

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

29 JUNE 2022

QUESTION NO. 1

Caroline Langdon to ask the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee:

Littering and Fines

- a) I would like to ask the Committee if they would urgently consider charging £100 for throwing litter including fag ends on the pavements, streets and shopping precincts as in Witham, Essex and Halifax and possibly other towns.
- b) I would ask them to look at the state of the cobbled areas where fag ends are lodged in the cracks. Would they look at the seating areas whether in town at bus stops or in the parks where people throw fag ends, spit, vomit (I've witnessed all of these) and have these areas cleansed and disinfected not just swept outside the seating. May I draw their attention to the shocking state of the bus stops.

REPLY by Councillor Hacker:

I invite Councillor Rowland, the Lead Councillor Environmental Services & Community Safety, to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

I would like to thank Ms Langdon for the question.

- a) Reading Borough Council has a team of Recycling and Enforcement Officers who investigate waste offences such as littering, unauthorised disposal of waste (fly-tipping) and duty of care for businesses as well encouraging and advising residents and businesses on how to recycle more effectively.

Investigations of waste offences may result in enforcement action being taken which can include a Fixed Penalty Notice being issued, or prosecution. The Council's fine for litter offences is £80, and for fly tipping offences £400, which can reduce to £200 if paid within 10 days.

Littering fines are often used for small scale fly-tipping offences, such as takeaway boxes or carrier bags, where evidence is found within the rubbish. Currently, the Council's operating policy does not include patrolling litter control officers issuing on the spot fines for small litter items, including cigarette debris.

However, Officers are constantly aware of the potential for behaviour change and the impact of this on the Town Centre environment. To this end, Officers regularly review and adapt their approach to ensure that it effectively delivers the enforcement of littering offences within the Town Centre.

As the new Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety I'm committed to investigating the possibility of introducing Litter Control Officers who would have the warrant to issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for littering within the Town Centre and other areas throughout the Borough where littering is a constant problem. The nature of this type of enforcement is confrontational with Officers required to be trained to minimise the escalation of angry conversation, wear stab protection vests and equipped with body cameras and urgency contact with the police.

Due to the nature of this type of enforcement, most Councils who adopt a high-profile Litter Control Team, employ specialist enforcement contractors with delegated powers to issue FPN's for littering offences.

The Council's Love Clean Reading website is a well-used application, enabling residents to report fly tipping, littering, graffiti etc. There is the opportunity to upload photographs together with monitoring the status of the report, the action being taken and completion of the report by items being removed. With a daily regime of cleansing within the town centre, small items are generally immediately litter picked or swept away.

- b) The Council's Street Cleansing team provide a comprehensive schedule, operating seven days a week, undertaking regular street cleansing, sweeping and litter picking to keep streets clean and safe.

High footfall areas, like Reading Town Centre, are rotationally cleaned 14.5 hrs per day from 05.30am to 19.30pm, seven days per week, 364 days per year, the only exception being Christmas Day. The cleaning operation utilises a combination of different processes and methods such as mechanical sweeping, hand sweeping, litter picking and power washing services.

Regarding streets with cobbled areas, these are mechanically swept using either a driver operated compact sweeping machine or a self-propelled applied sweeper, both of which have suction facilities to remove items to an internal hopper for later disposal. This methodology has proven to be the most effective way of removing small items such as cigarette debris, litter and leaves.



Stock photographs of Compact and Applied Sweepers

In addition to the mechanical sweeping, Reading Town Centre has permanent manual street cleansing operatives to perform detailed cleansing and sweeping together with reactionary capabilities to unpredictably issue that need immediate attention.

Working in partnership with Reading's Central Business Improvement District (BID), Street Cleansing provide a regular shop doorway washing service for businesses within the main shopping streets and a weekly trade cardboard collection and recycling service.

The Street Cleansing service also provides a dedicated graffiti removal team for 3.5 hours per day Monday to Friday, complete with a fully equipped vehicle with a high-pressure washer and environmentally friendly graffiti removal products. The Graffiti team clean known and agreed sites of all graffiti and fly posting as well as any racist or offensive graffiti from private property.

The Graffiti team wash litterbins, seating areas and council owned bus stops within the town centre on average eight times a year. They also provide an emergency response for any spillages that occur.

