

Investing in Reading's Future



Corporate Plan 2022-25
Annual update: March 2023



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

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Welcome

from the Leader of Reading Borough Council Cllr Jason Brock



Our vision - to help Reading realise its potential and to ensure that everyone who lives and works here can share in the benefits of its success - has been in place for a number of years now. With the cost of living crisis having an impact on all residents, and particularly those on the lowest incomes, it has never been more important for the Council to take the lead in supporting our communities, especially those who need our help the most.

As such, we continue to invest in Reading's unrivalled voluntary sector. They do an incredible job in helping us reach and support those communities and individuals that need our help the most, opening up new opportunities and breaking down the barriers which hold people back.

We also continue, at pace, our biggest council house building programme in a generation, with hundreds more affordable council homes on the horizon, including ones for elderly and vulnerable residents and our key workers. For existing tenants, retrofitting of their Council homes will make them more energy efficient and cheaper to heat.

Homeless services remain under pressure. However, our innovative modular homes mean we are well placed, not only to provide people with a roof over their heads for the night, but to help them get back on their feet with 24/7 support over a sustained period.

We are also continuing with our programme of investment by delivering modern new facilities for our residents. This is what residents have consistently told us to focus on.

Our biggest ever programme of road and pavement repairs continues.

Our modern new community pool at Palmer Park is now open, and our new flagship pool and leisure centre at Rivermead will follow later this year.

Our brand-new station at Green Park also opens to the public in 2023, while we will soon have completed the transformation of Reading West station - both projects undertaken in partnership with the rail industry.

We are starting work on significant improvements to our culture offer with major works to the Hexagon and the reprovisioning of Central Library.

And as we push towards our 2030 net zero carbon target, we are providing realistic alternatives to the private car by building major new segregated cycle lanes, as well as continuing to invest in our award-winning bus services.

Our Corporate Plan tells our story - both what we have achieved and what we hope to achieve in the year ahead.

It also recognises the huge importance of partnership working. Partnerships which include the businesses and employers driving our local economy; major institutions such as the University of Reading and the Royal Berkshire Hospital; Reading's incredible voluntary sector; and of course, our residents. The 2050 Vision is a result of that work, and it's a vision that has influenced this plan.

Our Reading



Reading's population is **174,200**¹



5,107
children on
Free School
Meals²



5
neighbourhoods are
within the 10% most
deprived in the country³



Relatively young
population, with
17.7%
aged under 15⁴



2nd
best place to
live in UK's top
36 economic
areas⁵



3rd
most unequal city
in terms of wealth⁶



77
languages
spoken in homes
across Reading⁷



Ranked in the top **5** UK
cities for good economic
growth⁸



6.8 years



7.8 years

Difference in life expectancy between
most and least deprived areas⁹



Unemployment
down from 5% to
4.2%¹⁰



100%
of council maintained schools
rated good or outstanding...¹¹

... but **4.5%** of young
people are not in education,
employment or training -
below the national average¹²



Made fastest economic
recovery and fastest
growing economy over
last 20 years¹³

1. ONS Census 2021 2. School Census 2022/23 3. Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 ONS 4. ONS Census 2021 5. PWC/Demos 6. Centre for Cities, gini co-efficient 2016
7. ONS Census 2021 8. Demos-PWC Good Growth for Cities Index 2019 9. Institute of Health Equity/PHE 2018-2020 10. ONS Oct 21-Oct 22 11. Ofsted 2022
12. DfE, Dec - Feb 2020/21 13. Ernst & Young Economic Forecast

Our Vision



"Our 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."



