

Labour: We've delivered on the Council's targets

Following the elections in May 2008, Reading had a hung Council for the first time for many years and Labour agreed to form a minority administration. In June 2008 Labour Council Leader Jo Lovelock moved a resolution to set out the Labour administration's priorities for 2008-10. That resolution was carried, with some minor amendments, and the final text is in the Appendix.

This report describes what Labour has done so far to meet those targets.

1 On the environment we have:

- a. Published a Climate Change Strategy and promoted Reading's Climate Change Pledge
- b. Set up the Climate Change Partnership to work with neighbouring Councils and other partners to reduce our carbon footprint
- c. Ensured through the planning system all new buildings are built to excellent or very good BREEM standards
- d. Seen the waste recycling centre at Smallmead voted the top civic amenity site in the country, and added a Materials Recycling Facility to it
- e. Increased recycling in Reading to 34.4% in 2008-9
- f. Endorsed the 10:10 campaign which aims to cut carbon emissions by 10% in 2010

2 On crime we have:

- a. Working with the police and with local communities, seen an overall 4% decrease in crime in Reading in 2008-9, following a 20% decrease over the previous four years
- b. Supported a *Veto Violence* campaign jointly with the police and young people aimed at preventing knife crime
- c. Supported Operation Falcon which has made a huge impact on the drug trade in Reading
- d. Tackling hot-spots through Neighbourhood Action Groups, seen anti-social behaviour cut by a quarter
- e. Launched a *Stamp It Out* campaign with our tenants to tackle anti-social behaviour on Council estates

- f. Appointed a Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator to focus efforts on reducing violence against women in particular
- g. Extended the ban on street drinking to cover the University area and much of West Reading

3 Working for our children, we have:

- a. Got half-way through a programme to improve 22 play areas in the Borough's parks, with funding from the Labour government.
- b. Now got a network of twelve recognised and designated children's centres across the town
- c. Worked hard to bring our Safeguarding service up to standard, it now being recognised by the Inspectors as having "greatly improved"
- d. Worked with children in the Council's care to develop a new pledge offering them the best possible opportunities in their lives
- e. Seen our schools continue to improve, with over half now judged good or outstanding
- f. Calculated that Labour has invested over £100M in new schools, new school buildings and major building works since Reading became responsible for education in 1998
- g. Opened a brand-new learning centre at Reading Girls, a brand-new Vocational Education Centre at Prospect School and a brand-new sixth form block at Kendrick
- h. Seen a huge 9% increase in the number of children meeting national targets at the end of their reception year, helped by the Council's move to a single point of entry in September
- i. Seen the number of children achieving 5 or more A*-C at GCSE increase from 58% in 2007 to 73.5% in 2009
- j. Seen Reading's A level students get A grades in 52.3% of their exams, almost double the national average

4 On housing we have:

- a. Completed 294 new build Housing Association homes in 2008-9, with many more on the way
- b. Rejected planning applications from developers that did not make a sufficient contribution to affordable housing

- c. Used additional funds made available by Government to bring forward the achievement of Decent Homes standard for all our Council homes
- d. Introduced a new Decent Neighbourhoods scheme to improve the environment in our Council estates
- e. Launched the Heatseeker scheme to help inform people about how energy-efficient their houses are and advise them of help with insulation and so on
- f. Appointed a project officer to develop a new Landlord Accreditation scheme for student accommodation in particular

5 Working for elderly and other vulnerable people, we have:

- a. Continued to help people whose needs are assessed as 'substantial' or 'greater moderate' as well as 'critical' - meaning over 2800 people are helped who would not be helped if they lived in Wokingham or West Berkshire
- b. Introduced new procedures to help safeguard and protect older people from abuse
- c. Consulted on and brought in *A Big Voice in Our Lives*, a new strategy for people with learning disabilities
- d. Picked up a national award for our Home Improvement Agency which assists older, disabled and other vulnerable people by carrying out repairs, adaptations and improvements to their homes
- e. Started a major refurbishment programme for our sheltered flats for the elderly
- f. Obtained planning permission for Extra Care Housing at the old Avenue School site and are now finalising funding for the scheme
- g. Worked with developers to get another Extra Care Housing scheme off the ground at Green Park

6 Worked to reduce traffic congestion by:

- a. Continued work on the massive scheme at Junction 11, expected to bring real reductions in congestion by next summer
- b. Finalising a Transport Innovation Fund bid which will bring £300M+ investment to the town, including, we hope, the third

Thames bridge, an HGV Low Emission Zone which will remove hundreds of the most polluting lorries from Reading's roads, improved bus priority measures and lower fares, and better facilities for cyclists and pedestrians

- c. Secured support from Oxfordshire for the principle of a third Thames Bridge, which they had long resisted
- d. Promoted Commonwheels, a community interest company aiming to establish a network of car clubs across the Borough
- e. As part of the upgrade in Reading Station, negotiated new bridges for Cow Lane to deal with the infamous bottle neck and get traffic out of the residential streets in west Reading.
- f. Consulted on a package of road safety measures in the Shinfield Road area and reduced the speed limit there as a first step

7 In promoting public transport, we have:

- a. Continued to invest in bus passenger information systems now provided at more and more bus stops across the town
- b. Designed and publicised a network of radial cycling routes which will be colour-coded alongside Reading Buses' premier routes
- c. Worked with Network Rail and other partners on the massive £644M scheme to redevelop Reading Station and provide a new concourse, which has now got planning permission
- d. Pressed for work on the new station to start as early as possible, so that Reading can reap the benefits and Reading people get the jobs

8 In regeneration, we have:

- a. Granted planning permission to Sackville Developments for a huge scheme including commercial, residential, retail and leisure uses, co-ordinated with the new Reading Station scheme, and stretching down to Friar Street
- b. Seen Phase 1 of Affinity's refurbishment of 1350 Council homes in Whitley completed nine months ahead of schedule
- c. Come to an agreement with the Dee Park Partnership to secure a £150million regeneration of the Dee Park estate, replacing all the 60s sub-standard flats with decent homes.