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QUESTION NO. 2

Caroline Langdon to ask the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee:

Fast Food Litter

- a) I would like to ask the Committee how the council and the Environment as a whole are going to cope with the amount of litter now produced post Covid 19 where many businesses now use it as an excuse not to provide crockery, employ washer uppers, presumably pay water bills. We already had several Greggs providing litter as well as McDonalds, Subway and Itsu, now from the Broad St Mall down to the Oracle.
- b) Have the committee noticed the number of businesses that have sprung up producing litter whether in or out namely Food Court, Taco Bell, Jollibee, Chopstick, a Tortilla shop, a chip kiosk and new coffee kiosk. Wendy's have moved into a bank corner of Friar St and Station Rd.

REPLY by Councillor Hacker:

I invite Councillor Rowland, the Lead Councillor Environmental Services & Community Safety, to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

I would like to thank Ms Langdon for her question.

- a) Our recovering economy is seeing a buoyant resurgence of new businesses and fast-food establishments that see the successful economic possibilities here in Reading and we can all be grateful for the fact that we do not suffer from a lack of interested businesses in Reading.

However, as with all businesses, those operating within the Town Centre are required to maintain a trade waste agreement with a recognised and legal waste company to dispose of their waste and recycling. Reading Borough Council has its own trade waste operations, with many of the non-national shops and outlets in the centre of Reading subscribing to the Council's service.

To ensure compliance to the law, Reading Borough Council have a team of Recycling and Enforcement Officers who regularly visit premises in the Town Centre checking that trade waste agreements are valid and in date, under the duty of care for businesses. They also encourage and advise residents and businesses on how to recycle more effectively. The team also investigate waste offences such as littering, unauthorised disposal of waste (fly-tipping).

Investigations may result in enforcement action being taken which may include a fixed penalty notice being issued, or prosecution.

From the photographic evidence provided with the question, it would appear the bags of waste and cardboard are trade waste placed out for collection by businesses operating in the town centre are of concern. The team regularly attend Reading town centre to undertake trade waste duty of care inspections to ensure that all businesses have a trade waste agreement in place and are complying with it.

A trade waste agreement will provide the business with either a trade bin collection or authorised trade waste sacks, which are common in areas where there is no space to store bins off the public highway.

Any businesses found to have insufficient waste disposal facilities in place may be issued with a fixed penalty notice. Any waste deposited on the public highway outside of an authorised waste receptacle (a bin or a sack) may be investigated as fly-tipping, and where possible enforcement action would be taken.

The Council's Street Cleansing team provide a comprehensive schedule, operating seven days a week, undertaking regular street cleansing, sweeping and litter picking to keep streets clean and safe.

High footfall areas, like Reading Town Centre, are rotationally cleaned 14.5 hrs per day from 05.30am to 19.30pm, seven days per week, 364 days per year, the only exception being Christmas Day.

Reading Town Centre has permanent manual street cleansing operatives to perform detailed cleansing, litter bin emptying and sweeping together with being present to reaction to unpredictable events of litter or cleansing that needs immediate attention.

The Council's Love Clean Reading app assists us greatly and is a well-used application by residents, enabling residents to report fly tipping, littering, graffiti etc. There is the opportunity to upload photographs together with monitoring the status of the report, the action being taken and completion of the report by items being removed.



Photographs supplied with Question

- b) Reading Council are keen to take a broad perspective and bring different interests together in the recovery of the “High Street and retail centres”.

A number of responsible food outlets that are new to the town, have commercial waste contracts with the Council’s own Trade Waste Service.

Recycling and Enforcement Officers regularly visit businesses in the Town Centre. For example, they have recently undertaken work with a newly established fast-food business (that I shall not name) to ensure their compliance with the waste regulations. The establishment was advised on the correct presentation and collection of their waste, which has been embraced and is working well. This level of one-on-one work is part of our Enforcement Teams on-going work. We will continue to monitor and look at ways to improve standards as we are able in the future with retailers if they present significant issues to the StreetScene environment.

In addition, consideration may be given to the possibility of introducing “Time Banding” within the Town Centre to restrict the times businesses and residents can place waste and recycling out for collection. Typically, this would restrict the collection times to when the Town Centre is less busy for example 18:00pm - 08:00am, preventing accumulations of bags of waste and recycling when the Town Centre has its highest footfall.

Should “Time Banding” be a policy the Council wish to incorporate a public notice process will be necessary to allow representation from businesses and residents. Enforcement of the regulation is by the Environment Protection Act 1990 under Section 47, which is in the process of being adopted and applied by the Council’s Environmental Enforcement team in order to help us to effectively deal with the issues of our buoyant business economy of which you have raised your concerns about this evening.