To make this vision happen, this Plan groups the Council's work into three themes:

- *Healthy Environment*
- *Thriving Communities*
- *Inclusive Economy*



Within the Council, we are driven by the principles of **TEAM Reading**:



Together

We work together as one team with colleagues and partners to deliver great services

Our Foundations

Our foundations underpin how our services are delivered. They are:

- **Customers first:** Our Customer Experience Strategy puts our customers at the heart of service design and delivery, and we seek regular feedback through consultations and our residents' survey.
- **Digital transformation:** Both internally and externally, we're transforming how we work using the power of digital technology. We're modernising services and harnessing new technology to make it easier for residents to interact with us. We're improving our website, streamlining processes and making more services available online.
- **Building self-reliance:** We work with others to build the ability of individuals and communities to solve their own problems and withstand the shocks that come their way. We provide support to those who need it – but our first priority is always to help people live independently for as long as possible.
- **Getting the best value:** We strive for value for money in everything we do, and we are focussed on delivering the Council's three-year Savings and Investment Programme. But the best deal is not always the cheapest – it's the one that protects people, jobs, the environment and the budget. So, we're also evolving our procurement practices to enhance the social value in all we do.
- **Collaborating with others:** We are stronger in partnership and we collaborate with organisations from major corporations to local groups; with the business sector, charities, education institutions, health and social care, the police, faith groups, and the voluntary sector in Reading and across the Thames Valley to achieve our vision for Reading. We are building on the work done during the pandemic to consolidate partnerships and ensure a stronger network to support the most vulnerable.

Efficient

We drive efficiency and value for money in everything we do

Ambitious

We are ambitious in our plans and in what we want to achieve

Make a difference

We are here to make a difference to the residents, communities and businesses of Reading

Our Achievements

We are proud of the achievements and investments we have delivered over the past 12 months and will continue to build on these successes:



Invested £3.75 million in repairing and improving over 50 kilometres of roads and pavements.



Gained Thames & Chilterns in Bloom Gold and Silver Gilt Awards for Forbury Gardens and Caversham Court Gardens.



Invested over £550k in the new Ranger Station at Prospect Park including a Reading themed mini golf, indoor ropes centre and Changing Places facility.



Secured 485K funding to deliver the Community Vaccine Champions Project (that created and supports a network of 50 health champions to inform and support diverse local communities to take up the offer of a vaccine).



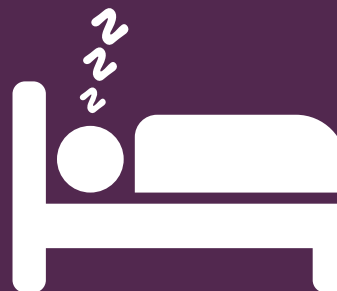
Received £26m in investment to improve bus services and over £2.5m investment into providing improved cycle facilities.



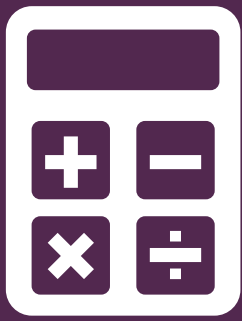
Supported and advised more than 2,400 Reading residents through the Adult Social Care Advice & Wellbeing Hub.



Welcomed 136 Ukrainian households, under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and offered accommodation to 16 Afghan families through the Afghan Resettlement scheme, in partnership with Southern Housing Group.



Awarded £2.8m in successful rough sleeping funding bid to continue to fund specialist accommodation and support for people with a complex history of rough sleeping and to provide a Housing First move on provision.



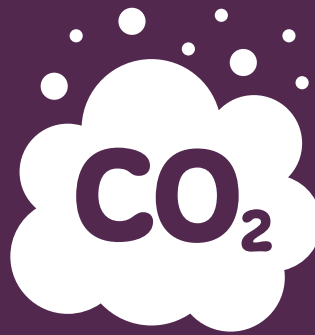
New Directions College secured £700,000 over three years to improve the numeracy skills of adults as part of the Multiply programme.



Completed the new six-lane community pool at Palmer Park Leisure Centre and Stadium and improvement works at South Reading Leisure Centre and Meadway Leisure Centre. Continued building Rivermead's new 25 metre, eight-lane competition pool with a combined teaching and diving pool.



Over 20,000 cost of living vouchers provided to vulnerable residents.



