

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### POLICY COMMITTEE

23 JANUARY 2023

#### PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 1

T Colliass to ask the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

#### Neighbourhood Policing

In my capacity as Chair of the Oxford Road Safer Neighbourhood Forum (SNF), (and recognising that the Chief Constable, Area Commander and Police and Crime Commissioner are here this evening), I am registering my concern at the very apparent reduction in policing resources now available to our area. I am aware that my concerns are shared by every other SNF chair across Reading.

You will be aware from your own regular attendance at, and reports to, the Oxford Rd SNF that in reality neighbourhood policing is not functioning as originally intended. However I still read on the TVP website that 'Every neighbourhood in the Thames Valley area has a dedicated neighbourhood policing team that works together with the local community and partners...'. The website goes on to say that: Neighbourhood policing teams are led by senior police officers and include police officers, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), police staff, police support volunteers and the Special Constabulary.

The Oxford Rd SNF sits under the Abbey and Battle Local Neighbourhood Policing Team Police which lists on the website two Inspectors, two sergeants, seven police constables and eight PCSOs. Currently, I understand that the Oxford Road area has no locally-assigned PC (as that person is currently re-allocated elsewhere) and a total 2.5 PCSO's for the entirety of the Oxford Road area. I understand that whilst we do have Police Officers and PCSO's in Reading at all times, they float in to and out of the Oxford Road area to every other part of town, on an as-need basis. I am asking specifically about my local neighbourhood police team.

Can I ask the Lead Member to clarify what her understanding is as to how many of these posts are vacant, or how many of the individual officers have been moved, re-assigned or re-allocated to other policing duties in Reading or elsewhere, and how many are actually available to fulfil duties that deliver "an approach that is focussed on visibility, engagement, problem solving and community resilience."?

Can the Lead Member also say how badly Reading will be impacted by the reported 160+ resignations amongst new recruits to the TVP? Can she also provide some clarity as to where those Police officers actually are? If they aren't full time on our streets yet, can you clarify when they are expected to be?

**REPLY** by Councillor Rowland (Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety):

I'd like to thank Ms. Colliass for her question. When I moved to this country 10 years ago and wanted to make a difference for my community by reducing the crime and ASB around my new home, your Oxford Road Neighbourhood Action Group, (under your previous

chairing) was the very first public meeting I attended. Given your long record of public service, I wish to, along with my colleagues, thank you for your level of dedication over the years as an active community volunteer, who dedicates many hours of your personal time, to reducing the crime and ASB along the Oxford Road.

Yet, here you and I sit today, ten years later, even more frustrated with the same issues than we were when we first met.

I'll be honest with you, Teresa. The Council is aware that there are challenges in relation to neighbourhood policing, as residents want to see it: Police out in your neighbourhood that know the local area and are seen to be out deterring crime by their very presence. You and I both have concerns raised to us daily by residents.

I am sure that you are also aware that this issue has been raised with Thames Valley Police by myself, my colleagues and this Council on many occasions as we lobby for better resourcing to tackle illegal behaviour here in Reading and for a return to visible neighbourhood policing. However, you and this Council have been advised that there are challenges with resources at the current time. We have been given varying dates of when this will be resolved, and varying promises of the numbers that they can dedicate to the Oxford Road area. The latest information that the Council has been advised is that the situation will improve over the next 18 months.

I truly wish I had the answers for you. One thing I will not do is to berate the local Reading Policing force that we do have, because we are fortunate here in Reading to have a dedicated team lead by Supt Raffield that work day in and day out to ensure the town's safety with the very limited resources they are given. But in hopes of giving you the most accurate answers, your question was forwarded to the PCC and the Chief Constable last week - and I trust that our police colleagues here tonight will give a more comprehensive answer to the very real concerns and queries that you have raised in their presentation this evening.

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### PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 2

N Haskins to ask the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

#### Size of Neighbourhood Police Teams

As the Chair of the North Reading Safer Neighbourhood Forum (NRSNF), I am aware that the Police Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable are appearing, as they do annually, at Reading Borough Council's Policy Committee Meeting on the 23rd of January. I would like to take this opportunity to ask you a number of related formal questions. These are questions that I have raised at numerous Safer Reading meetings, North Reading Safer Neighbourhood Forum meetings and issues I have also raised with the PCC when he has kindly agreed to have meetings with me.