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29 JUNE 2022

QUESTION NO. 3

Caroline Langdon to ask the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee:

Begging

Why is there so much begging allowed in the town centre? Around the station, as I wrote to Cllr Jason Brock, there were 4 outside the railway station pestering people.

Then are all down station road including bedding and rubbish left in the entrance of the empty bank. The police and community officers don't do anything about it. Do you know they say they pick up £100 per day according to police and community officers. There is one active young lady with glasses permanently seated with cup/bowl in front of her in Broad St moves from outside Cafe Nero to other places.

Why do you not do anything about this? I have tried to help one young lady called NAME REDACTED in a terrible state offering her phone numbers etc. She is in the worst state but not the worst offender for begging.

REPLY by Councillor Hacker:

I invite Councillor Rowland, the Lead Councillor Environmental Services & Community Safety, to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

I would like to thank Ms. Langdon for her timely question.

The increase in begging in the Town Centre is acknowledged and previous partnership processes that have been in place are to be reviewed and updated to ensure a consistent partnership approach is taken to tackle this evident and ongoing issue.

Many people who choose to beg in Reading will already have accommodation with support open to them; either here or in a neighbouring borough. It's highly likely that those accommodated and begging are doing so to obtain funds that supplement possible substance misuse problems. This is one of the reasons therefore, that we do not encourage the public to give them cash.

Since the pandemic the Council have commissioned new supported housing projects to provide a longer-term home to people sleeping rough. Whilst living in these environments they receive support with destructive behavioural issues, such as drug and alcohol use, that can contribute to the reasons why people beg. Reading Borough Council commissions a Rough Sleeping Outreach Service run by St Mungo's. That team is accompanied by Reading's Drug and Alcohol Service, Change

Grow Live. Their drug and alcohol outreach team along with the St Mungo's team attend town centre hotspot areas, such as Station Road and Broad Street, at various times of the morning and evening throughout the week. They continually offer support to encourage a lifestyle away from the streets. Sadly, not everyone accepts their support and we find that certain persons continually present on the street sleeping rough and begging.

I accept your concern and those of residents about the situation but there are constructive ways the public can help. To support our assertive outreach effort, the Council encourage members of the public to identify and report abandoned bedding, and any associated rubbish, via the Love Clean Reading App. If the public have concerns about someone sleeping rough, this can also be reported via www.streetlink.org.uk. This will be directed to Reading's outreach teams who will visit that site to offer support. Finally, we also encourage the public to download and use our Reportable App to report begging, especially when it is persistent, worrisome or aggressive. These reports go straight to our Council's ASB Team who liaise with the Thames Valley Police to deal with particularly hostile and aggressive cases of begging.

Officers from Thames Valley Police and Reading Borough Council have initiated discussions to review the current processes in place to tackle aggressive begging in Reading and as a result have agreed to set up a partnership task and finish group in early July, which will carry out a problem-solving exercise to understand the severity of the issues, review previous processes that were followed to tackle begging. That group will review their effectiveness and formulate a partnership action plan, which will set out a programme of activity to engage, intervene and where necessary, take enforcement action against individuals who continue to persistently beg aggressively. The action plan will be jointly produced by Thames Valley Police and Reading Borough Council. It will involve input from key partners who can provide support to those individuals involved in begging, including St Mungos and Change Grow Live along with other key partners who operate within the Town Centre, including Reading's Business Improvement District and British Transport Police, who will be able to provide support with evidence capturing.

Officers from Thames Valley Police and Reading Borough Council acknowledge the urgency of this escalating issue and once actions have been set by the task and finish group, they will be enacted immediately and communicated to the public.

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QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor Cresswell to ask the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee:

Waterloo Meadows Refurbishment Update

Can the Lead Councillor give an update on the plans and progress of the refurbishment of the play area at Waterloo Meadows?

REPLY by Councillor Hacker:

I invite Councillor Barnett-Ward, the Lead Councillor Leisure & Culture, to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Leisure & Culture:

I would like to thank Councillor Cresswell for his question.