Achieved 4th largest reduction in carbon footprint in the UK; the Council has reduced its corporate emissions by 71.3% since 2008/09.



Invested £1.1m in bereavement services, including two new cremators as part of a major refurbishment of the crematorium.



Awarded £19.1m to revitalise the Hexagon and Central Library.



Supported 1,325 children attending 8,958 Holiday Activity Fund sessions in the summer holidays.



Over 400 children and young people offered mental health and emotional wellbeing therapeutic assessments and interventions in the last quarter.



Purchased 5 new electric waste vehicles.



Piloted digital technology to help keep people in their homes.



Planted 351 trees.

Residents' Survey Results

In summer 2022, the Council undertook a survey with a representative sample of 1,000 Reading residents to gauge levels of satisfaction with the local area, the Council and the services it provides, in order to inform corporate and service planning. Here is a summary of the key findings:

63% were satisfied with the way Reading Borough Council runs things overall.

47% agreed that Reading Borough Council provides value for money.

57% felt Reading Borough Council acts on the concerns of local residents a great deal or a fair amount.

The residents' survey highlighted several areas for improvement. We set out below what we are doing in response:

- **Roads and pavements** - we have delivered a £9 million three-year highways repair scheme and have commenced an additional £8 million road and pavement investment programme.
 - ◇ Over 400 residential roads have been resurfaced as part of year 1 and 2 (2020/21 to 2021/22) in the three-year-programme with a further 100 expected in year 3 (2022/23).
 - ◇ 34 pavements have been reconstructed as part of year 1 and 2 (2020/21 to 2021/22) in the three-year-programme with a further 50 expected to be reconstructed in year 3 (2022/23).
- **Levels of crime** - a new three-year Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy has been approved following a needs assessment and public consultation capturing the voices of our communities and involving key agencies such as the police and probation. Seven priorities have been identified including reducing community based drug activity, reducing knife violence and tackling violence against women and girls. The Community Safety Partnership is now developing a three-year action plan to tackle these priorities. The plan will deliver a number of actions through working in partnership across these key areas.
- **Traffic congestion** - we are improving bus services and delivering more bus lanes through the £26 million Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) grant funding secured from Government, building a new station at Green Park and refurbishing Reading West Station as well as investing in cycling improvements and enhancements for pedestrians. We are investing in our traffic signal assets as well as moving to a 4G radar vehicle detection monitoring system, and updating the Urban Traffic Control systems that will improve traffic flows, reduce congestion and reduce pollution levels.
- **Affordable housing** - we are investing a further £105 million in the delivery of 290 homes over the next three years, as well as securing nomination rights to around 400 new affordable homes through the planning process over the next four years.
- **Cleaner streets** - a free bulky waste collection service has been introduced for all residents across the borough. For Reading town centre, we will be investigating how, through our street cleansing and waste collection services, we can reduce the persistent presentation of bagged waste. This will then be rolled out to local shopping centres. In addition, we are investing in a new works scheduling system to improve efficiencies and communications for operational teams within Streetscene.
- **Parking** - we continue to address smaller-scale parking issues raised or observed through the Waiting Restriction Review programmes and consider further rollout of resident permit parking schemes where there is demonstrable majority local support to do so. We have also commissioned a review of the Council's Town Centre Parking Strategy.





Your Services

Reading Borough Council is committed to delivering high quality public services that meet the needs of our residents and businesses, and demonstrate value for money. The areas below outline some of the key work we do to provide services vital to Reading and its communities:

