



<b>Title</b>	Safer Reading Review
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To make a decision
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Report author</b>	Jason Murphy. Community Safety Manager
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Councillor Rowland
<b>Corporate priority</b>	Thriving Communities
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. The proposed refreshed structure for the geographical Safer Neighbourhood Forums is approved to ensure the Forums are operating in line with the Council's Constitution.

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out recommendations to restructure the current model for the Safer Reading Neighbourhood Forum and geographically based Safer Neighbourhood Forums (SNFs). The report addresses how residents engage with the forums to reduce crime and disorder and to address the perception and fear of crime in Reading. This follows discussions held at the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Executive Group Meeting in September 2023 and ongoing dialogue with SNF Chairs.
- 1.2 The Safer Reading Neighbourhood Forum received a briefing on 18 January 2024 from the Community Safety Manager on the limited level of participation in the current Forums, the absence of any Forums in certain areas, and limitations on the support Reading Borough Council Officers can provide to the current programme of Forums. This was also discussed at the Safer Reading Neighbourhood Forum on 17 April 2024. The proposal is that these changes will progress to the Community Safety Partnership Meeting on July 18th, subject to agreement.
- 1.3 The review itself and work to better understand the status of each meeting follows on from the review of Reading's Community Safety Partnership and the introduction of its new strategy at the beginning of January 2023. This was supported by proposals put to the Reading Community Safety Partnership on 14 September 2023. Since then, an informal review of the forums has taken place, with fresh impetus provided to support the Safer Reading Neighbourhood Forum.
- 1.4 This document sets out the importance of putting communication and community engagement at the heart of reducing crime and the fear of crime by utilising the existing forums as fully advertised public meetings and expanding into other geographical areas of the town, in order to:
  - Encourage greater engagement with all communities and demographics.
  - Achieve a demonstrable impact on issues of crime and disorder and perception.
  - Strengthen links between problem solving meetings and communities to deliver collaborative problem-solving approaches.

- Improve communications about the work happening in local areas to tackle crime and disorder.
- Move away from a “one size fits all” approach to working flexibly with communities on this agenda and making more efficient use of resources and tools available across the partnership.
- Raise the profile of the CSP and strengthen links with communities to enable them to influence direction.

1.5 The programme of work to implement the new model, expand into new geographical areas and to review the span of existing forum areas (see appendix two) where forums may be too big, will be reviewed annually at the Safer Reading Neighbourhood Forum and progress reported on to the Reading Community Safety Partnership Executive Group.

## **2. Policy Context**

2.1. Reading’s Safer Reading Neighbourhood Forum, commonly known as the “Safer Neighbourhood Chairs Forum”, as it is an invitation only meeting for SNF Chairs, Councillors, the Police, and critical agencies has been a longstanding mechanism for how the Community Safety Partnership engages with residents, with the Partnership being responsible for overseeing its activities, as set out in the Council’s Constitution.

2.2. The overarching Safer Reading Neighbourhood Forum’s responsibilities are:

- To reduce crime and the fear of crime in Reading by establishing and supporting geographically based Safer Neighbourhood Forums.
- To develop and support geographically based Safer Neighbourhood Forums which will involve the Police, Councillors, Council Staff, residents, and other agencies to develop effective local problem-solving responses to identified local priorities and where appropriate those which are contained in the Community Safety Plans
- To encourage collaboration across Reading on how best to address local issues through the sharing of best practice and jointly run projects.

2.3. In addition to overseeing the Forum’s functions, the Community Safety Partnership has relied on the main Forum and its associated geographically based Safer Neighbourhood Forums to be the Partnership’s “face to face” mechanism for communicating, consulting, and engaging with residents about crime and disorder and CSP priorities, i.e.: reduce crime in the top crime-generating neighbourhoods; improve the way the CSP works with communities to tackle ASB and hate crime; reduce community-based drug-related activity; reduce knife violence; tackle organised crime gangs transporting illegal drugs across Reading’s borders (‘county lines’); improve safety for women in public places and reduce sexually focussed crime and ASB; and develop a strategy to reduce persistent offending.

## **3. The Proposal**

3.1. Since the above framework was established there have been multiple changes to staffing and resources among partners, as well as other changes affecting the consistency and capacity of each meeting. Over time it has been necessary for the Forums increasingly to ‘self-serve’ with regard to finding and booking venues, sending agendas, capturing, and circulating action points, and dealing with other logistical challenges.

3.2. In response to the above changes, a focussed review has been conducted to understand the reach of the forums, their apparent impact, and the contribution they are making at present to the CSP’s wider problem-solving approach and engagement with all communities. The review considered:

- Data on attendance numbers for the current Forums

- SNF Review Workshop 19/01/2024 with the Chairs of the forums and partners to assess impact made by forums.
- Feedback from the Community Safety Survey, which asked specific questions about how residents would like to interact with the CSP.

