

## COUNCIL MEETING – 30 JANUARY 2024

### QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

1. Councillor Moore to ask the Lead Councillor for Corporate Services and Resources:  
**Cyber Security**

For some months, the Council was recommending residents disable their web browser security settings to access the Planning Applications Portal. I'm pleased to see this issue has now been fixed through the application of a security certificate.

However, in light of this poor advice which was criticised by international security experts such as Troy Hunt, a well-known expert on digital security; and the recent cyber attack on Gloucester City Council, can the Lead Councillor for this area please explain what concrete steps the Council is taking to prove to residents that it takes their cyber security, and its own cyber security seriously, including achieving the Cyber Essentials certification (it is stated in the Strategic Risk Register that this would be achieved by end of 22/23 but as of writing this question it has not been achieved according to the Cyber Essentials certification website) and any NCSC (National Cyber Security Centre) checks that may be taking place regularly ?

**REPLY** by Councillor Terry Lead Councillor for Corporate Services and Resources.

The Council has an established programme of work to address the growing and evolving threat of cyber attack, and a team including a dedicated cyber security officer, supplemented with additional technical project resources, is in place to deliver that programme.

The concrete steps being taken by that programme can be considered in three categories: the introduction of protective measures, active monitoring for threats and vulnerabilities, and the application of best practice standards including those set by the National Cyber Security Centre (or NCSC).

In the first of those categories, new protective measures introduced in the last two years include:

- the implementation of new internet and email gateway products offering enhanced protection against external attack;
- the introduction of multi-factor authentication for login to council systems to protect their security;
- the provision of secure public WiFi at council buildings including content filtering to ensure that content is safe and appropriate, implemented to Government standards including those set by PREVENT;
- the introduction of mandatory annual cyber security training for staff;
- the definition of mandatory cyber security standards applied to the procurement of new IT products and services;
- and the procurement of insurance against cyber security attack, a process which included an assessment by our insurers of the adequacy of our security controls.

Turning to the second category, given the constantly evolving nature of both technology and the cyber threat, monitoring of threats and vulnerabilities is critical.

We monitor and act on the following threat intelligence feeds, which provide us with information about new types of attack:

- the NCSC Early Warning System;
- the NCSC Cyber Information Sharing Partnership;
- SEGWARP: the South East Government Warning, Advisory and Reporting Point;
- and monitoring of the dark web provided by our cyber security insurers

We monitor our systems for vulnerabilities through penetration testing: the employment of experts who seek to defeat our protection mechanisms. We use two penetration testing providers:

- We have an annual penetration test undertaken by an independent external organisation with NCSC certification, an example of the regular NCSC checking mentioned in the question. In the most recent penetration test of our systems – in January 2024 – the testers were unable to penetrate our systems and our warning systems successfully detected their attack attempts. This was a very strong result.
- This annual independent testing is supplemented by monthly penetration testing by the security team within our hosting and end user computing provider Agilisys.

Turning finally to the category of best practice, we are targeting compliance with three levels of assurance.

Firstly, we are compliant with the Public Sector Network (or PSN) requirements set by the Cabinet Office. Such compliance is a prerequisite for connection to certain government systems including those of DWP. Compliance requires annual certification based on a detailed assessment of security controls, vulnerabilities and remediation plans against the constantly evolving threat environment. Following a review of our submission, the Cabinet Office unconditionally renewed our PSN certificate in December 2023, providing clear assurance of the strength of our cyber security position.

Secondly, as the question notes, we are targeting compliance with the Cyber Essentials standard, a significant undertaking for a large and complex organisation. We commissioned an independent assessment of our compliance with the standard in November 2023. This found that we were compliant with 90 out of the 96 controls in the standard. One of the non-compliances has already been addressed. Compliance with the other five is dependent on two things. The first dependency is the completion of in-flight projects that are replacing legacy applications that predate current security standards. Note that the risks associated with these are mitigated by the protective measures that were the subject of the recent successful penetration test. The second dependency is the completion of a review of all web-based applications by Council services, the need for which was introduced in the most recent update of the Cyber Essentials standard. Risks in this area are limited and do not involve any threat to our business-critical systems. We are expecting both these dependencies to have been completed this summer.

Finally, the Council is one of eight Councils that successfully applied to be part of the DLUHC Future Councils programme, which included piloting the application of the draft Local Government profile of NCSC's Cyber Assurance Framework. This is seen by DLUHC as the future required standard for local government. As part of that pilot, we are going through an independent assessment of our cyber security position against that new draft standard. That

assessment is still in progress but has not so far identified the need for any remedial action that is not already in hand.

2. Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety:

### **Greens Urge the Council to get on with Glass Recycling**

Glass bottles pile up in front gardens and are then sometimes thrown into grey bins or dumped. Green Councillors are again urging the Council to bring forward a doorstep glass recycling scheme to boost recycling.

How much glass is in the average grey bin in Reading?

What progress has the Council made on doorstep glass recycling recently?

When will the Council be able to pick up glass from everyone's doorstep?