- Maintaining more than 100 parks and open spaces – mowing the grass, tending plants and trees and maintaining equipment.
- Looking after streets and neighbourhoods, from emptying more than 18,800 bins a day to maintaining 18,500 streetlights.
- Continuing to rewild and plant trees in our open spaces and park areas to enhance biodiversity and improve our environment.
- Developing our library network to provide innovative local services in person and online.
- Collaborating with partners to create a cultural programme for the whole community celebrating our rich history and heritage, including our historic Abbey and shaping the future of Reading's iconic Gaol.
- The Council owns just under 7,000 social housing properties which it rents to tenants at an affordable rent and continues to provide housing advice and support to prevent homelessness to over 450 households a year.
- Helping people live independently at home for as long as possible and providing more than 37,000 homecare hours per month.
- Providing the right help at the right time through Brighter Futures for Children, to support every Reading child to have a safe, happy, healthy and successful life by:
 - ◇ Delivering early help, children's social care and youth offending services. We look after 250 children.
 - ◇ Delivering education services and support to schools, children and families, including special education needs and disability (SEND).
- Delivering our strategy to reduce inequality through an innovative place-based approach and focus on skills, education and training.
- Delivering high quality education and training for adults through New Directions.
- Providing Housing Benefit and Council Tax support, and delivering a broad range of advice and support for residents, businesses, and voluntary and community groups experiencing financial difficulties as a result of the current cost of living crisis.
- Responding to 340,000 enquiries a year through our customer fulfilment centre, from Council Tax enquiries to housing repairs.
- Administering important life events with around 8,000 registrations for births, deaths and marriages every year. Supporting 2,200 families to say goodbye to loved ones through our burials and cremation service.
- Processing over 700 planning applications a year, including major developments.
- Dealing with over 7,000 service requests in Public Protection, including 2,500 regarding nuisance and noise, as well as conducting 700 food hygiene and standards inspections and processing over 600 premises licenses.



Reading
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Our Themes

We've listened to what residents, businesses and our partners and stakeholders have said about their experience of Reading, and their hopes and aspirations for the town.

In this year's residents' survey we heard that the majority of residents are satisfied with how the Council runs services in Reading, but would like to see more action taken on key issues. Through consultation on our major change initiatives – such as the Local Transport Plan and the Climate Emergency Strategy – we know we have the support of residents and partners to make the changes we all want to see.

We will make this change happen by focusing on three interconnected themes:





Healthy Environment

We are working towards a clean, safe town that is easy to travel around, and where people feel the benefits of clean air and active travel like walking and cycling.

A healthy environment has a positive impact on the life of every resident – making Reading a nicer, greener, more attractive place to live, with a tangible impact on physical and mental health and life expectancy. We consider this in our town planning and built environment to ensure residents live close to services to enable active travel rather than reliance on cars.

We are investing in walking, cycling, and public transport; tackling congestion; increasing recycling rates; and improving parks and open spaces.

We are promoting the climate ambitions of our residents and have been making an impact in the global arena.

Our plans shows a roadmap to carbon neutral Reading by 2030, that will protect our residents now and in the future.

We are:

Listening to feedback from our residents' survey and transport consultations, and making increased investments in green infrastructure.

Making it easy for people to play their part through the choices they make about their transport and waste.

Committed to playing our part in tackling climate change and working towards our goal of a carbon neutral town by 2030.

Key initiatives:

- Reading Borough Council is a founding member and host of the Reading Climate Change Partnership and endorsed the Partnership's Climate Emergency Strategy which sets out a road map towards a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.
- Our Council Carbon Plan 2020-25 outlines a pathway to an 85% cut in the Council's emissions by 2025, including energy saving in our buildings, a greener vehicle fleet, and renewable energy initiatives.
- In 2022 Reading was named as one of only 19 UK local authorities, and one of just 122 across the world, to make a coveted 'A' list for bold climate leadership and transparency. This accolade demonstrates our long track record of partnership working on climate change. We aim to maintain that status.
- Our priority for the coming years is to continue to reduce our carbon footprint and make our infrastructure and communities greener and more resilient.
- We are increasing our commitment to tree planting in the borough aiming to plant at least 3,000 'standard' trees by 2030 on Council land and increase overall canopy cover to 25% by 2030, as well as ensuring that all wards have at least 12% canopy cover by 2030.
- Our Local Transport Plan prioritises investments in walking and cycling initiatives, public transport and electric vehicle infrastructure that will make it easier for residents to make healthy choices and feel the benefits of clean, green neighbourhoods. Working with schools, we have already set up some School Streets in communities to ensure children can walk to lessons safely.
- Weekly kerbside food waste collections, better information on recycling, reducing the size of 'residual waste' bins and increased enforcement has already seen an increase in recycling rates and will continue to do so. The introduction of electric vehicles in our recycling fleet will reduce our carbon emissions even further.
- Our Health and Wellbeing Strategy provides more support for mental wellbeing for children, young people and adults. It also aims to reduce the differences in health between different groups of residents and support those who are at high risk of poor health outcomes.
- We will tackle flytipping in the borough by monitoring sites using cameras and taking action against those that flytip. We are also working with our businesses to ensure they are legally disposing of their waste.