During my tenure as Chairman I have spent a lot of time with each of the local Neighbourhood Inspectors. A few years ago, pre Covid, I spent time with the then Inspector as I thought that we had less neighbourhood police resources than was required. Following a long analysis of data at the police station the Inspector agreed and said that North Reading should have two police constables and three PCSOs based upon the level of crime, size of the population etc. Given that there was a shortage of PCs at that time it was determined that North Reading would have one PC and four PCSOs. Since then, I think that there has been an increase in Police funding at a national level and an increase in council tax in the form of a precept to "protect neighbourhood policing and PCSOs across the region". I realise that there are many difficult issues such as recruitment, staff turn over, training, Covid etc However, my questions are very simple.

a) Given that background can you please tell me why my local neighbour police team currently only consists of one PC, one full time PCSO and one part time PCSO? And more importantly:

b) Can you please, with the PCC and Chief Constable and Supt Raffield here this evening, give the North Reading Safer Neighbourhood Forum a commitment as to when North Reading will at least be back to the old size of the Neighbourhood Team (ie pre the announcement of increase in police officers and before the precept aimed at supporting the Neighbourhood Team)?

**REPLY** by Councillor Rowland (Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety):

I'd like to thank Mr Haskins for his question and along with my colleagues, I'd also like to publicly thank him for the incredible amount of hours, as a volunteer, that he has spent over many years to press for residents' safety north of the River.

Mr Haskins, as you know, Police resourcing is allocated from national government. Reading has what we have been given. You are also aware that although we as Councillors and Officers lobby consistently for greater Police resourcing, the Council cannot just make

that “happen”. Police numbers and allocations across the country are in the hands of the current Government, and the PCC and Chief Constable are the allocators of the resourcing that they have been given. Noting their struggles with resourcing and having to constantly react to “need” across their TVP region, that information is beyond our ability to give you with any surety, and best we have been advised is that the situation will likely improve over the next 18 months.

As with Ms Colliass’ query, your question was passed on to the PCC and the Chief Constable as they are the only ones that have the ability to answer the very specific concerns that you have raised this evening about what resourcing they will be able to place in your area - and indeed across the whole of Reading.

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

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### PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 3

N Haskins to ask the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

Can our Neighbourhood Police Team please police our North Reading Neighbourhood?

I am aware that some of Reading's neighbourhood teams appear to be asked to attend routine events in other areas outside of Reading. Given the size of the Neighbourhood Teams this is very concerning.

I have just been sorting out the dates for the NRSNF meetings for 2023. I have been told that the one PC that is allocated to North Reading might not be able to attend all of the NRSNF meetings as he is also allocated to the "Response Team".

Can I please ask that the North Reading Neighbourhood Police Team is allocated to North Reading ie as per the precept literature: "to protect neighbourhood policing and the number of police and PCSOs"?

**REPLY** by Councillor Rowland (Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety):

Again, Mr Haskins, I'd like to thank you for your excellent question. It is a shame that when the Safer Neighbourhood Forums were restructured in 2017/2018 from the former Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGS), that action was undertaken at the behest of the local Police to work with them in providing a platform whereby they could communicate and engage with the public. The Council eagerly agreed to support that Safer Neighbourhood Forum structure with the goodwill of the Police at that time. I find it most regrettable, therefore, that five years later, we find the Police struggling to attend those meetings which are attended by dedicated community volunteers and concerned residents that have vital information that can help the Police solve local issues.

Sadly, your area and your Forum's attendance by the Police is not unique across Reading. At the Safer Neighbourhood Chairs meeting last Wednesday night that you attended, I noted your query was echoed by every SNF Chair there, all of whom wanted to know, "Where are our neighbourhood Police?"

The last Oxford Road Safer Neighbourhood Forum had no police officers or PCSOs attend at all. And as we heard at that meeting, the Coley SNF Chair had written to the PCC on the 13<sup>th</sup> November to query residents' concerns about neighbourhood policing; an answer I understand that was only provided this weekend after a complaint was lodged by that Chair to the Office of the Police Crime Commissioner.

