

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

15 JUNE 2026

Petition from Aravind Chandrashekar:

Save the Caversham Heights Pink 22 bus

The Caversham Heights community is currently facing a significant challenge: the potential removal of the Pink 22 Bus service. This essential bus route serves as a lifeline for many residents, providing crucial connections to schools, workplaces, and essential services throughout Reading. Without this service, many individuals, especially the elderly, disabled, and those without alternative means of transportation, may find themselves isolated and unable to access vital resources.

Local transportation options are vital for maintaining community cohesion, reducing traffic congestion, and supporting our environmental goals by decreasing our carbon footprint. The Pink 22 Bus is not just a mere convenience; it is an integral part of our community's infrastructure, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their personal circumstances, can stay connected and lead an active life.

The proposed cutbacks come at a time when public transport should be expanded, not diminished. With the growing population in the area, public transport services are needed now more than ever. Removing this service could lead to increased social isolation, negatively impacting mental health and community wellbeing.

The alternative routes do not adequately replace the specific geographic coverage of the Pink 22, meaning that vulnerable residents, the elderly, and school children will be disproportionately isolated or forced to walk unsafe distances and the uphill of Caversham heights.

Furthermore, removing public transport options directly contradicts Reading Borough Council's stated commitment to reducing car dependency and achieving net-zero carbon targets.

If this service is cancelled, residents need to travel by car and add to the already congested traffic in Caversham and against the environment strategy of Reading Borough Council.

The car parking charges are very high in Reading Train station and in reading town centre. So as the taxi costs. Reading Borough does not allow cheaper taxi services options such as Uber.

I urge Reading Buses and the Council to reconsider this decision, explore alternative funding options, or look into a revised route to bus route 23 and 24 to serve Caversham heights.

Reading Buses and Reading Borough Council is not a money-making organisation but to serve and provide necessary service to people. Because it is publicly owned,

all profits are reinvested back into the local network to improve the bus fleet and fund less profitable community routes

We propose that the Council conduct a thorough review of the current transportation needs in Caversham Heights, considering the voices of the community members who actively rely on the Pink 22 Bus. Alternative solutions should be sought, such as restructuring routes or adjusting schedules but retaining the vital service altogether.

By investing in and maintaining our public transport options, we can ensure that Caversham Heights remains a vibrant and connected community. We urge the Council to reconsider this decision and seek alternatives that will not leave residents without this necessary service.

Please sign this petition to show your support for keeping the Pink 22 Bus service in operation for the benefit of the entire community. Together, let's prevent our vital public transport services from disappearing.

REPLY by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport):

Reading Borough Council acknowledges the concerns raised by residents in the wake of Reading Buses decision to terminate the Route 22 Bus Services. We understand that this decision by Reading Buses was not taken lightly and comes as a result of a combination of factors, including, but not limited to, limited growth in patronage following the pandemic, rising costs, prolonged road closures which impacted service efficiency and patronage, and recent further falls in patronage following the reinstatement of a full service.

Although Reading Buses have continued to operate this service at a loss, in the hope that patronage would recover and this has been supported by the Council, ultimately the Council understands that the service does not cover its basic running costs, and it is not financially prudent or responsible to continue to run the service at a loss.

The Councils Local Transport Plan, the Reading Transport Strategy 2040, sets out the Councils Policy for Public Transport, and its aspirations for the future of Public Transport. To this end, the Council has continued to explore alternative options with Reading Buses to protect Bus Services throughout Reading. Regrettably, despite these discussions, the bus operator has been unable to identify a viable bus service that would be cost-neutral.

The Council has explored alternative options with local bus operators; however it has not been possible to agree a commercially viable solution to enable a bus service to continue on the full route of the Pink 22 service, and therefore none of the alternatives are possible without external financial support. It is understood that the X40 route operated by Thames Travel will continue to operate on its existing route which provides a service for part of the Pink 22 route.

The Council has provided significant support for bus services across the borough, including between 2022-2025 investing £5m into offering subsidised bus tickets for Reading residents, to support patronage growth including on the Pink 22 route,

which was made possible through the Council securing grant from Government for this purpose. In addition, the Council supports Readibus to support comprehensive dial-a-ride services being available for residents who qualify for this service, including those living in Caversham Heights.

