

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY COMMITTEE

15 JUNE 2026

COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 1

Councillor White to ask the Leader of the Council:

Council purchasing goods and services from administration councillors

Residents have rightly raised concerns over the Council purchasing goods and services from the Administration's own elected Councillors, sometimes from its Lead Members.

Can the Leader of the Council clarify, how many times has this happened in the last five years, with details, and what open and transparent process is there that governs this to ensure conflicts of interest involving elected members of the Administration are properly managed, and seen to be managed?

REPLY by Councillor Terry (Leader of the Council):

Thank you for your question, Councillor White. Reading Borough Council manages hundreds of procurements each year under a robust, well-established governance framework designed to ensure integrity, transparency, and fairness in all decision-making. This includes clear and consistently applied requirements for both officers and elected Members to declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest, including those relating to spouses or civil partners. These declarations are mandatory, regularly reviewed, and actively enforced.

Transparency is embedded in our approach to the hundreds of procurements the Council undertakes each year. The Council publishes financial data including all contract awards over £5,000 and expenditure over £500, ensuring public visibility of how funds are spent. Of the approximately 200 procurements per year within our transparency governance framework, only around 20% involve Member engagement, typically through Policy Committee or equivalent forums. In those cases, Members are not making procurement award decisions; they are approving the scope, strategic direction, and use of public funds, with delivery appropriately delegated to officers in line with governance requirements

It is important to be clear that procurement award decisions are made through structured, officer-led processes, based on objective evaluation, moderated scoring, and formal assurance that due process has been followed. Where procurement decisions are presented to Members, supplier identities are anonymised because the purpose at that stage is to confirm governance compliance; not to influence outcomes. The Council's procedures include multiple, mandatory conflict of interest checks throughout each procurement lifecycle, including prior to evaluation and award. Any declared or perceived conflict is actively managed to ensure full integrity of the process. Access to bidder information is strictly controlled and confidential, limited to relevant officers only. Importantly, officers are not briefed on councillor or officer interests in advance, as doing so would risk introducing conscious or unconscious bias, something our processes are specifically designed to prevent.

The Council is aware of one occasion when a contract was awarded to a company of which an elected member is a director – and that interest was appropriately declared and managed.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 2

Councillor Thompson to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

Bus Gate and Signage at Reading Green Park Station and lack of drop-off facilities for disabled travellers

In April the Traffic Penalty Tribunal ruled in favour of an Appellant who claimed that signs alerting drivers to the bus gate at Reading Green Park Station were inadequate. The Tribunal directed Reading Borough Council to cancel the Penalty Charge Notice, which had been issued to the Appellant for driving onto the bus gate, and to repay the fine. Moreover, contrary to the Appellant's expectation, there is no exemption for blue badge holders to use the bus gate. As a consequence, there is no drop-off point for disabled travellers close to the station entrance, despite space being available to accommodate one.

In light of the above:

1. Will the Council advise how many penalty charge notices have been issued at this site since the introduction of the bus gate and will they take steps to refund all payments?
2. What steps will the Council take to improve signage notifying drivers about the bus gate?
3. What steps will the Council take to provide a drop-off point for disabled travellers outside the station entrance?

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

I would like to thank Councillor Thompson for her questions; I would like to response to Q1 & 2 together

The bus gate enforcement on Flagstaff Road began on 4 July 2024, and since then 6,113 Penalty Charge Notices have been issued, with the majority paid.

There have been 15 appeals to the Traffic Penalty Tribunal. One was allowed, three were not contested, and 11 were dismissed. In those dismissed cases, Adjudicators found the signage to be compliant, and as recently as May 2026 it was described as "substantially compliant, clear and adequate".

While one appeal was allowed, each case is determined on its own merits, and the Council does not consider it appropriate to issue refunds.

The Council keeps enforcement locations under review. There is no requirement to provide advance warning signage beyond the statutorily required but we will continue to monitor this location and consider whether any further measures could improve clarity for motorists.

Q3

Reading Green Park Station was designed in partnership with Network Rail and Great Western Railway, with accessibility embedded from the outset, including step-free access and tactile paving.