Prior to the recent elections, Katesgrove Labour Councillors worked with officers to plan and cost out a transformation of the Waterloo Meadows playground area facilities. £95,000 was allocated in 2021/22 and a further £200,000 in 2022/23 for this work from the local CIL funding pot. Together these amounts will allow both the refurbishment of the ballcourt and the full replacement of the children's playground equipment over the upcoming 22/23 CIL delivery period. To date, the ball court renovation work is nearly complete. There has been a delay in resurfacing it, as contractors have experienced some issues accessing the road entrance because of residents' parking on the access route. This has now been resolved, and completion is scheduled for early July.

The refurbishment of the Children's Centre and associated landscape plans needed to be considered prior to commencing the design aspect of play area. Plans for the new entrance to the Centre intruded on the playground location. A revised access route to the community centre hall has been agreed so that there are no future access issues for users of both the play area and the community centre.

A new location for the new zipwire has been agreed and the installation will commence the end of July.

It will now be possible to make progress with planning the new playground and the community's input will be sought to help shape the design of that site. As we do with all our playground upgrades, we will also consult with our Accessible Play Task and Finish Group, to ensure accessible enjoyment for children of all abilities and for carers that may also have accessibility issues.

Through this large investment in the ball court, the community centre renovation and the future re-designing of the play area, the area will be rejuvenated and

provide years of safe, attractive, and accessible activities for young people and their families in the local area.

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HOUSING, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

29 JUNE 2022

QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor McCann to ask the Chair of the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee:

University Good Neighbours Plan

I was pleased to hear that the university is working on a plan to help new Second Year students be good neighbours. Can the Lead Councillor tell me how the council can support this initiative, especially when it comes to tackling waste issues?

REPLY by Councillor Hacker:

I invite Councillor Rowland, the Lead Councillor Environmental Services & Community Safety, to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

I would like to thank Councillor McCann for her question.

Firstly, I would like acknowledge the positive contributions that the University of Reading's approximately 5000 off-campus students make to our town, the vast majority of whom add a positive vibrancy to Reading and are good neighbours within our communities. Indeed, many ultimately make Reading their home after they leave University. However, I sense Cllr McCann is alluding to the work being done to ensure all off- campus students are aware of how to be good neighbours and how we work proactively with the University to work with the small segment of students that do cause problems and challenging issues within the community.

As I understand Cllr McCann is already aware, the Council's Recycling and Enforcement team have been working closely with the University for many years. We are delighted that with an increase from the University in Community Liaison work, over the past couple of years, that relationship has led to more positive interaction and co-working to engage and work with the off-campus community. Last autumn, in a first joint exercise, University officials, students, Council officers and Councillors engaged in a door -knocking effort, speaking with new students', and passing out Moving-in packets with tips on being good neighbours, and how to dispose of waste responsibly. Most recently, this exercise was repeated as students prepare to leave for the summer in a 4-day engagement exercise with Council officers and the University that saw 800 Moving Out packets delivered to 26 streets where students live within the Reading community. In both packs it included information about how to dispose of waste correctly including how to deal with bulky waste removal, rubbish and recycling was distributed. There will be, as has been done over the past number of years, an additional rubbish pick-up in student areas by the Council paid for by the University to handle extra moving-out rubbish.

Throughout the year, the Council's Recycling and Enforcement team continues to work closely with the University and will be supporting in the delivery of Moving-in information packs again this September. The Council will look to have a stand at the Freshers Fayre (as they did last year), as well as having a presence at the Sustainability Fayre to help provide information in the first few weeks of students moving in. Our Recycling and Enforcement team carry out initiatives to tackle issues with contaminated recycling, and overflowing bins throughout the year working with the University's Community Outreach Manager and team. That relationship is strong and we continue to work with the University to refine the manner in which off-campus students are supported and where need be, dealt with through direct engagement and where necessary through disciplinary action within the University as warranted. As part of our on-going work with the student population living off the main campus, our Team have door knocked residents, provided information on the door-step, and contacted landlords and HMO license holders where required to ensure that rubbish and recycling issues are dealt with where there is a lack of cooperation with rubbish and recycling collection. Our officers feedback to the University any relevant information, and a joined-up approach in tackling the issues is carried out.

Our Recycling and Enforcement team also have a representative on the steering group that the Student Union has recently formed. At these meetings there are discussions on multiple topics, including waste. I am delighted to have a particularly positive relationship with the new Student Union President, Sheldon Allen, who initiated a lot of this positive co-working last year with the September walk-about.

We believe greatly in a positive and joined up approach with the University when tackling issues such as waste, and there is no doubt that we will continue to support and work proactively with the University to encourage all off- campus residents to be good neighbours.