3.3. There are currently functioning Forums in the following areas – North Reading, Coley, East Reading, Oxford Road, West Reading and Southcote and the review has identified the following issues with the operation of the current model:

#### 3.3.1. **Limited participation:**

- It has proved difficult for some Forums to implement in practice the vision of genuinely open meetings which all residents can attend. This is partly as a result of, issues raised around data protection that limited the distribution of membership lists, a reliance on information which is not regularly updated and refreshed, and the absence of a consistent level of support from the Council including publicising meetings effectively.
- Recent attendance figures reflect an overall low number of attendees, at times made up of a heavier balance of Councillors and Officers than Residents. Some Forum chairs report spikes in attendance as certain issues become the subject of intensive focus. Overall, however the aspiration is to increase participation, including a rise in the number of attendees who usually coalesce into a `core' membership in the evolution of such meetings.
- It is clear that the current Forums are not intended to exclude the wider public – due to a number of logistical factors however, they currently operate in what could be perceived as a relatively `closed' way. The distribution lists for invited attendees are often out of date, meaning invites can be sent only to those with prior knowledge, whether invested in attending or not.
- The principle of open access has also been compromised by the limited levels of support with communications and publicity provided by the Council, concerns about data-sharing, and changes in Council and Thames Valley Police structures and priorities which have affected these partners' ability to provide sustained and focused support.

#### 3.3.2. **Lack of strong strategic links to the CSP:**

- From recent observation the focus of some meetings has been mainly on long-standing specific local issues determined by information gleaned from longstanding, older Community Safety Surveys with little or no reference to the wider goals of the CSP. Whilst a focus on local concerns is natural and indeed desirable, these issues` ideally also need to be linked more clearly to the CSP's wider strategic aims. This can be compounded where there is a lack of specific metrics to track improvements on issues back to. The focus on problem solving with all residents is no longer always the focus of every meeting – and, for example there is sometimes very limited time on agendas for residents to raise new concerns.
- As a result, the emphasis on problem-solving set out in the Constitution has arguably been weakened, creating a risk that Forums are experienced more as information-sharing sessions than as a space where new concerns can be raised and where response to previously raised concerns can be shared, including outcomes which have been achieved through actions agreed at earlier Forums.

#### 3.3.3. **Inconsistent priorities:**

- Not all Forums include a specific `You Said, We Did' update item to allow partners to brief residents on actions which have been progressed between

meetings. When such practices are not adopted for the geographical meetings, chances can be missed to provide reassurances about partners' activities since the previous meeting, and to clearly demonstrate the benefits of the Forums themselves by setting out the clear link between the raising of concerns and particular actions which have followed to address them.

#### **3.3.4. Limited logistical support from RBC:**

- The overall number of meetings has also led to the resources for support which are available being spread too thinly, and a blurring of the distinction between the recognised SNFs and other gatherings. The combined effect of all these factors constitutes an impediment to the Forums fulfilling their purpose as set out in the Constitution.
- Since before the Covid pandemic, the meetings in the East and North have been supported administratively by the Police, which is increasingly unsustainable as resources have been pared back. Some of the other forums have been supported by the RBC Neighbourhood Initiatives Team, which has now disbanded following an internal restructure designed to better address issues and support an asset-based community development approach within communities. The Neighbourhood Initiatives Team has been replaced by the new Sustainable Communities Team, which is now a community development focussed team but has not to date been assigned a role in supporting the administration of the Forums.

#### **3.3.5. Other factors identified:**

- The geographically based Safer Neighbourhood Forums, which are chaired by local residents and administered by Thames Valley Police and the Council, have been delivered in a number of incarnations over a period spanning approximately 20 years, changing from Forums to Neighbourhood Action Groups following the introduction of Thames Valley Police's Neighbourhood Policing model and then back to Forums. This results in some participants working to previous perceptions of the scope of the Forums, and not always aligning issues raised with the CSP's current responsibilities, strategic priorities, and duties.
- Political ward boundary changes also mean coverage does not always fit geographical locations; others, such as the Oxford Road Forum, replicate historic Police beat boundaries that no longer exist, and straddle four wards. Some areas of the town do not have a local Forum including but not limited to, wards and areas in South Reading and the Town Centre. Others such as the North cover a wide span, that may be too large an area to support with just one forum.
- Administratively, the current schedule of meetings often leads to clashes, with as many as three meetings scheduled on the same evening. Whilst efforts have been made around the Reading Borough Council and Thames Valley Police calendars to allow Council Officers, Councillors, and the Police to attend, there are still too many variables with Police availability due to shift patterns or officers expected to attend more than one meeting.