Thriving Communities

It's you, the people of Reading, who make our town an exciting and diverse place to live and work.

Our aspiration is that this spirit of inclusivity and community is carried into every aspect of life in Reading, wherever people live and whatever their stage of life.

In public consultations and in our residents' survey, you have told us what is important, and we are prioritising the issues that matter, like affordable housing, better roads and pavements and the level of crime.

With an increased focus on inclusion, we will prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable and

excluded in our communities, ensuring young people, older people and those with long term health conditions or disabilities are supported to live their best lives.

We will ensure that what we do reflects what is needed, we want everyone to feel able to participate and feel they can influence decisions that affect their lives and local areas.

We know that where there is greater connectivity in communities, residents feel safer and are more resilient against risk or harm. This connectedness also enhances a sense of belonging and wellbeing.

We are:

Committed to tackling inequality in our society, to ensure everyone has an equal chance to thrive wherever they live and whatever their economic, social, cultural, ethnic or religious background.

Investing in voluntary and community organisations, building relationships and strengthening the capacity and resilience of the sector.

Prioritising the needs of the most marginalised groups and the most vulnerable adults and children in our communities.

Taking a place based approach to improving employment, training, and skills in areas where need is greatest and addressing the legacy of the pandemic by tackling mental health issues and social inclusion.

Key initiatives:

- We are building 290 new affordable, energy efficient homes over the next four years. This £105m investment in home building will help reduce the housing waiting list and provide affordable rent properties to Reading's residents, including provision for sheltered housing, key workers and those on the housing register.
- A £2m investment in temporary modular homes is allowing us to house people who had been found sleeping rough, giving them the opportunity to rebuild their lives and receive essential support.
- We are investing £51m in Adult Social Care services, predominantly from within the Housing Revenue Account, to build new day services, supported living flats and respite services for our service users
- We are redeveloping the Minster Quarter, which sits in the heart of Reading town centre. This will create a major new residential led mixed-use urban and cultural quarter in the heart of Reading.
- We are working in partnership with the Department for Education in building schools and improving conditions to meet the future needs of our children and ensure access to education with £33 million invested into our schools over the next three years.
- We have produced a new Community Safety Plan in partnership with Thames Valley Police to focus on reducing serious violent crime and improving community engagement.
- The home first approach to our Adult Social Care provision means residents can be supported to manage their conditions and remain at home for as long as possible, including after discharge from hospital.
- We are increasing the range of Technology Enabled Care for residents to enable them to live independently in the community.
- Residents who are under the care of Adult Social Care are able to receive Direct Payments to allow them to commission their own care, which is tailored to their needs.
- The Council is funding its Children's Services provider, Brighter Futures for Children, to focus on earlier intervention, provide local care placements where possible, excellent teaching and learning and more local school places for children with Special Educational Needs and or Disabilities.
- Our £40m investment in leisure centres continues with the new Rivermead Leisure Centre, creating accessible, affordable opportunities for residents to improve their physical and mental health. We are working to ensure that our cultural offerings are inclusive and engage all our communities.
- The Community Vaccine Champions Project will develop and sustain its network of 50 champions to become Community Health Champions that support health improvement and health protection at a place based community level.
- The implementation plans of the Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy will deliver a range of health improvement activity that aims to: reduce the differences in health between different groups of people; support individuals at high risk of poor health outcomes to live healthy lives; help children and families in early years; and promote good mental health and wellbeing.
- Our Compass Recovery Team will continue to offer free lower level mental health and wellbeing workshops for anyone who may be affected directly or indirectly by mental health or wellbeing challenges within the community.