In light of this decision by Reading Buses, the Council is now reviewing revised guidance from DfT, relating to social necessary bus services, and seeking external legal advice, to understand how this may relate to the withdrawal of Route 22.

Alongside this, the Council is reviewing the allocation of the limited revenue funding it currently has available to support bus services with a view to ascertaining if any support would be available moving forward.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 1

J F Wellum to ask the Leader of the Council:

Nolan Principles

My question addresses Reading Borough Council's daily demonstration of Nolan Principles.

The principles apply to all local authority officers and individuals serving residents, either by election, employment or nomination in the geographic area covered by Reading Borough Council.

Officials refer to all required to demonstrate compliance with the Nolan Principles in execution of their duties.

The purpose of the sub-questions below is to scope the response.

How do councillors monitor compliance with Nolan Principles by officials?

What are the findings?

Are Councillors satisfied with compliance by officials?

Are improvements are required?

Who (i.e. local authority officer) has the Council asked to deliver the improvements?

What time scale has the Council imposed on that officer?

Do Internal Audit investigate compliance with the Nolan Principles??

REPLY by Councillor Terry (Leader of the Council):

The Council has adopted a Councillor Code of Conduct and an Employee Code of Code. Both documents are published on the Council's website.

Both Codes of Conduct are based on and consistent with the seven principles set out in section 28 of the Localism Act 2011, which were originally set out by the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life. These principles are selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

The current version of the Employee Code of Conduct was approved by Personnel Committee on 19 November 2020, and the current version of the Councillor Code of Conduct was approved by Council on 18 October 2022.

The Council's Head of Paid Service, who is the Chief Executive, has ultimate responsibility for the conduct of officers, which is monitored via a well-established performance review process for all employees, which includes regular performance conversations and 1 to 1s between the individual and their line manager, the setting of performance objectives each year, identification of any development needs, and formal annual performance reviews against which the achievement of objectives and development needs are discussed and overall performance is considered. If there are concerns about an employee's performance or conduct, these are addressed

under the Council's employee Performance Management Policy or Disciplinary Policy, as appropriate.

Arrangements in respect of the Chief Executive's own performance are reviewed and agreed by Personnel Committee. These arrangements were last reviewed by the Personnel Committee on 20 November 2025. The Leader of the Council is responsible for setting performance targets for the Chief Executive each year. These performance targets are regularly reviewed, and the Leader holds regular performance discussions with the Chief Executive to actively manage on-going performance. If any development is required, this would also be discussed as part of these ongoing discussions.

Members of the public may raise concerns about individual officers or Council services via the Council's two-stage Corporate Complaints Procedure, details of which are published on the Council's website. Should a complainant remain dissatisfied with the outcome of a complaint, they may escalate their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman and/or Housing Ombudsman as appropriate.

The Council also operates a confidential Whistleblowing Policy, details of which are also published on the Council's website. The Council's Internal Audit and Investigations Team are responsible for investigating Whistleblowing concerns.

Members of the public may also raise concerns about Council employees with their local Ward Member or MP, the Local Government Ombudsman, the Council's External Auditor (KPMG), relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations, or the police.

Complaints about Councillors may be made to the Council's Monitoring Officer and these are monitored by the Standards Committee.

No requirement for improvements to the Council's arrangements for ensuring compliance with the Nolan Principles has been identified.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 3

Pete Evans to ask the Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health:

SEND place-planning projects

Can the Council provide an overview of all current SEND place-planning projects, school organisation changes, capital schemes, provision reviews, or other significant changes to specialist provision that are being actively developed or considered across Reading?

For each project, can the Council set out:

- its current status;
- the problem or need it is intended to address;
- the anticipated timeline for engagement, consultation and decision-making;
- the decision-making bodies involved; and
- how parents, carers, schools, governors and representative organisations will be involved?

Given the scale of SEND reforms, Local Area Planning and transformation funding activity currently underway, what assurance can the Council provide that significant changes to SEND provision will be considered as part of a transparent borough-wide strategy rather than through a series of isolated decisions?

