

COUNCIL MEETING – 24 MARCH 2026

AGENDA ITEM 6: QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

1. Councillor McCann to ask the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport:
Tackling Road Safety on Kings Road and Cemetery Junction

Just days after Eleanora Galli pleaded with us at Full Council to take action to make Kings Road and Cemetery Junction safer, two young people were hit and seriously injured on the same stretch of road where her son was hurt in 2021.

Will the Lead Councillor now consider setting up a cross party working group to consider seriously what can be done to make the road here safer, especially for our young people ?

REPLY by Councillor Ennis Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport.

Thank you for your question. Our thoughts are with these two individuals and their families, and I wish them a full and swift recovery.

As I said to Ms Galli, in reply to her question at Full Council in January, Reading Borough Council takes road safety very seriously. We understand and share in the concerns around the incidents that are occurring on Kings Road.

I continue to be briefed by officers on the nature of these incidents, and I hope that you continue to understand that I cannot share sensitive information about the details of incidents in public, but please rest assured that officers are working on some potential mitigations.

It is important that any measures that are considered for introduction are properly considered by professional officers and that they seek to directly address the suspected causes of the incidents and not introduce additional risks. It is challenging to address these incidents with engineering solutions, but I am aware that officers are developing some proposals.

I have asked officers to share their latest briefing with Ward Councillors, so that they can be correctly informed of the nature of the incidents, what has been introduced, and have sight of what is being developed. I will ask the same for future briefings, in which the result of the findings will be shared cross party with councillors at the Traffic Management Sub-Committee, which is the prime forum for discussing traffic issues and safety measures across the borough.

I would like to complete my answer by thanking Reading College for contacting me for a meeting to discuss safety on Kings Road. I was joined by colleagues and officers and considered this to be a very constructive and helpful meeting, exploring what we could all do to help.

2. Councillor Hoskin to ask the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care:
Adult Social Care Referrals

We are hopeful the Lead Councillor will be elevated to a more exalted civic position for the next municipal year so I would like to thank him for championing in his present role the values we and many of us here care passionately about, that everyone should have the right to live in a place they call home with the people and things that they love, in communities where we look out for one another, doing the things that matter to them.

I see that Adult Social Care services in Reading have handled nearly 4,000 referrals for help over the last year. What measures, including preventative ones, have been taken to support people to stay in their homes and communities rather than more expensive and less personalised interventions?

REPLY by Councillor Gittings Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care.

Thank you for your question and for your kind words.

At the heart of Adult Social Care in Reading is a clear purpose: **supporting the life that matters to you**. This guides how we design our services and how we support people every day.

Over the past year, our services have handled over **4,000 referrals**, with 4,427 new contacts made in 2024/25. Importantly, only **2.9%—around 1 in 34 people—required long-term care**. This reflects the strong emphasis we place on prevention, early intervention, and promoting independence.

The **Care Act 2014** requires councils to prevent, reduce or delay the development of care and support needs. A big part of this is ensuring people can access clear information and advice so they can make informed decisions. In the latest published Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework, **Reading ranked 12th in the country** for people who find it easy to access the information they need—an important foundation for prevention.

Prevention runs through everything we do. Some key measures include:

A strengths-based Front Door

Our teams focus on what matters to each person, the strengths and networks they already have, and how these can be built upon. Residents are supported with information, advice and signposting to community groups, early help, and practical support. This includes our **VCS Community Navigator Service**, delivered by the Red Cross, and online tools such as **Ask Sara**, which helps residents identify the right equipment to stay safe and independent.

High-performing reablement services

Our reablement service supports people recovering from illness or crisis, and helps people return home after a hospital stay. It prevents or delays long-term care and promotes confidence and independence. National data shows Reading is **20th in the country** for the proportion of people who need no further ongoing support after reablement.

We have also extended reablement approaches to young people with learning disabilities as they enter adulthood, and to people recovering from mental ill health which is an innovative model building on our strengths.

Home First and effective hospital discharge

Working closely with Health partners, we continue to deliver a strong **Home First** approach. **93.1%** of our residents are discharged **home** after a hospital admission—exceeding our Better Care Fund target. This ensures people return to familiar surroundings with the right support in place, rather than moving into residential care unnecessarily.

Partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector

Our VCS partners are central to prevention. Through the **£1.3 million Closing the Gap framework**, we support organisations that provide social connection, wellbeing activities, practical help, advice and early support. These services prevent isolation, build resilience, and reduce the likelihood of needs escalating.