Inclusive Economy

We're working towards a town where everyone can access education, skills and training and good jobs and where child poverty is eradicated.

An inclusive economy enhances wellbeing with more opportunities for more people to participate in the growth and success of the town.

We will continue to work with our community and voluntary sector partners to ensure that we support our communities where they need us most.

The town is dealing with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, as well as recovering from the impact of covid-19. As with any crisis, the most vulnerable have been the hardest hit. We don't yet know how quickly the economy will recover and the extent to which people will face long term harm as a result.

Our priority is to support the most vulnerable in our communities and to lay the groundwork for a strong economic recovery.

We are:

Building on our cultural heritage to enhance our tourist industry, creating an amazing place for people to enjoy.

Enhancing education, skills and training opportunities, particularly for our more vulnerable residents.

Investing in key infrastructure to keep Reading at the forefront of advances in technology.

Key initiatives:

- Working with Reading Economy and Destination Agency (REDA) to deliver the 'Powered by People' economic recovery strategy, building back a post-covid economy that is more inclusive, smarter and more sustainable, and that tackles local unemployment.
- We have listened to our vibrant Voluntary and Community Sector and awarded contracts worth £1.205m a year to support those most in need through our Closing the Gap commissioning process. We have also delivered the annual Small Grants Programme, awarding 49 grants totalling £200,000 for community-led activities addressing the impacts of poverty and supporting mental wellbeing. Providing more training opportunities and building employment skills through programmes such as our Skills and Employment Youth Hub at The Curious Lounge, run by Brighter Futures for Children, in partnership with JobCentre Plus and others as well as putting additional funding into literacy and numeracy catch up lessons in schools.
- Increasing the number of apprenticeships and work experience placements within the Council and providing a new coaching and mentoring scheme for work experience students.
- Investing in the culture and heritage offer of the town including maximising opportunities created by screen industries in Berkshire, shaping the future of Reading Gaol and enhancing our heritage with High Street Heritage Action Zones.
- Investing in public transport and active travel measures which provide affordable and accessible options to access education, employment, health and leisure destinations, whilst reducing carbon emissions and congestion and improving air quality by taking more private cars off the road.
- Embedding and increasing social value through our purchasing power to ensure that the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of Reading benefits through our contracts over and above the goods or services being procured. An example is the installing and improvement of the digital connectivity of our community buildings, with Wi-Fi and new schemes to lend and provide use of IT equipment.
- The Council has signed the Business in the Community's Race at Work Charter, and committed to working with others to promote social inclusion at the Council and across Reading.
- We will deliver key improvements to our libraries: by focusing on supporting our communities, especially children and young people; improving access to online services; supporting improvements in health, wellbeing and literacy, and bringing arts, culture and heritage into our libraries.





We'll know we're successful when:

- Our residents tell us they are more satisfied with Reading as a place to live as well as with the services and value for money that are delivered by the Council.
- Reading's economic success is shared more equally, and all local people can access the skills, training and jobs they need.
- Measures of inequality between groups and communities – such as life expectancy and unemployment – are declining.
- Our most vulnerable adults and children have the support they need.
- There is a reduction in the demand for children's services from Early Help and Social Care.
- More people choose to walk, cycle and use public transport because it is easy, safe and convenient and a greener, more attractive alternative.
- Carbon emissions continue to fall, and we hit our climate milestones.
- Relationships between partners in the town – businesses, local institutions, the voluntary sector and the Council – are stronger and more productive.
- Adult Social Care services support more people at an early stage to remain independent.



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