As with your previous question, this one was also passed on to the PCC and the Chief Constable to give a more comprehensive answer to the issues you have raised.

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#### PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 4

N Haskins to ask the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

Can we please reintroduce the Police Have Your Say Days (HYSDs) in North Reading and can you advise your support for local Speedwatch Campaign work as undertaken by volunteers?

The HYSDs were used as an active tool for tackling ASB in our area. They were used at problem locations reported by residents and resident associations. This gave residents the opportunity to inform the neighbourhood police team of events that were occurring. Careful choice of time and location also allowed our local PC to use the HYSD as an active tool in tackling ASB. North Reading has not had a HYSD for some time, which my understanding is due to lack of resources on the North Reading Team.

a) Can you please commit to working with the Police to returning HYSDs to North Reading?

I am also aware of a worrying incident at one of the new volunteer Speedwatch campaigns that was run by a local community group in which a car was reported to have mounted the curb and driven at a group of volunteers. This incident exactly mirrors a concern that was raised at the Safer Reading Forum by one of the Chairs of another Reading Safer Neighbourhood Forum. I am, also, slightly concerned that this is a shift from volunteers supporting the Neighbourhood Policing Team, to volunteers taking over a role that the Neighbourhood Policing Team used to administer.

b) Can you please tell me if you think that a PCSO should be in attendance at SpeedWatch events in North Reading on safety grounds? And if the answer is no, could you please assure me and the other Neighbourhood Forum Chairs, that the event organiser will not be liable in any way should such an incident occur?

c) Can you please tell me how effective you think the volunteer Speedwatch Campaign will be in terms of reducing speeding given the limited powers available to it, and how do you see that fitting in with any other council led initiatives to reduce speeding?

**REPLY** by Councillor Rowland (Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety):

Thank you for your question, Mr Haskins. The Council appreciates the value of resident engagement events such as the 'Have Your Say Days' and is supportive of any police resourcing that could be dedicated to ensure that there is regular engagement with residents in the town; be it Have Your Say events, Safer Neighbourhood Forums or any other method that might be able to provide the community access to speak to the Police.

I am familiar with the situation about the Speedwatch Campaign that you have referred to - and I have to admit, I find it extremely perplexing that the PCC believes it is good practice to juxtapose well-intended community volunteers trying to reduce speeding in their own area, against a random driver who could be uninsured, drunk, or angry, behind

the wheel of over a ton of speeding metal. Beyond potentially lethal incidents, community volunteers have also been hurled insults from drivers when participating in Speedwatch programmes. I query if asking this of volunteers, with or without a PCSO present, is the best way to reduce speeding in our communities.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, Reading Borough Council has been, over years, at the forefront of lobbying for the speed enforcement powers to be handed over to local Councils so they can get on with using those powers that the Police fail to use in Reading and elsewhere.

And I will ask this again of the PCC right now: Will you support this Council and other Councils in the right to take this under our control? We will provide far better results than reckless drivers receiving a series of warning letters.

Finally, Mr Haskins, again, the PCC and Chief Constable have been passed this query and I eagerly await their explanations and answers to your specific concerns in their presentation this evening.

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

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### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Corporate Services and Resources:

#### Supporting Local Business

Green Party councillors believe having a strong local economy is key to tackling many of the challenges we face. Manchester City Council has moved its local procurement spend from 44% of its budget to 70%. What percentage of Reading Council's procurement spend is spent locally? And what plans does the Council have in this area?

**REPLY** by Councillor Terry (Lead Councillor for Corporate Services and Resources):

Of course I want the best for our local economy because a strong economy can make the community that we live in stronger and more resilient, and have a positive impact on people's experiences of everyday life in Reading.

I am aware of the work that Councils such as Manchester (and Preston) have done to increase their spend with local suppliers, and have noted the efforts required and time taken to make the positive progress that they have in this area. Manchester City has been working with the Centre for Local Economic Studies (CLES) since 2008, some 14 years or so.

Positively our own Corporate Plan confirms [*under "Our Foundations"*] that "... the best deal is not always the cheapest - it's the one that protects people, jobs, the environment and the budget. So we are also evolving our procurement practices to enhance the social value in all we do". This includes, of course, taking proactive action towards maintaining and evolving a strong local economy.