REPLY by Councillor Eden (Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health):

I can assure you that we will be bringing forward a comprehensive School Place Strategy and report covering the matters you raise at October ACE Committee. In the meantime we want to work with families and schools to ensure that our Strategy is developed properly and transparently.

You are right to point out the scale of SEND reforms and the significant transformation and improvement of our local SEND system we are proposing, as set out in our reform plan today. Our reform plan builds on years of work with schools, parents and children in developing provision for children with SEND. Now we are at a point where we want to take stock and plan our next phase in a clear boroughwide approach to our School Place Strategy.

A report will be brought forward for ACE committee in October setting out an overview of our School Place Strategy, which will include information on current SEND place-planning projects, school organisation changes, capital schemes, provision reviews, and other significant changes to specialist provision.

This report and Strategy will provide assurance that significant changes to SEND provision will be considered as part of a transparent boroughwide strategy rather than through a series of isolated decisions.

The reform plan sets out how children and young people, parents, carers, schools, governors and representative organisations will be involved in the transformation of our local system for children with SEND. I believe it is particularly important that children and young people are involved and engaged in these plans.

Our local area SEND reform plan has a strong emphasis on developing local places for every child by ensuring our school system is as inclusive as possible, with our aim being that as many children attend their local mainstream school as possible. However our reform plan also recognises that we need to develop more specialist provision for those children who cannot access a mainstream school. This is why we are developing a School Place strategy for consideration at ACE Committee to ensure we have sufficient high quality.

To inform this report, we are proposing a boroughwide engagement approach from July. One element of this will be officers hosting a monthly session in Family Hubs where we will be sharing information on current provision and plans in our reforms for change. Details of these engagement sessions will be made available on our web pages for Family Hubs.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 4

Juliet England to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

22 Bus Service

I rely heavily on the Number 22 bus service and hold a concessionary bus pass due to being hard of hearing. I am not aware of any public consultation having been undertaken to assess the impact that the proposed withdrawal of this route will have on local residents, particularly those who depend on it for essential journeys.

Will the Lead Member for Climate Strategy and Transport commit to extending the notice period for the proposed withdrawal of the Number 22 service and ensure that a full consultation and impact assessment are carried out before any final decision is made?

REPLY by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport):

Thank you for your question. Please see my response to the petition for a full explanation of the reasons for the proposed withdrawal of the 22 service.

In answer to your specific question regarding a Public Consultation, the withdrawal of the Route 22 Service was made by Reading Buses, rather than the Council, and is therefore not subject to a Public Consultation.

The Public Consultation is intended to inform the Council of public opinion prior to making decisions for which it has authority over. In this instance, the Council is not the decision making organisation, and therefore would not be able to alter the decision of the Bus Operator as a result of a consultation.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 5

Kin-Ling Ho to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

22 Bus Service

The withdrawal of the Pink 22 service will leave many residents in Caversham Heights, particularly older and less mobile people, without a practical direct link to Reading town centre. Given that the route's low usage was influenced by higher fares, poorer station connections and less frequent services than the competing X40, rather than a lack of local demand, will the Council commit to using its powers and available transport funding to retain or replace the Number 22 with a direct, socially necessary bus service for Caversham Heights?

REPLY by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport):

Thank you for your question. Please see my response to the petition for a full explanation of the reasons for the proposed withdrawal of the 22 service.

The Council has explored alternative options with local bus operators; however it has not been possible to agree a commercially viable solution to enable a bus service to continue on the full route of the Pink 22 service, and therefore none of the alternatives are possible without external financial support.

In light of this, the Council is now reviewing revised guidance from DfT, relating to social necessary bus services, and seeking external legal advice, to understand how this may relate to the withdrawal of Route 22.

Alongside this, the Council is reviewing the allocation of the limited revenue funding it currently has available to support bus services with a view to ascertaining if any support would be available moving forward.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 6

Alexandria Prior to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

22 Bus Service

In common with other young people living in Caversham Heights, I rely on the Number 22 bus service. I use it Monday to Friday to get to Reading town centre to get on my school bus and to get home again.