3.4. The review concluded that there are benefits being delivered by the Forums, including a space for some residents to raise current issues and feel supported, information to be gathered at the meetings and disseminated to key stakeholders and the dedication and support from the Chairs to tackle issues of crime and disorder.

3.5. Constraints to the forums achieving benefits for all communities were also identified, along with risks to resourcing the meetings in the future. The main issues that need addressing are set out below:

- Lack of Forums in some areas
  - Lack of engagement with seldom-heard communities and young people
  - Limited evidence of outcomes
  - Low attendance and representation
  - The need for consistent support from RBC with attendance, recording of actions agreed at the meetings, and venues.
- 3.6. It should also be noted that the introduction by Thames Valley Police of a 5 Local Command Unit approach may limit the level of Police engagement with the current Forum model, particularly from senior officers.
- 3.7. To ensure that all residents have an opportunity to feed into our activity to tackle crime and disorder, there is an identified need to:
- Move from a “one size fits all” approach to working more broadly with our communities on the objectives of the CSP, with other means of gathering feedback such as online surveys, Love Your Neighbourhood sponsored activities, e.g., estate walkabouts etc. to complement the activities of the Forums.
  - Ensure all Council supported Forum meetings are promoted as open to all residents, with awareness-raising and publicity initiatives to maximise attendance.
  - Make more efficient use of resources and tools available across the Community Safety Partnership to engage.
  - Incorporate a wider range of methods used by residents and communities today to connect on issues that impact them.
  - Ensure greater engagement between the CSP and all communities (young people, seldom heard) on matters relating to crime and disorder and support them with the structure to do so, including encouragement to attend the Forums as much as possible.
  - Ensure there is a direct link between officer led problem solving meetings and communities to allow residents to contribute to problem solving issues that are impacting their neighbourhoods.
  - Improve communications about the work happening in local areas to tackle crime and disorder in a way that doesn't rely solely on Forum meetings.
- 3.8. To enable this, a refresh of the geographically based Forums is recommended to address both the structural and logistical challenges identified which are arguably preventing the Council's vision for that, as set out in the Council's Constitution.
- 3.9. This will require a move away from the current model with the aim to expand to an all-encompassing approach to working with local communities through well publicised public meetings, enabling residents to raise issues of concern, and to contribute to finding solutions to tackle crime and disorder and reduce the fear of crime. The following Safer Neighbourhood Forum Principles will be introduced:
- The Forums will be supported from the Council's Community Partnerships Service, specifically the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and Safer Public Realm (SPR) Teams, as well as Thames Valley Police and local Councillors.
  - There will be some rationalisation of the current schedule to allow for consistent RBC support.

- The schedule of meetings needs to support Police attendance which at the latter end of the working week can be more challenging due to shift priorities.
  - New Forums will be established in all neighbourhoods currently without one (e.g., South Reading, Town Centre, Amersham Road and Orts Road) over time, starting with South Reading initially over the summer of 2024.
  - All Forums will be held three times a year, once each in Winter, Spring and Autumn Terms avoiding half terms and holidays
  - All forums will be genuinely open to all residents in an area.
- 3.10. To engage meaningfully with residents, the following elements are essential features of a public-meeting style of forum, to be able to achieve notable success in problem solving:
- The scope for residents to participate is diversified, allowing several channels for engagement, including online and use of social media, for those unable to attend, or who do not wish to,
  - Forums are inclusive with as open an approach to attendance as can be realistically expected,
  - Are simple in format, style of delivery and accessibility,
  - Are utilised to leverage local relationships and conversations, in time allowing local people to lead,
  - That they are not rushed, allowing time for resident's contributions.
  - That Police and Council Officers set out clear expectations of what is and is not achievable.
  - That Officers who attend forums from across always report back.
- 3.11. To facilitate the transition to the revised model, existing chairs continue acting as SNF Chairs and as members of the Safer Reading Neighbourhood Forum, and to act as a local advocate [volunteer Leader] for the Community Safety Partnership and Residents' Voice. Representatives of Social Landlords with responsibility for tackling ASB will also be encouraged to attend meetings in areas where they have significant levels of stock, as will other stakeholders in particular Forums such as the University of Reading.
- 3.12. The Annual Community Safety Survey will be utilised as a vehicle, both to gather information on residents' concerns, but also as an engagement tool to promote the forums and participation in 'Have Your Say' events, which run across Reading, usually led by Thames Valley Police.
- 3.13. The meetings will be complemented with a programme of activities and engagement events under the Love Your Neighbourhood brand that was introduced as part of Reading's Safer Streets 2 project. These events could include partnership Have Your Say events, Love Your Neighbourhood Public Meetings, Estate Walkabouts, and maximising social media platforms, amongst a range of other activities. Primarily, however, public meetings will instead be offered that can be communicated more widely and are open to all to attend. This is particularly important in areas such as South Reading where no forums have successfully materialised under the existing model. It is also worth noting the value of online events such as Facebook Live events with Thames Valley Police are showing increased interest and growing participation numbers. The emphasis will be on ensuring models that work for each area are established.
- 3.14. Alongside the refresh of the geographical Safer Reading Forums will be the reform of the Safer Reading Neighbourhood Forum, also known as the Safer Neighbourhood

