadets, and guides divisions. Locations vary and change across Reading. There are costs attached to attending, although most groups state they do not want cost to be a barrier and will offer support and/or access to grants.

Sports

In addition to the leisure facilities provided through Reading Sports and Leisure facilities there is a wide range of sports clubs from football, gymnastics, rugby, martial arts, fencing, canoeing and rowing, swimming, cricket, tennis, dance schools etc. There is a cost attached to these activities.

There are some sports organisations including Reading Rockets who contribute to community events and have a social inclusion focus. Reading Community Football Trust have recently increased their delivery and are delivering sessions in the community at Prospect Park, Amersham Road and will be developing a session in Whitley. During the pandemic they have delivered on-line programmes.

The Arts

There are a number of private companies offering theatre, drama, and music activities and classes with fees. There are some VCS organisations offering community-based activity with a focus on social inclusion. Many of these have to charge for participation but some will offer free activities when funded to do so or on application.

Faith-based youth groups

There are a few faith-based youth groups that are open to all and most faith-based organisations such as churches, Gurdwara, mosques and the Hebrew congregation hold activities for their communities.

Some of the more youth focused include Shift (South Reading) who offer mentoring and community outreach, Churches Together in Caversham who have a detached youth worker, St Laurence's Youth Church, and mentoring and youth activities at the Globe.

BAME Young People

The Globe Deliverance centre community projects include mentoring and activities for BAME young people. Reading Refocus aims to provide inclusive social enterprise/ youth projects although current delivery is limited with a lack of funding.

There are two new projects emerging who plan to deliver mentoring and group work programmes for BAME young people through one-to-one mentoring and group work programmes - Bro & Co (working with BAME boys and young men) and the OMA foundation (working with Black British young people).

Many community specific organisations offer ad hoc family based activities for their communities, but most do not offer regular youth activities to our knowledge, although the Pakistani Community Centre does run regular weekly youth clubs.

Specialist Groups

Activities and short breaks for young people with SEND are advertised through the local SEND offer and include a range of specialist activities for young people with neurodiversity, learning and physical disabilities as well as supported access to mainstream activities.

Other specialist youth provision includes ReachOut LGBTQ provision, Young Carers youth clubs, a young parents' drop in and activities for children looked after provided by BFFC.

Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme

BFFC worked with 15 providers over the summer 2021 to deliver activities across the Reading Borough. In total, 1045 (24%) of the 4365 eligible children attended provision. This is in line with the 20-30% up-take for well -established HAFS. This will continue subject to funding.

There is also a good universal offer for those who can afford and are interested in accessing costed activities through a wide range of uniformed groups, sports, arts clubs and classes. These are publicised by the Reading Services Guide.