The Council is undertaking a number of actions that will, amongst other things, enable us to embark upon if not a similar journey then one that is best for our Community. These include: -

- Implementing a new Finance and Procurement ERP system to enable the required access to relevant data;
- Baselining our current supply base to identify spend patterns and goods and services that are available (or not) locally, to identify supply voids and opportunities to bring local businesses (including social enterprises) into our supply chains, and/or to create new businesses where there are no existing suppliers of those goods/services here (so where they are being bought from outside Reading ...);
- Being clear on what we mean as "local", and looking to initiate dialogue with other public sector bodies in Reading about their own spend patterns, and the possibilities of working together (for example, Manchester City included the Greater Manchester area);



- Making procurement spend more accessible to local small businesses and third sector organisations, whilst at the same time increasing community benefits and social value delivered by our suppliers.

I note that the information found via this link ([Manchester City Council Spend Analysis 2020/21 | CLES](#)) suggests that the amount spent with Manchester based organisations in 2020/21 was £247m, or 59.3% of the total spend with the top 300 suppliers. This is an increase from 51.5% in 2008/09. I am unsure where you got the 70% spend figure from?

I strongly agree with the following from the Centre for Local Economic Studies which considers “progressive procurement (of goods and services)” to be one of the 5 strands that can deliver Community Wealth Building (CLES’ own phrase) with other strands including fair employment and just labour markets, and socially productive use of land and assets which are clearly in line with the council’s social value aspirations and achievements to date.

I am happy to keep this Committee updated on progress.

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### COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care:

#### Ambulance waiting times and Adult Social Care

Devastatingly the National Health Service is in crisis. Please can I get an update on ambulance waiting times at the Royal Berkshire Hospital and what the Council is doing through adult social care to help tackle this problem? Please can relevant Council key performance indicators be included in the reply (targets, actual performance and direction of travel for each indicator).

REPLY by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care):

Many thanks to Councillor White for his question. The National Health Service is under enormous pressure this winter, and as predicted, it has been the worst in NHS history for demand on A&E services. The Covid pandemic has left a backlog of operations and other treatments compounded with a spike in Covid this Winter and a substantial increase in flu and other viruses, as well as an increase in complexity of health and care needs which has led to overwhelmed A&E and ambulatory services. Coupled with this has been the ongoing strikes by Nurses and Ambulance staff.

The Council does not have access to ongoing performance data regarding ambulance waiting times at the Royal Berkshire Hospital, with NHS Digital reporting at the West Berkshire level for the South Central Ambulance service. However, feedback from the Berkshire West, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire (BOB) Integrated Care Board has been that demand in the Royal Berkshire Hospital A&E department is 20% higher than winter 2021 and that target handover times between the paramedics and the A&E department is below the expected target levels.

Reading Borough Council Adult Social Care are working very closely with our NHS colleagues to reduce hospital admissions and support discharges as much as possible. With the additional winter discharge funding that the Government announced in November the Council has been able to implement a plan to put additional social care resources at the Royal Berks to support discharge co-ordination and have increased the capacity in the home care and care home market, commissioning an additional 3,200 hours of reablement hours and five additional discharge to assess care home beds that have improved the flow out of the hospital.

Councillor White has requested information on key performance indicators and Adult Social Care are measured closely in their performance around both discharges and admission avoidance as part of the Better Care Fund joint arrangements with the Integrated Care Board on a quarterly basis. One of the measures that provide an indication for this area is the measure around the length of stay in an acute hospital bed - a longer stay could evidence a delay in discharge. The target measures the percentage of people still occupying a hospital bed at 14 days and 21 days after admission: the lower the percentage the better. Based on the latest data we have the target for 14 days is no more than 9.6% people still in hospital and we are achieving 9.2%. The target for 21 days is no more than 5.5% and we are achieving 4.5%.

Another indicator linked to discharges is the percentage of people that are discharged to their normal place of residence which is really important for us in Reading as we promote home first. The target is that at least 92% of people are discharged to their normal place of residence and we are currently achieving 93.4%.

Reading Borough Council's Adult Social Care department work in partnership with the wider Berkshire West Health and Social Care system to improve pathways and services for our local residents.