Falls prevention and technology-enabled care

We continue to strengthen our approach to preventing falls—one of the biggest causes of loss of independence. This includes strength and balance activities, occupational therapy advice, minor adaptations, equipment and proactive work to identify people at risk. Technology Enabled Care plays a crucial role in helping people stay safe at home.

Support for unpaid carers

Unpaid carers are vital in enabling people to remain at home. We provide assessments, respite and specialist advice to support carers' wellbeing and sustain caring relationships.

Across all these areas, our aim is consistent: **to help residents live independently, safely and with dignity in their own homes for as long as possible**. A preventative approach - supported by strong information and advice, community resources, and early targeted support - not only leads to better outcomes for individuals, but also strengthens communities and makes responsible use of public funds.

3. Councillor Moore to ask the Lead Councillor for Corporate Services and Resources:

X

A growing number of local authorities across the UK have withdrawn from X (formerly Twitter), with many citing declining public engagement and questions about whether maintaining a presence on the platform remains a good use of council time and resources. These decisions have often been made alongside broader concerns about the platform's direction since Elon Musk's acquisition, including the spread of misinformation and a rise in harmful content.

Southampton City Council announced it would no longer post on X. Devon County Council has stopped using the platform entirely. Rugby Borough Council passed a motion to end its association with X, with its account subsequently deleted. Solihull Council froze its use of the platform following a periodic review of its social media channels, with councillors expressing concern that continued use could be seen as tacitly accepting the nature of content now prevalent on the platform. Wokingham Borough Council has similarly stepped back from X due to low levels of public engagement. Most recently, in January 2026, Oxfordshire County Council announced that it is withdrawing from X, having found that it has become less effective as an engagement channel and has contributed to a less safe online environment for local communities.

Could the Lead Councillor please advise:

1. What are Reading Borough Council's current public engagement and reach metrics for its X account, and how have these changed over the past 12–18 months?
2. Has the Council undertaken any review of whether X remains an effective and appropriate channel for communicating with residents, in light of the decisions taken by these and other local authorities ?
3. If engagement is low or declining, or if the platform no longer meets the standards the Council would expect of its communications channels, does the Council have any plans to withdraw from X and redirect that resource to channels where residents are more actively engaged ?

REPLY by Councillor Emberson Lead Councillor for Corporate Services and Resources.

Thank you for your question Councillor Moore.

I very much appreciate the sentiment of your question and am mindful many Councillors on our side have opted to make the move to Bluesky or close their X account owing to the general

distaste for Elon Musk, the manosphere he has enabled and his general inability to ensure the platform is what it once was.

Having said that, officers recommend to remain on X at this time.

The Council has a multi-channel strategy for engagement which we continuously monitor and review.

Specifically for X, in March 2026 our followers were 26.1K – which is down 590 followers from the same period in 2025. Engagement rates with our posts are 0.38% - down from 0.51% for the same period in 2025.

The communications team consistently review X and all our other social media accounts to ensure they are reaching residents. They have seen a decline in X over the last number of years and you may have noticed that the Council has therefore been posting more content on Facebook and Instagram where engagement is much higher.

These channels allow the team to more effectively showcase the work of the council through campaign based work, using videography. Our recent Your Reading campaigns are a particular example of this targeted social media work which I am sure you have all seen.

The team use a social media management tool that allows them to post content to all channels simultaneously, so there is no extra effort required when posting specifically to X.

Whilst they have seen a decline in followers on X, the team will continue to keep this account open for the time being and continue to use it when appropriate, mainly for news updates and important announcements, like during an emergency situation, where we require a multi-channel approach to get information to as many people as possible.

Any future decision about any social media channels needs to take into account the number of followers – currently X has over 26,000 followers many of whom are Reading residents.

For information:

These are the number of followers on our other corporate social media accounts

Facebook - 18,972

Instagram - 5,263

Linkedin - 13,229

4. Councillor White to ask the Lead Councillor for Corporate Services and Resources:

Supporting the Local Economy through Buying Local

Green Party Councillors believe having a strong local economy is key to tackling many of the challenges we face in Reading such as entrenched poverty and inequality. Preston Council has retained millions of pounds circulating in the local economy through prioritising local procurement. What percentage of Reading Council's procurement spend is spent locally ? What is the Council's definition of local ? How has this spend changed in recent years ? And what plans does the Council have in this area to increase local procurement ?

REPLY by Councillor Emberson Lead Councillor for Corporate Services and Resources.

Thank you Councillor White for your question.