Chairs Forum, that meets 4 times a year. It is intended that this will become a Networking forum for the Safer Reading Chairs and key CSP partners, which will offer:

- CSP updates from partners
- Space for escalating concerns,
- Training
- Peer support, e.g., to share best practice,
- Planning time for events and community engagement strategies
- Problem-solving thematic issues.
- The meeting will reduce to 3 meetings per year to review the output of the forums in each term time period.

- 3.15. In the main only non-personalised data will be exchanged to help inform local discussion and to support feedback that officers can utilise in local operations, as well as community feedback to influence the work of the Community Safety Partnership.
- 3.16. The Safer Reading Neighbourhood Forum will continue in its current form, with a look to include other Community Associations, Neighbourhood Associations etc. to be invited to take part. This will be an opportunity to cascade information and updates from the Community Safety Partnership that would benefit from local resident input.
- 3.17. A representative of this group will be invited to sit on the Community Safety Partnership. SNF Chairs have welcomed this suggestion in principle, and it is proposed that they will agree between themselves on a representative and a deputy, so that one will be available for every CSP meeting.
- 3.18. As above, representatives from other established community groups can also be included in the forum. On a case-by-case basis partners, including SNF Chairs, can assess whether a group has the capacity to participate and whether it is filling a need separate from the established Forums, for example where there is no established Forum in the area served by the group. An example of this is the Bell Tower Residents' Association, which is serving an area not clearly aligned with any current Forum. Over time some of these group may be able to be developed into Forums within the overall structure, but in the interim, it is important that as many voices as possible are heard.
- 3.19. Chairs will be invited to share campaign information and communications on behalf of the Community Safety Partnership via their own self-generated networks and will be given access to the distribution lists if needed to enable this. It is important to reiterate that some, but not all Safer Neighbourhood Forum Chairs have had access to distribution lists previously and due to the last alteration of the Safer Neighbourhood Forums these have been removed from the Chairs to maintain. This is a situation that will be resolved by the meetings being advertised publicly on a range of platforms, including Thames Valley Alert. Members of the public will be invited to sign up to a generic mailing list which will be maintained by the Community Safety Team. Each Chair will have access to the list to be able to communicate non-personalised and desensitised information directly to local forum members.
- 3.20. The Chairs will be supported by the RBC Community Safety Manager, who will pass on relevant information for distribution on behalf of the Community Safety Partnership and other Criminal Justice System partners that is appropriate for wider circulation. This includes working with Forum Chairs to maintain a distribution list of members of the public signed up to each forum, who can receive details of meetings, campaigns, events and safety information if signed up.
- 3.21. The chairs of the existing Safer Neighbourhood Forums were consulted on 5 June 2024 and fed back their perspectives with respect to implementation and opportunities

to grow forums across Reading. It was agreed that roll out may take some time, to allow learning from the process to be reviewed and that within each forum a more nuanced approach may be taken to account for local preferences – overall the agreed aim is to ensure that residents across Reading have access to a forum in their area.

- 3.22. It is anticipated that making these changes will encourage more engagement with the public in problem solving local issues of concern and will improve confidence from those participants that information is shared with them, and that it will demonstrate what local action can achieve by working together.

#### **4. Contribution to Strategic Aims**

- 4.1. The proposal set out in this report will contribute towards the Thriving Communities priority, with a focus on reducing crime and to create safer communities and neighbourhoods for residents of Reading.
- 4.2. The proposal contributes to Reading's Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy 2023 – 2026 priorities, which set out how the CSP will improve how it engages with communities to tackle crime and disorder and reduce fear of crime.

#### **5. Environmental and Climate Implications**

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 5.2. By creating and facilitating more local Ward based forums, Residents will have a reduced need to travel across the Borough to attend meetings, which may have previously been further from where they live thus reducing emissions.
- 5.3. The focus on problem-solving issues of crime and disorder with communities will also contribute to improving the public realm and in turn, improvements in the quality of the environment. The proposed approach will provide a space for residents in areas where there are not currently Forums to highlight areas of concern and allow them the opportunity contribute ideas for how issues, which may be having a negative impact on their areas, are tackled.