There are 12 blue badge parking bays located around 50 metres from the station entrance in the short-stay car park, which also accommodates drop-off and pick-up activity.

We recognise that wayfinding to these could be clearer and I have asked officers to work with the adjacent landowner to improve signage.

The transport loop directly outside the station is reserved for buses, rail replacement services and taxis. Allowing general drop-off in this area could lead to congestion and impact bus movements, so there are currently no plans to change the existing arrangements.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 3

Councillor Ballsdon to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

Proposed Withdrawal of the Number 22 Bus Service

In light of the proposed withdrawal of the Number 22 bus service, can the Council confirm:

1. Whether an Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and, if so, what consideration has been given to the impact on older people, disabled people, neurodivergent young people, teenagers, young adults, lower-paid workers and residents who do not have access to a car;
2. Whether the impact on supported living services, residential care settings, homecare provision, schools, preschools and the staff who work in Caversham Heights has been assessed;
3. Whether the Number 22 has been considered as a socially necessary service within the Council's bus partnership and transport planning arrangements;
4. What alternative options were explored before agreeing to a full withdrawal;
5. How the loss of this route is consistent with the Council's objectives of reducing car dependency, promoting sustainable travel and providing attractive alternatives to private car use;
6. Whether the assessment of passenger numbers took account of the impact of recent and prolonged roadworks, including the closure of Kidmore Road, which may have temporarily affected the route's performance.

Given the significant impact this decision will have on a hilly community with an ageing population, growing housing density, schools, supported services and ongoing transport disruption, does the Council agree that asking residents simply to walk further to another route or switch to using a car is not an adequate solution, and what steps will it now take to safeguard public transport provision in Caversham Heights?

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

Thank you for your question regarding the proposed withdrawal of Route 22 bus service. In response to each of your questions.

- 1) *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.*
- 2) *As a commercial operator, Reading Buses are not required to carry out assessments such as these. The Council acknowledges that the service withdrawal will impact all residents, including those you have referenced.*

- 3) *The Council is currently seeking external legal advice relating to the recent DfT guidance relating to socially necessary services, and to assess how this may relate to the withdrawal of Route 22*
- 4) *I would like to reiterate that Reading Borough Council did not “agree to the withdrawal” but rather understands the position that Reading Buses find themselves in, and it not being financially prudent to continue to operate services, running at a significant loss. Reading Buses briefed the Council on various options they considered, including, reduced frequencies, as well as significantly enhanced frequencies. However none of these options would cover their running costs, without significant patronage increases, or subsidy from the Council.*
- 5) *The Council remains committed to the ambitious plans laid out within its Local Transport Plan, The Reading Transport Strategy, and whilst the decision of the Bus Operator is regrettable, it does not detract from the incredibly strong public transport network within Reading. Clearly there is now a gap in this network, and this is going to impact residents on the affected route, however we also have to acknowledge that it would not be appropriate for the Bus Operator to continue to run services at a significant loss.*

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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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 4

Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

Withdrawal of Pink 22 bus service to Caversham Heights

Green Party councillors believe that reliable and affordable public transport is essential if we are serious about tackling congestion, reducing carbon emissions, and ensuring that everyone can access jobs, education, and services.

Reading Buses is wholly owned by Labour-run Reading Borough Council and provides an important public transport service for many residents. Green councillors have been contacted by residents who are understandably concerned about the announcement that Reading Buses intends to withdraw the Pink 22 service between Reading and Caversham Heights.

Given the proposal to withdraw the 22 bus service, can the Lead Councillor set out what discussions have taken place with Reading Buses, what assessment has been made of the social and environmental impacts of the decision, and how the Council is using its position as sole shareholder to help protect vital bus links for local communities?

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

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 continued to explore alternative options with local bus operators, however it has not been possible to agree a commercially viable solution, that would allow the bus service to continue, and therefore none of these alternatives would be possible without external financial support.

The Council recognises that Reading Buses decision to withdraw the services, is going to have a significant impact on residents in the area, and for some this will involve changing travel behaviours, and for others, may result in a loss in independent travel.