Labour-run Preston Council has been using the “Preston Model”, a form of Community Wealth building, since 2012. One of the aims of this model is to localise as much spend as possible,

investing in local supply chains and improving local economic competitiveness. When it was introduced, just 5% of Preston Council's spend was with organisations in Preston. Within four years they increased that figure to over 18%.

I wish to point out to Councillor White that Preston Council themselves note on their website "we may have started well, but we have only begun to explore how, for example, the wider benefits of procurement spend can be tracked down the value chain. Our work to date has concentrated on getting those letting the contracts within anchor institutions to change their perspective and approach.

We now need to do more work with businesses in the supply sector, to encourage them to raise their game and to engage more with anchor procurement. And, where there are gaps in the supply chain to explore the opportunities for setting up co-operatives or new businesses to meet that untapped demand."

I appreciate entirely Councillor White's ongoing desire to find for this Labour administration silver bullets however the reality is there are very few on such complicated matters.

To respond directly to the question, in Reading, our definition of 'local' is Berkshire, in line with Cabinet Office guidance.

Analysis of supplier postcodes suggests that 53% of our spend this year has been with organisations across Berkshire, with the majority of that being assigned to Reading postcodes.

This figure excludes payments made to Brighter Futures for Children but includes payments to schools and nurseries.

We haven't previously published this data, so we don't have trend data to share with you at the current time. There is however a social value report tracking which will give Members the opportunity to review the good work we have done in this space.

This will entail directly looking to support local businesses in line with what is allowed under the Procurement Act. The review will also include our reflection of recent guidance from MHCLG issued to all local authorities allowing lower value contracts to be reserved to bidders within the local area.

I would also like to remind everyone of the increasing number of contracts let by the Council which attract social value that will support the local economy. One recent example of this was the bus shelter contract which has an offer of £350,000 of free advertising for local businesses.

5. Councillor Nikulina to ask the Leader of the Council:

City of Sanctuary

Reading has long prided itself on being a City of Sanctuary, and Councillors across parties have supported the principle that people fleeing war and persecution should be welcomed and supported in our town. This is something that many residents and community organisations in Reading care deeply about and it forms an important part of our identity as a diverse, compassionate and outward-looking Borough.

In light of this Council's anti-racism statement we will be hearing later this evening and Labour Government's recently proposed immigration changes, including proposals to reduce refugee status to 30 months, extend settlement routes to ten years and introduce restrictions affecting nationals of countries such as Afghanistan and Sudan, could the Leader of the Council outline what representations, if any, she has made to the Government regarding the impact these policies may have on people seeking sanctuary in Reading? And does she believe that demonstrating

moral leadership as an anti-racist City of Sanctuary also means being prepared to challenge national policies when they appear to undermine those same values?

REPLY by Councillor Terry Leader of the Council.

You are correct Reading is a welcoming town and the mayor's announcement this evening that the Council was formally recognised as a Council of Sanctuary by City of Sanctuary UK, marks a significant achievement in our ongoing commitment to welcoming, supporting, and empowering people.

Reading has a long history of welcoming people fleeing conflict and persecution. As a City of Sanctuary, our identity is rooted in inclusivity, compassion and anti-racism, and we remain committed to working with residents, partners and community organisations to uphold these principles.

However, I am concerned that your question oversimplifies complex issues. Anti-racism is about opposing discrimination based on race or ethnicity. Refugee policy involves law, capacity, security and humanitarian obligations.

Anti-racism is a universal principle – people should not face discrimination because of who they are. Refugee rights however are defined through legal frameworks such as asylum law and international agreements which always include criteria and limits.

I accept that they are connected but conflating them can cause confusion and harm.

Where national proposals may affect people seeking sanctuary in Reading, the council use established channels - including the Local Government Association, our local MPs, formal Government consultations and regional asylum and resettlement networks - to raise concerns about the potential impact on vulnerable individuals, on local services, and on the alignment of national policy with fairness, protection and long-term integration.

As a Borough committed to anti-racism and to the principles of the City of Sanctuary, our moral leadership must ensure that our values guide how we support people seeking safety. That does include challenging national policy where the evidence shows it may undermine those values or risk harm to our communities. Our role is to advocate for stability, dignity and fair treatment, and to ensure the voices and experiences of affected people are heard and represented in national discussions.

I have personally spoken to the MPs representing Reading regarding my concerns about the impact of some of the proposed changes, so yes Cllr Nikulina, I do believe that demonstrating moral leadership also means being prepared to challenge national policies when they appear to undermine these values. I am sure that you have also personally raised your concerns with your MP and the Government, but I would be interested to know what representations you have made.