#### **6. Community Engagement**

- 6.1. Engagement has taken place with the chairs of the geographical Safer Neighbourhood forums at a Safer Reading Review workshop, which has informed the review conducted to inform the proposal set out in this report. The chairs have also been given the opportunity to be briefed in person regarding the proposed new model.
- 6.2. Reading's Community Safety Partnership now conducts an annual Community Safety Survey, which is used to capture and monitor feedback from residents as to how they would like receive information about crime and disorder and engage with the Community Safety Partnership.

#### **7. Equality Implications**

- 7.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2. The proposed model seeks to be more inclusive of all residents and communities and moves away from a model that has had limited reach to all communities. On this basis, an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not relevant to the decision,



## **8. Other Relevant Considerations**

- 8.1. None

## **9. Legal Implications**

- 9.1. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, sets out a statutory duty for key responsible authorities, including local authorities, to work together to do all it reasonably can to reduce crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social behaviour), the misuse of alcohol, drugs and other substances and minimise re-offending and serious violence in its area. Authorities should consult the community on the levels and patterns of crime, disorder and substance misuse issues and on matters that should be prioritised by the partnership.

## **10. Financial Implications**

- 10.1. No additional funding will be required to implement the proposed model. The current model is resourced through Officers within the Council's Community Partnership Service and Thames Valley Police. The Officer resource supports the geographical based meetings and overarching Safer Reading Neighbourhood Forum.

## **11. Timetable for Implementation**

- 11.1. Subject to agreement from this Committee, the new model would be implemented in September 2024 to fall in line with the proposals to hold meetings in Autumn, Winter and Spring. This will also allow time for officers to work with the current Chairs to set out a schedule of meetings, organise venues and set up initial Forum meetings in new areas.

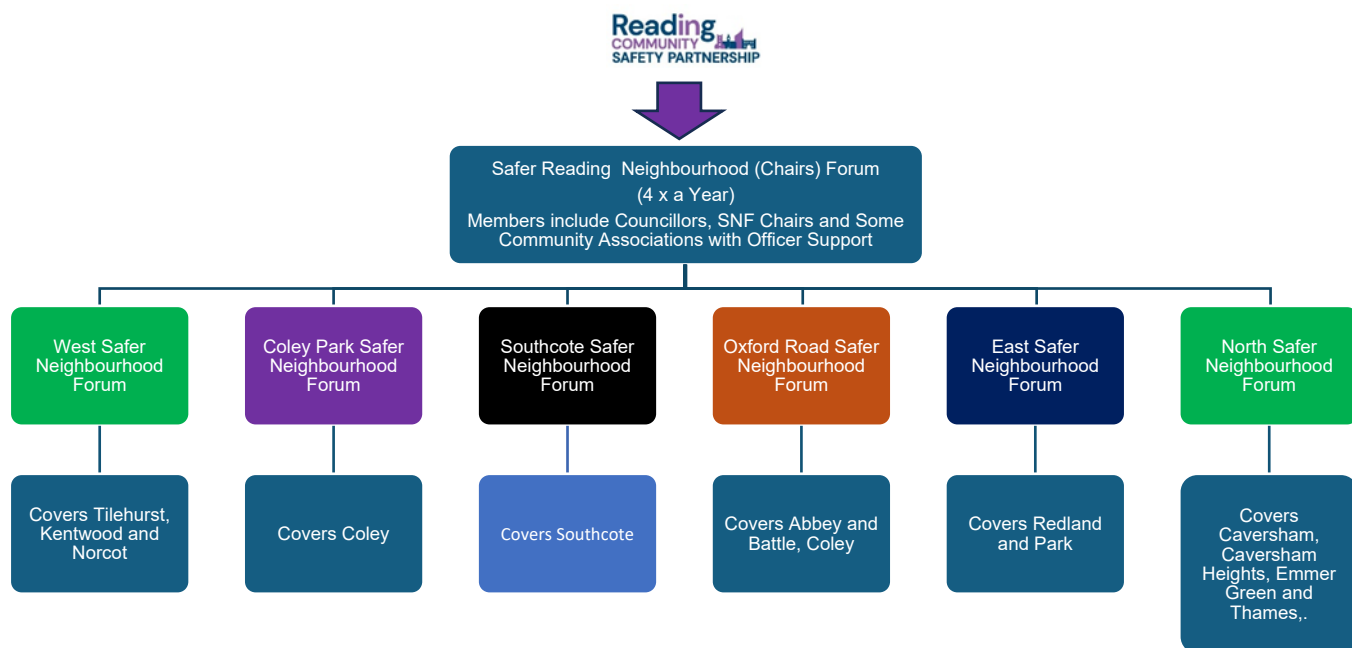
## **12. Background Papers**

- 12.1. There are none.

