

(C) QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

1. Councillor Duveen to ask the Leader of the Council:
Final Annual Accounts for 2016-17

Can the Leader of the Council please explain why the final annual accounts for 2016-17 have not yet been published despite repeated assertions that they will be published soon and can he also:

- Update members on the state of the accounts for 2017-18 and when these will be published;
- Inform members how much money has been spent on consultants sorting out the accounts for 2016-17 and for 2017-18.

REPLY by Councillor Brock Leader of the Council.

The Council's 16/17 accounts have been under final review with our external auditors since 20th May and I'm pleased to say this is nearing conclusion. EY have completed an internal peer review of their audit work and proposed opinion on the accounts. However, as the re-casting of the PFI and asset valuations has had to be performed over more than a ten year period, the closing Balance Sheet figures for 2015/16 have been re-stated which has necessitated a number of Prior Period Adjustments in the 2016/17 Accounts. EY's technical team are in the process of completing their review of these notes. The Public Sector Audit Appointments body will thereafter need to be formally consulted by EY, as their contract was awarded under the PSAA framework agreement. Having spoken to EY we expect this process to be completed and the 2016/17 accounts to be signed off in the next two to three weeks.

Preparation of the 2017/18 accounts are nearing completion and has incorporated the lessons learned and system improvements arising from the 2016/17 accounts process. We are expecting to be able to issue these accounts for public consultation imminently, following the formal sign-off of the 2016/17 accounts.

In finalising the 2016/17 accounts, considerable re-calculation of technical asset valuation methodologies has had to be performed - this has necessarily required additional one-off resource to work through all these changes. The cost of consultants employed during this period has been £534,000. Not all of that cost is directly attributable solely to closing the 2016/17 accounts, but also includes recalculation of up to ten years of certain balances; work on the 2017/18 accounts; and implementing process improvements.

2. Councillor Josh Williams to ask the Leader of the Council:
KPMG Refund

In February, the ex-Leader of the Council admitted that the costs of failing to file the Council's accounts had risen to around half a million pounds, meaning more financial pressure on stretched public services. Councillor Lovelock put the blame for the Council's failings squarely on the previous auditors, saying, "the entire committee feel strongly that the historic issues the current auditors EY have required the Council to deal with should have been identified by the previous auditors, KPMG." Can the new Leader of the Council tell us how much money Reading Borough Council has asked KPMG to refund for its inadequate work, to offset these spiralling costs ?

REPLY by Councillor Brock Leader of the Council.

The responsibility for preparing accounts that comply with International Financial Reporting Standards and other accounting regulations sits solely with the Council.

External auditors have a duty to apply due diligence to the work they undertake in forming their overall opinion that the accounts contain no material mis-statements. This is predicated on their assessment of the adequacy of internal controls which affects their materiality threshold when performing audit testing.

I share concerns expressed by the previous Leader - although it must be noted that Cllr Lovelock has never placed blame for the Council's issues 'squarely on the previous auditors' - and the Council is still considering its position. After the 2016/17 accounts have been signed off I will discuss the matter with my colleagues and with the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, being mindful of the need to ensure value for public money.

3. Councillor Duveen to ask the Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities: Recycling

Given the latest survey of recycling where Reading was placed 308 out of 353 councils for recycling their waste, can the Lead Councillor explain why the recycling rate in Reading is so poor and will she admit that our current rate of 30.7% is unacceptable and that unless we finally start to recycle food waste, which makes up around 1/3 of what goes in to our grey bins, we do not have a chance of meeting the national target of 50% anytime soon.

REPLY by Councillor James Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods and Communities.

Reading currently sends 20% of its municipal waste to landfill with 79% being recycled, composted or sent to Energy from Waste. The Council is committed to aiming for the EU Directive target recycling rate of 50% by 2020 and recognises that the current recycling rate of 30.7% is too low but that increasing it represents a considerable challenge for the Council.

Reading has 27,000 communal properties out of a total of 70,000 properties, many with communal bin facilities - that's 4 out of 10 properties. As is the case nationally, recycling from communal properties can prove to be challenging and this adversely affects the recycling rate.

The Council recognises that it needs to commit extra resource to increasing the recycling rate and the enforcement of environmental crime. This will be achieved by establishing a Recycling and Environmental Enforcement team with the target of increasing recycling by 4% per annum. In addition, its aims will be to reduce contamination in recycling and carrying out enforcement action against fly-tippers and businesses who do not manage their waste correctly.

The team will be supported by a comprehensive communications and education campaign which will highlight the environmental and economic benefits of recycling and support the Council's recent declaration of a Climate Emergency.