Whilst Reading Buses is owned by Reading Borough Council, it is also wholly independent of the Council, with its own Board and Chief Executive and is responsible for ensuring that the business does not operate at a loss, and to maximise the availability of services across the entire Reading network.

In the case of Route 22, Reading Buses had continued to operate this service at a loss, for a prolonged period of time, in the hope that patronage would recover. However sadly that did not occur and consequently 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.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 5

Councillor R Singh to ask the Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health:

Potential Closure of St Joseph's College

Many hardworking Reading residents have contacted me with deep concerns about the potential closure of St. Joseph's College. Given the cumulative impact of recent cost pressures such as the removal of business rates relief, the introduction of VAT on fees, and rising National Insurance contributions, what role can the Council play in bringing together all stakeholders to identify a sustainable pathway for the school? And, crucially, how will it work with partners to ensure continuity of education for the 565 pupils and provide reassurance for staff whose jobs are at risk, particularly those supporting students with special educational needs and those in the middle of GCSE and A-level courses?

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

Since the Local Authority was informed on Monday 18th May that St Joseph's College was consulting with parents on closure for this July (2026), officers have been working closely with the school leadership and parents to support children's continued access to their education.

The consultation on closure is still ongoing and officers are urging the College to consider the short notice of this unexpected news, which has a significant impact on local parents.

I have been pleased to see how council officers at all levels have worked swiftly and intensively to engage and support the school and families. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on individual cases but I can assure you behind the scenes we are working closely to support families and the school in this difficult time.

The RBC School Admissions Team have supported parents to consider school places and councillors are advised to signpost parents who have any queries or are seeking a local school place to our RBC School Admissions team – the contact details can be found on our website and will be published in this written response. [School admissions - Brighter Futures For Children](#)

Whilst St Joseph's is an all-phases setting (early years, primary and secondary), the priority concern is the number of secondary school pupils who may need a school place and who might be preparing for exams.

Officers have spoken to local primary and secondary leaders and early years settings and I have been pleased to see how many education settings are keen to help if they can (including schools exploring options to admit in year around any spare building capacity that schools have, and in line with the number of children the Department for Education permit for schools to admit)

State maintained secondary leaders have also met parents at the school.

We have flagged the situation to union representatives (ASCL, NEU and Unison) who are reaching out directly to support staff and the leadership team of the school at this difficult time.

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COUNCILLOR QUESTION NO. 7

Councillor Saadat to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:

Withdrawal of 22 Bus Service

My colleague Cllr Isobel Ballsdon and I have received lots of emails from residents worried about the announced cancellation of the Number 22 bus service. Here is one:

"We are so concerned the planned cut to the 22 bus. My Mum lives very close to me and she is a non-driver. She relies on the 22 bus. As she suffers with anxiety she finds it very difficult to leave the house but with the help of her bus, she gets to town when she feels able to and this bus helps her to avoid being isolated and ensures she is able to fight her own challenges with becoming totally housebound. Since receiving her bus pass on March I've noticed a huge improvement in her mental wellbeing because she was able to travel free of charge so this helped reduce the barriers to trying to get out as there was no financial involvement too. It has been wonderful to see her improvement and we were only talking about it yesterday morning before finding out about this cancelled bus service and it's really worrying me as she will be stranded as she can't afford taxis. She is already having to contemplate moving house because that's how serious this is to her. Moving away from will reduce my caring support with my disabled son too and affect the well being of the younger children as they often walk round to see their Grandma which ensures they have 1:1 company when I'm busy with my disabled son. So this one bus cancellation has a huge impact on all of my family."

It makes no sense to cut an environmentally friendly form of transport to an area which relies so heavily on the bus route, both school children and the elderly in the majority. Please rethink this decision.

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

Thank you for sharing the correspondence from a local resident.

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 Reading Buses have had to make this decision, and the Council recognises that this is going to have significant impacts on residents in the area, such as the ones described in the email you have shared. We recognise how important public transport is to retain people's independence and to ensure they do not become isolated.

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.