## Appendices

### Appendix One: Existing and Proposed Structure of Safer Neighbourhood Forums

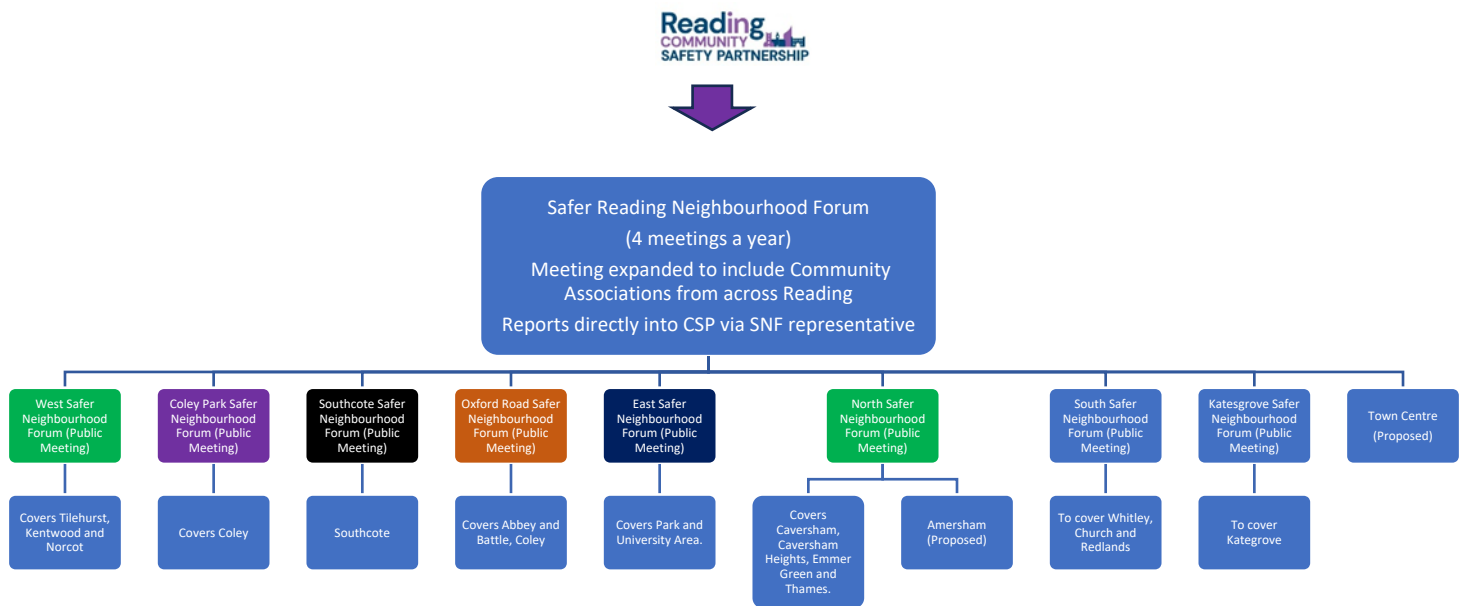
#### Current Model of Safer Neighbourhood Forum



**The geographical Safer Neighbourhood Forums meet more regularly throughout the year, complete minutes and do not cover Katesgrove and South Reading. Redlands is covered by East.**

Current Model	Requirements of Officers	Areas not covered	Links to CSP
<b>6 Safer Neighbourhood Forum meetings 6 times a year (36)</b>	<b>To minute, advertise and attend,  Chaired by SNF Chair (resident)</b>	<b>Whitley, Church and Katesgrove</b>	<b>Limited as previously links to Neighbourhood Initiatives not CSP</b>
<b>Safer Reading Forum meeting quarterly</b>	<b>To minute the meeting, advise and assist.  Chaired by Lead Member for Community Safety</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>Strengthened by reporting on CSP matters proposed as topics of interest by attendees</b>