The collection of Pots, Tubs and Trays at the kerbside was introduced by the re3 waste disposal partnership in 2018, expanding the range of materials that can be recycled at the kerbside.

Against the backdrop of austerity the Government published its Resources and Waste Strategy in December 2018 and it is currently consulting on 6 proposals 3 of which relate to waste collection, all of which are likely to change the way waste is collected and recycled in the future. One of the key proposals of the Strategy is to introduce compulsory kerbside food waste collections from 2023.

'Adding a food waste collection to the current service offers the potential to increase recycling and reduce emissions from landfill with the waste being processed via anaerobic digestion. There is also a cost involved to introduce and maintain a food collection service and, critically, a change in behaviour to separate out waste streams to ensure that our investment delivers the full environmental benefits.

There is a lot to consider. Introducing a food waste service is being evaluated at present to see if such an initiative is both affordable and effective. I anticipate future reports on this matter in the Autumn.

4. Councillor McGonigle to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:
Engine Idling

Rule 23 of the Highway Code states 'You must not leave a vehicle's engine running unnecessarily while that vehicle is stationary'.

Despite signs at Taxi Ranks around the railway station informing drivers that engine idling can incur a fine, I have observed an average 6-12 taxis idling at any one time. I have spoken to many of these drivers who know they should not be idling but say they want to be ready to move off quickly, even though some of them are out of their vehicles talking with other drivers.

And confronting drivers of taxis idling in residential streets across the town, the most popular response is that they are waiting for a fare, even if that wait is 10 minutes.

Can we know if the Council is monitoring this issue at all, and what, if any, reductions in idling have been observed and recorded ?

REPLY by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Cllr McGonigle for her question.

In 2017 the Council agreed a campaign to inform and communicate with taxi drivers on the harm caused by idling. Since then officers have repeated this same message to the trade organisations and many drivers appear to have taken the message on board. However a minority have not.

Taxi Licencing Enforcement Officers routinely ask taxi drivers to turn off their engines when they visit the ranks. The drafting of the legislation requires that officers provide a warning to drivers and if they comply a fixed penalty notice cannot be issued.

It is now time that further and more formal action is taken with drivers and the trade to try to change the culture around idling. As I made clear at the full Licencing Committee on 11th June, when representatives of both of Reading's trade associations were present, officers are now actively issuing fixed penalty notices for unnecessary idling at a rank where relevant signage is in place.

5. Councillor Whitham to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment Planning and Transport:

Electric Vehicle Charging from Lampposts

Previously when I was a Councillor I suggested that the Council should look into electric vehicle charging from lampposts in areas of terraced housing where people don't have drives. This could help tackle air pollution problems in Reading as well as cutting the town's carbon emissions. I understand the Council has now done some work on this. Please can I get an update on when electric vehicle charging from lampposts will be rolled out and to what areas?

REPLY by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Cllr Whitham for his question and the opportunity to update on some important work.

The Council has now carried out some detailed investigations following a successful bid for a £100,000 air quality grant to fund the project. The proposal was based on carrying out a residents' survey and then installing lamp column charge points in the areas where demand was identified.

The residents' survey was carried out and received 140 responses. The responses were subsequently surveyed for suitability of the locations.

The surveys ruled out a large number of locations and resulted in a re-evaluation of how best to deliver the project. This is due to the following reasons:

- Lamp columns at the rear of the pavement or old cast iron lamp columns are unsuitable for lamp column chargers to be installed directly.
- Satellite pillars could be used, but these add to street clutter, taking up valuable space on already narrow pavements. A minimum of 1.45m is required for disabled access and on some roads satellite pillars reduce space to below this minimum.
- The supply would also need to be replaced on some of the older columns.
- The service and back office maintenance contracts become expensive when installing a large number of lamp column chargers (estimated at £291 each per annum).

Due to these difficulties it has been decided, at this first stage, to install lamp column Electric Vehicle Charge Points where they can go directly into the lamp column. This has resulted in the number of lamp column charge points being scaled back to 15 in the following locations:

- 2 in St Bartholomews Road
- 2 in Manchester Road
- 3 in Coventry Road
- 1 in Filey Road
- 2 in Caversham Road
- 2 in Anstey Road
- 3 in Wantage Road

These charge points have been ordered and are scheduled for installation in the autumn.

In addition to this, DEFRA has granted the Council permission to widen the scope of the project to include installing fast or rapid charge points on Council-owned assets near to the residential areas where demand has been evidenced.