**REPLY** by Councillor Rowland Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety.

I'd like to thank Councillor White for his question which allows me an excellent opportunity to update the public as to Reading's position with kerbside glass recycling.

Glass represents up to 5% of our overall 50% recycling rate. Despite our latest analyses indicating that only 4% of our grey bins and only 1.92% of our red bin contamination is glass, I do share your opinion that in an ideal world these numbers would be at zero.

I've taken the liberty of publishing below our annual "binfographic" below, which highlights greater recyclable waste issues in our bins beyond glass. I hope this alerts Green Party Councillors to the real challenges we are facing with getting recyclable waste out of our recycling and residual waste bins. Reducing this recyclable waste can save significant money – and reduce what is disposed of largely through Energy for Waste (EfW).

Labour Councillors are committed to maximising recycling. Whilst we understand the desire for a kerbside glass collection, we also recognise that our bottle banks around the Borough are well used by many residents and that service design needs careful thought to prevent a new issue of glass collection noise disturbing greater numbers of residents.

As the first town in this country to establish a comprehensive town-wide glass bank system in the late 1970s, we have 49 glass bank sites across the Borough, as well as at Smallmead. Whilst we understand kerbside glass recycling will be appreciated by many, we always knew that there would be significant and potentially costly changes to changing to a kerbside collection. We know broken glass also plays havoc with vehicles, machinery and collection systems requiring potentially expensive on-going maintenance along the entirety of the collection stream route. Labour Councillors have always appreciated that cost and along with our Re3 partners, have chosen not to proceed until we knew the financial implications. I trust you will understand in the current financial climate, this was a prudent path to take.

By way of background, the Environment Act was passed on 15 November 2021. Finally, in late October 2023, the Government published its' response to the consultation on Simpler Recycling which included their long-overdue requirement for kerbside glass recycling. That Government guidance stated it expects Councils to provide residential kerbside recycling from 31 March 2026. However, the financials of kerbside glass recycling - which is the part we really need to understand remains vague. It was advised that the first bit of funding to help us with that conversion will only begin to arrive in December 2025- a mere four months before this costly

conversion and implementation is expected to be completed! Extenuating circumstances at the national government level aside, it is largely expected that this funding will fall short of the costs to fully implement the conversion. Along with Bracknell Forest and Wokingham Borough, we still foresee significant challenges in mounting an efficient and affordable glass collection service while uncertainties remain about the funding.

Given the financial implications and the relatively low- level of contamination in comparison to other recyclables that we are working to drive down, I believe, Councillor White, that patience in this case is a virtue. The Re3 Board, with me serving as its current Chair, received an update at our meeting on the 11th of January around the options to address this requirement. We could go the route alone without our partners, but we consider that our most financially wise position is to look at routes that we can take along with Wokingham and Bracknell to collectively share best practice and deliver economies of scale. These options will consider a wide range of alternatives from collecting glass co-mingled with dry recycling to other separate collection stream alternatives. I will be delighted to provide an update on the Council’s position once the FCC and Re3 have had the opportunity to look at the best route for kerbside glass collections and once we and our partners have had a chance to consider our best and wisest options.



**3. Councillor White to ask the Leader of the Council:  
Israel Gaza War and Council Action**

Greens are deeply concerned about the tens of thousands of civilian deaths in Gaza from Israel’s military action. We condemn the terrible Hamas attack of 7th October. Greens support an immediate, lasting ceasefire in Gaza and the return of all hostages. We were disappointed that neither Matt Rodda MP nor Alok Sharma MP supported the ceasefire motion in November.

Previously, at the 27th January 2009 Full Council Meeting, it was resolved as part of Councillor Lovelock’s amended ‘Israeli invasion of Gaza’ motion to look at the Council’s purchasing and other policies to bring pressure to bear on governments that breach international law and

companies that knowingly facilitate such breaches. Please can we get an update on what action was taken following this motion and what the Council plans to do on this in the future.

**REPLY** by Councillor Brock Leader of the Council.

I am happy to provide an update on this.

Since that Council meeting, Reading Borough Council has continued to enforce all legislation, in respect of its purchasing and procurement activity, pertaining to international law. This includes subsequently introduced Legislation, including the EU Public Contract Regulations 2015 (as amended), the Bribery Act 2010, and the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

We continue to ensure that companies who supply our goods or services have not been convicted of criminal offences including terrorist offences, money laundering, fraud, child labour or human trafficking. All these areas are key to the principles of upholding international law.

We have recently updated our Contract Procurement Rules to ensure we continue to adhere to UK Government purchasing and procurement policies including the UK National Procurement Policy Statement and applicable Procurement Policy Notes (PPNs). In October this year, the UK Procurement Act 2023 is expected to come into effect, and this will enhance our ability to deliver policy through our procurement activity by way of mandating the integration of policy aims into our contract specifications, and being clear on our expectations of our suppliers in supporting such policy aims.

The Council will continue to develop these approaches, and to work with a supply base that continues to align to the ambitions that it holds.