## Proposed Model of Safer Neighbourhood Forums (2024)



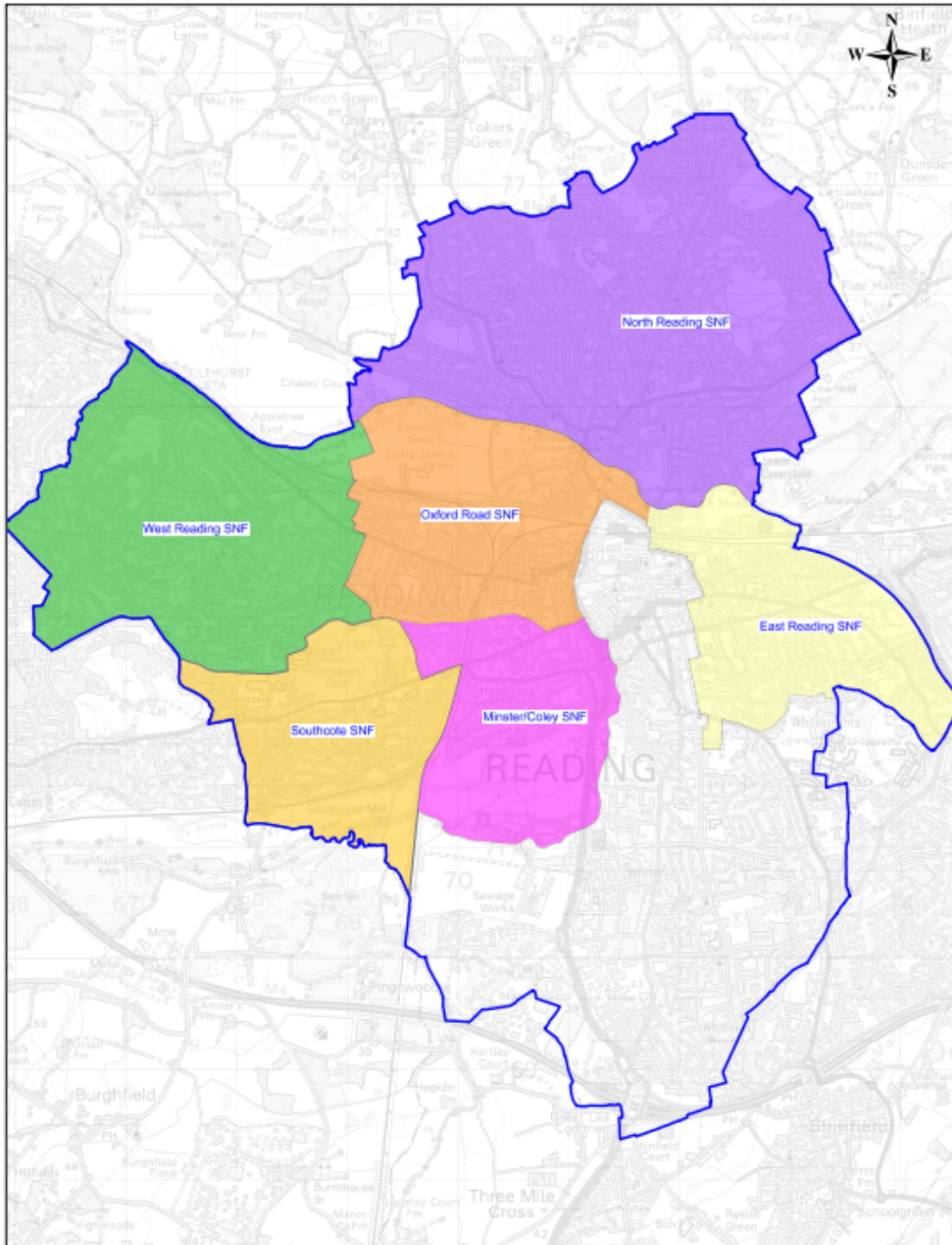
**All Safer Neighbourhood Forums will be supported 3 times a year, are open to the public and advertised in local areas and via social media, expanding the offer to the South of Reading first in 2024.**

Proposed Model	Requirements of Officers	Areas not covered	Links to CSP
<p><b>7 to 8 Safer Neighbourhood Forum areas delivered as public meetings once a term (21 to 24 meetings per annum), scheduled weekly to avoid a clash.</b></p> <p><b>Growth to 9 to 10 forums in 2025</b></p>	<p><b>To advertise and attend.</b></p> <p><b>Chaired by SNF Chair (resident), with exception of new areas, chaired by an RBC or TVP officer until resident involvement can be achieved.</b></p> <p><b>Housing attend in areas of social housing.</b></p> <p><b>Specialist services attend by invitation.</b></p>	<p><b>South and Katesgrove offer new areas of coverage.</b></p> <p><b>Potential to run more than one meeting in the North, inclusive of Amersham Road.</b></p>	<p><b>Activity is linked to CSP priorities, with residents invited to identify and problem solve local issues with RBC and TVP</b></p> <p><b>Themes cascaded up to CSP.</b></p> <p><b>Future strategy informed by experiences of residents</b></p>
<p><b>Safer Reading Neighbourhood Forum meets four times a year,</b></p>	<p><b>To minute the meeting, advise and assist.</b></p>	<p>n/a</p>	<p><b>Receives presentations and reports from CSP.</b></p>