Car parks provide ideal locations for the installation of charge points although the chosen sites must fulfil the aim of the project, namely to make provision for residents living on streets with no off-street parking.

Potential sites which require surveying for their suitability for the project include:

- Chester Street, Caversham
- Kensington Road
- Hills Meadow
- Palmer Park
- Recreation Road, Tilehurst
- Civic B, Town Centre
- Thames Side Promenade, Richfield Avenue

A further update on this project will be provided to the SEPT Committee in November.

6. Councillor Josh Williams to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport:
Sustainable Transport Solutions

In 2017 the Lead Councillor for Transport voted against a proposal from Green Councillors to investigate a potential workplace parking levy in Reading, saying it was simplistic, childlike and arbitrary. With the Council conducting a wide-ranging business parking survey; is he now investigating a potential workplace parking levy in Reading ?

REPLY by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport.

I thank Cllr Williams for his question.

Demand for new homes and jobs in Reading is increasing, and the town also remains a key shopping and leisure destination in the region. However, like many successful towns and cities, Reading suffers from significant levels of traffic congestion, and poor air quality is having a real effect on the health and wellbeing of our residents. In addition, earlier this year the Council declared a Climate Change emergency with ambitious plans to make Reading carbon neutral by 2030.

In order to find solutions to these issues the Council will very shortly be launching a consultation to help inform development of a new Local Transport Plan. By launching a broad consultation on the challenges our town faces, we want to hear from residents, businesses and visitors about their ideas for transport solutions to help manage levels of congestion and improve air quality, whilst accommodating the significant levels of planned growth. The consultation will also focus on how we can improve the quality of life and health of residents in the Borough, alongside reducing carbon emissions in line with our updated Climate Change objectives.

The parking survey sits alongside this consultation. All data and feedback received from these combined exercises will then be used to help inform Reading Borough Council's new Local Transport Plan.

Subject to the outcome of the LTP consultation, the following options could be applied within Reading borough to meet the transport and air quality challenges that Reading faces:

1. A Clean Air Zone/Low Emission Zone
2. Road user charging
3. A Workplace Parking Levy

No decisions will be made on any scheme or schemes, until the results of the consultations have been assessed.

All councillors are encouraged to play an active role in the consultations, and help shape the transport strategy for Reading for the next 20 to 30 years.

7. Councillor R Singh to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport:

Contravention of Parking Restrictions

Dangerous parking can reduce visibility, particularly at the junctions, affecting the safety of motorists, pedestrians and cyclists. We are seeing a pattern of increased parking contraventions specifically on the double yellow lines near the schools or on the side roads, At least in my ward (Kentwood) that is the case.

Can the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport confirm the average overall parking compliance throughout Reading currently stands at and how many PCNs issued for contravention of parking on the double yellow lines or red route this year compared to the last year and also how the income is reinvested?"

REPLY by Councillor Page Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport:

I thank Councillor Singh for his question.

The Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) patrol the Borough on a regular basis and Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) are issued to any vehicle in contravention of the restriction in place. There are various types of parking restrictions in Reading but in particular our CEO's will focus on areas where dangerous parking exists, such as on 'keep clear' markings near schools and on double yellow lines at junctions.

I have asked officers to ensure the areas Councillor Singh has mentioned in Kentwood be investigated further. In addition, the Council has an online reporting form to report illegally parked vehicles. The reports are sent to the CEOs' office and when there is a CEO in the area they can be directed to investigate the issue. The online tool can be found here:
<http://www.reading.gov.uk/parking>

It is important to note that our CEOs are charged with covering the whole of the Borough which is a relatively large and busy area. Of course it is not possible for the CEOs to be in any specific location at all times nor is it practical or viable for them to wait at a particular place in case a contravention may occur.

In 2017-2018 the Council's Annual Parking Report (which is a public document always available on the website) shows that 5,646 PCNs were issued to vehicles in contravention of double yellow lines. The comparison of data between 2017/18 and 2018/19 will be available later this year when the 2018/19 parking report is published. This Annual Report is reported through the Traffic Management Sub Committee each year.

The net income from parking enforcement activities during 2017-2018 was £3.5m, and this was reinvested in the following areas:

Supported bus services	70,233
Discretionary concessionary fares	514,034
Adult Social Care in house transport	328,602
Road safety schemes & CCTV	732,364
Structural Maintenance (principal roads)	766,100
Structural Maintenance (Other roads)	639,000
Expenditure on Bridges	348,400
Road Safety	62,500
Street Lighting	74,000
Total	3,535,233