

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5

(B) QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1. Moira Gomes to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:
Bedroom Tax

In April 2015 the bedroom tax will have been in place for 3 years. Could the Lead Councillor for Housing please tell me:

How many people in Reading are currently subject to the bedroom tax ?

How many people have fallen into rent arrears or associated financial difficulties as a result of the bedroom tax ?

How many bedrooms in social houses have been freed up by the bedroom tax ?

RESPONSE by Councillor Davies (Lead Councillor for Housing):

The total number of households in Reading currently subject to the bedroom tax is 693. This means that hundreds of residents of this town including many people with disabilities and health conditions are struggling even more to make ends meet.

Nationally a group of disabled tenants are challenging the bedroom tax in the Supreme Court which would take many people out of this cruel tax and Labour have pledged to abolish the bedroom tax altogether meaning that no one in Reading would be subject to it within weeks of a Labour government being elected.

As of 1st February 2015, 416 RBC properties were affected by the bedroom tax and out of these properties 106 households were in arrears. To put this in perspective, 60 of these were in receipt of part HB and between 2-3 weeks in arrears. The remaining 46 had higher levels of arrears.

40 tenants who were under-occupiers and under pensionable age have moved since 2013. However, it is not possible to provide definite information as to how many would have been claiming Housing Benefit and therefore been affected by the bedroom tax. This small number demonstrates the unrealistic nature of the bedroom tax - for many people it is simply not feasible to move to smaller properties, both due to simply the shortage of suitable housing - which this government has made worse with its disastrous approach to affordable housing, family circumstances and because many people with disabilities actually require an additional room.

2. Claire McDonald to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport:
Gosbrook Road Caversham Mini Roundabout

With regards to the mini roundabout at the junction of Church Street / Gosbrook Road / Prospect Street in Caversham, I would like to know what mechanism RBC has put in place to measure the effectiveness of the recent changes to the road layout and also what evidence does RBC have to suggest that it has improved safety for the public ?

RESPONSE by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport):

Thank you for the question.

The changes carried out at the junction of Gosbrook Road with Prospect Street are subject to a continuous process of review as a part of the road safety audit process over the next 3 years. This is in line with national standards.

Following completion of the works a Stage 3 road safety audit is now underway and we expect this to be completed within the next month to 6 weeks.

The Stage 4a road safety audit follows in 12 months, with a Stage 4b road safety audit in 3 years. The purpose of the Stage 4b road safety audit is to ensure the objectives of the original scheme have been met.

We are confident that the changes to this junction and the continued road safety audits will result in an overall improvement in road safety for all users of this very busy junction.

3. Tony Warrell to ask the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport:

London Road - 2014 Road Improvements

What affect has this project had on easing the congestion in East Readings' 'bottleneck'?

I understand there have been four traffic accidents including an overturned vehicle since the introduction of the new traffic light system at Cemetery Junction four months ago.

Is this correct?

So, the Councils scheme to improve the traffic movement now needs to be evaluated by those groups who were in support of this project - backed by £1.5m of public money in 2013.

Councillor Page claimed in an article in Get Reading on 4th October 2013 that; 'The A4 is a major gateway into Reading from the east and a key strategic rout for the wider Thames Valley region'. It was a 'plan to keep the traffic moving'.

What has changed?

The fragmented work was carried out over a long period of time at considerable cost and inconveniences to all road users.

The overlooked residents, especially those living near to the Kings Rd; and London Rd; in this residential area, not forgetting the hospital need a plan to reduce the noise and air pollution.

Can the Council report back please?

RESPONSE by Councillor Page (Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport):

I thank Mr Warrell for his question.

The highway improvement works at London Road and Cemetery Junction form part of both the wider Local Sustainable Transport Fund project, for which the Council received over £25m funding from the Department for Transport (DfT), and the Pinchpoint scheme funding from the DfT. Monitoring and evaluation of the LSTF project as a whole is being undertaken in line with the requirements of the LSTF evaluation framework, which includes the Council submitting annual output and outcome reports to the Department. The evaluation is focused on achieving the primary objectives of the LSTF programme of facilitating economic growth and reducing carbon emissions, for instance through reducing congestion and increasing levels of cycling and walking.

The schemes have been designed to enhance the streetscape at Cemetery Junction and London Road and included the following improvements:- footway widening to cater for new shared pedestrian and cycle routes, raised crossings at junctions to provide a level surface, de-cluttering of existing street furniture, footway and carriageway resurfacing, and upgrading the traffic signal junctions at Cemetery Junction, London Road / Alexandra Road, London Road / London Street and Crown Street / Southampton Street to ensure the junctions are operating as efficiently as possible.

The scheme is subject to a continuous process of review as a part of the road safety audit process over the next 3 years. The completion of the works was just before Christmas and the stage 3 road safety audit is underway (on the whole scheme) and we expect this to be completed within the next month to 6 weeks. From this stage 3 audit (initial scheme completion) there may be some alterations required as there are a few snagging issues and validation processes that, not unusually for a project of this type, need to be resolved. Stage 4a road safety audit follows in 12 months with stage 4b road safety audit in 3 years. The purpose of stage 4b road safety audit is to ensure the objectives of the original scheme have been met. We are confident that the investment in the area and the continued road safety audit will result in an overall improvement in road safety for all users.

Since completion of the scheme, the Council is aware of one injury accident on London Road near De Beauvoir Road and this took place on Monday 9th February 2015. The full details of the accident have not been released by Thames Valley Police but to date they have not contacted the Council to discuss any contributory factors as a result of the revised road layout.