<b>inclusive of Councillor's nominated by Leader and an extended membership of Community Organisations</b>	<b>Chaired by Lead Member for Community Safety</b>		<b>SRF Rep attends CSP to represent resident voice</b>
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------	--	--------------------------------------------------------

**Appendix Two – Maps of SNF coverage (existing and proposed)**

**Existing**



Title: Safer Neighbourhood Forum areas 2024

Drg.No.: GIS00655

Date: 25/06/2024

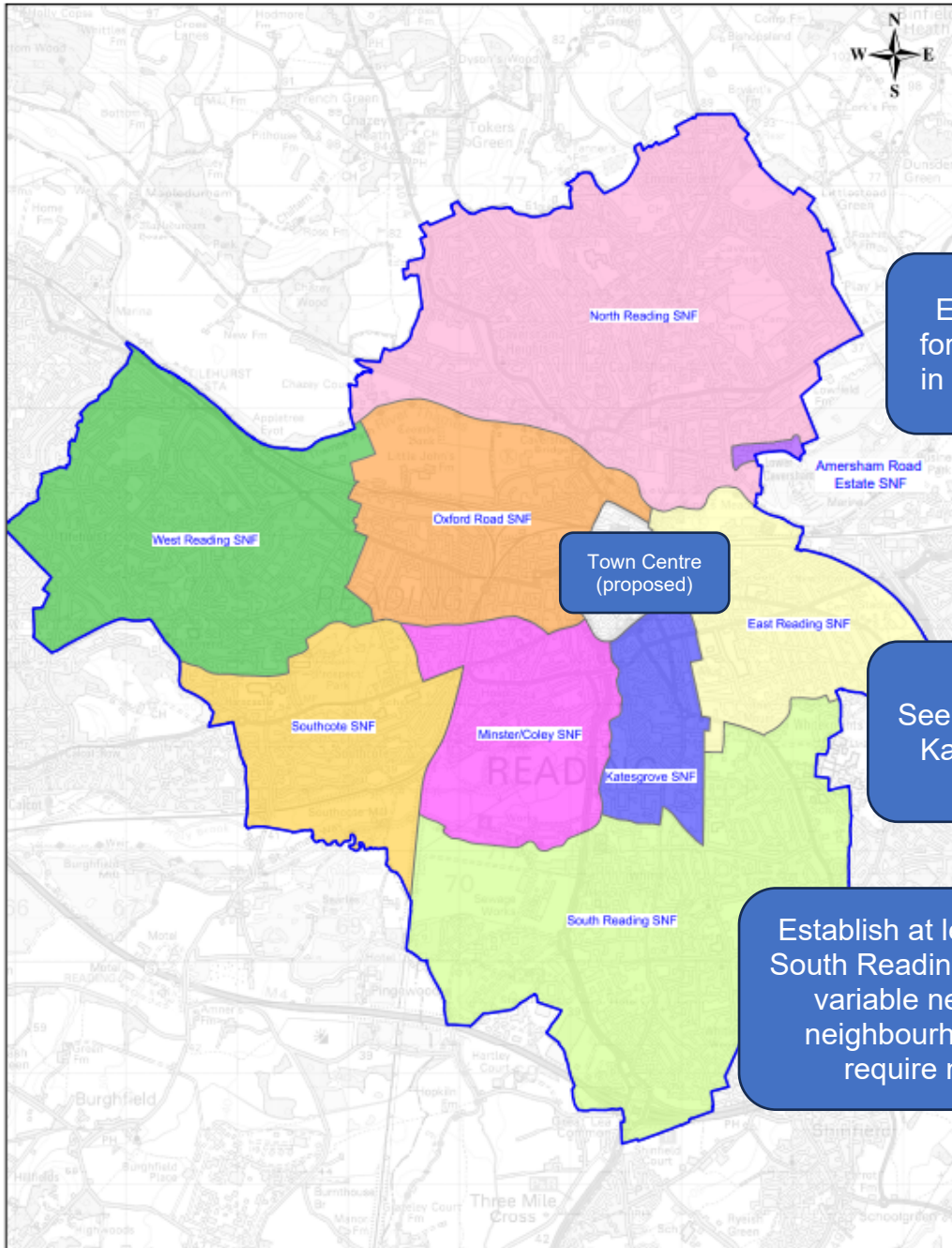
Scale at A4: 1:45 000

Produced by GIS & Mapping Services

Ref: G:\MID\CDICE\Comm Reni\Thriving Neighbourhoods\NAG & Neighbourhood Areas Oct 15



**Proposed**



Explore Potential for dedicated forum in Amersham Road

Town Centre (proposed)

Seek to re-establish Katesgrove SNF

Establish at least one forum in South Reading, recognising the variable needs of distinct neighbourhoods here may require more forums