When the 22 does get discontinued (if it does follow through) this will impact me a lot. It is a shame to see the route go as the Kidmore Road has only recently been fixed for the route to be back to normal and also the buses have been refurbished.

Driving is not a realistic option for many young people when they are old enough to try and pass their test. The insurance is ridiculously expensive and then the fuel and parking charges makes it even worse.

Please do not abandon young people. Reverse the decision!

REPLY by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport):

Thank you for your question. Please see my response to the petition for a full explanation of the reasons for the proposed withdrawal of the 22 service.

It is regrettable that the Bus Operator needed to take this course of action, and the Council recognises the impact it is going to have for passengers that rely upon the Bus Service. There remains frequent bus services on the x40, which may be suitable for some passengers.

The Council understands that since the reopening of Kidmore Road, and despite Reading Buses promoting an introductory cheaper fare, patronage still declined from the levels prior to its re-opening and so the service remains financially unviable.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 7

Tracey Haralambous to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

Withdrawal of 22 Bus service

I am not aware of any public consultation or significant campaign to increase passenger numbers before withdrawal of the Number 22 bus service was announced on 4 June. For many residents living off Hunters Chase in Caversham Heights, including me, the alternative bus routes would involve an uphill walk of at least 20 minutes-far in excess of the standard planning guideline for an acceptable walk to a bus stop in urban areas. This walk is particularly challenging for those with mobility issues, elderly people and those carrying shopping.

Will the council commit to reviewing this decision and taking action to ensure that Caversham Heights retains an accessible local bus service?

REPLY by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport):

Thank you for your question. Please see my response to the petition and Public Question No.4, for a full explanation of the reasons for the proposed withdrawal of the 22 service.

To reiterate, in relation to a Public Consultation, the withdrawal of the Route 22 Service was made by Reading Buses, rather than the Council, and is therefore not subject to a Public Consultation.

The Council has explored alternative options with local bus operators; however it has not been possible to agree a commercially viable solution to enable a bus service to continue on the full route of the Pink 22 service, and therefore none of the alternatives are possible without external financial support.

In light of this, the Council is now reviewing revised guidance from DfT, relating to social necessary bus services, and seeking external legal advice, to understand how this may relate to the withdrawal of Route 22.

Alongside this, the Council is reviewing the allocation of the limited revenue funding it currently has available to support bus services with a view to ascertaining if any support would be available moving forward.

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PUBLIC QUESTION NO. 8

Roli Richa to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

Withdrawal of 22 Bus service

I rely on the Number 22 bus to get my daughter to school and so do other families, including those with children with additional needs who have no other practical means of transport. Elderly residents with limited mobility depend on it to reach their GP, post office, pharmacy, and supermarket, with no viable alternative. The Number 22 is a lifeline, not a luxury, and its withdrawal leaves Caversham Heights as one of the few areas in Reading without a direct public transport link to schools and essential services. Removing it without a replacement transfers the costs/burden onto the most vulnerable people in our community.

1. Was an Equalities Impact Assessment carried out before this decision was made, and if so, will the Council publish it?
2. Will the Council commit to retaining or replacing this service so that residents can continue to access schools, shops and essential services?

REPLY by Councillor Ennis (Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport):

Thank you for your question. Please see my response to the petition and Councillor Question No3 for a full explanation of the reasons for the proposed withdrawal of the 22 service.

The decision to withdraw the service was made by Reading Buses, rather than the Council. Reading Buses are not required by law to undertake an Equalities Impact Assessment, prior to making commercial decisions such as this.

The Council has explored alternative options with local bus operators; however it has not been possible to agree a commercially viable solution to enable a bus service to continue on the full route of the Pink 22 service, and therefore none of the alternatives are possible without external financial support.

In light of this, the Council is now reviewing revised guidance from DfT, relating to social necessary bus services, and seeking external legal advice, to understand how this may relate to the withdrawal of Route 22.

Alongside this, the Council is reviewing the allocation of the limited revenue funding it currently has available to support bus services with a view to ascertaining if any support would be available moving forward.