- 9 To protect the town's open spaces, we have:**
- a. Persuaded the Government to drop the proposal to build on Kennet Meadows from the South-East Plan
 - b. Started a drive to turn Kennet Meadows into a trust to give it long-term protection
 - c. Resisted plans to bring back the scheme for a Cross-Town Route which would have destroyed Kennetmouth
 - d. Rejected planning applications which conflicted with the Open Spaces Strategy
 - e. Under the BBC's Breathing Spaces scheme, worked with schools, community groups and others to enhance the town's green spaces and provide additional habitats for wildlife
 - f. Obtained £1.6M from the National Lottery to bring Caversham Court Gardens back to their former glory
- 10 To develop plans for a new theatre and library, we have:**
- a. Continued to consider this alongside the need for a new Civic Offices, but progress has been slow because of the global economic downturn
- 11 In promoting access to sport for all, we have:**
- a. Got on track to get 85% of young people taking part in two hours of sport a week, and three further hours by 2011
 - b. Extended free swimming for the under-16's from just school holidays to throughout the year
 - c. Introduced free swimming and a wider "Smile" sports programme for older people in the town's sports and leisure centres
 - d. Seen the Sports Reading Partnership pick up a top prize for best practice in the Government Business Awards
 - e. Now got a Quality Assured benchmark for Rivermead, Palmer Park Stadium, Central Pool and Meadway
- 12 Working with local communities, we have:**
- a. Seen the successful implementation of neighbourhood policing across the Borough, with Neighbourhood Action Groups making a real difference in many areas

- b. Developed proposals to bring Neighbourhood Action Groups and Safer Communities Forums together in a new and more efficient structure with access to funds to address local needs
- c. Greatly developed tenant participation on our Council estates, with hundreds of tenants now involved in a “sounding board” and other mechanisms
- d. Spread the Thriving Neighbourhoods programme to more parts of town, consulting local people in detail on what matters to them
- e. Ensured that committees dealing with planning, traffic management and licensing listen to and take account of the views of local people

13 Supporting the voluntary sector, we have:

- a. Continued generous funding for the voluntary sector, with over £2.5M committed this financial year
- b. Supported Reading Community Welfare Rights Unit in moving to a new and very central base on Oxford Road near the IDR
- c. Worked with the African Caribbean Community Group on plans which should see Central Club re-open next year as a base for a wide range of black community groups
- d. Agreed plans with the Muslim community to provide land at Green Road for a new mosque
- e. Started talks with Warren & District Residents Association to find a way of redeveloping the Mapledurham Pavilion

14 To improve our enforcement capacity, we have:

- a. Funded additional officers in Planning and brought a number of high-profile planning enforcement cases to a satisfactory conclusion
- b. Brought in new tough measures to tackle rogue landlords in the private sector, particularly in East Reading
- c. Continued, in co-operation with the police, the fight against graffiti and brought several prolific taggers before the courts

15 To help Reading through the economic downturn, which was not foreseen in the resolution last June, we have also:

- a. Run a series of credit crunch summits with partners, local businesses and the voluntary sector to focus on what could be

done to support local people, including extra money for Reading's CAB and Welfare Rights Unit to help them deal with increased demand.

- b. Provided advice on *Beating the Credit Crunch* for Reading residents, with pointers about where to go for help
- c. Supported Reading Credit Union, a new means of offering support to people who can't get a bank account, and running an active campaign to keep loan sharks out of town
- d. Brought in expert help to tackle loan sharks and prevent them exploiting Reading people
- e. Signed an accord on joint working with the Federation of Small Businesses, and worked to ensure their invoices are paid within 20 working days
- f. Pushed for more apprenticeships to give young people a start in work, with Council departments providing a lead by promising there will be 50 by April 2010.
- g. Built on the successful Local Labour schemes to ensure local people have the first opportunity to get jobs and gain skills on projects such as Dee Park.

APPENDIX : READING BOROUGH COUNCIL MEETING - 24 JUNE 2008

RESOLUTION : COUNCIL PROGRAMME - 2008/10

This Council reaffirms its commitment to quality public services, to good management of the Council's finances, and to working with partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors in the interests of the people of the town.

This Council resolves that the key priorities to be addressed in its programme for 2008-2010 will include:

- Reducing Reading Council's carbon emissions by a minimum of 10% by 2012, becoming one of the leading Councils in carbon reduction and leading the fight against climate change. Working through the planning system to make sure new buildings are built to the highest environmental and energy-saving standards, and reviewing the Council's waste policies so as to minimise the amount of waste generated, increase the use of recycled materials and maximise the level of recycling, subject to economic and environmental cost.
- Aiming to ensure crime in Reading continues to fall - by working with the police to strengthen neighbourhood policing by working with the increased number of police officers and PCSO's; by further developing action on drugs, anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, street drinking and graffiti
- Aiming to ensure every child gets the best possible start in life, with a strong network of children's centres, good schools, and good training opportunities, working to improve the availability of school places for Reading children and continuing to invest in Reading's schools so that the town's record scores for GCSE and A-level continue to improve
- Developing more affordable housing - to rent and to buy - giving people a chance to have a decent home at a price they can afford, and achieving Reading's Decent Homes standard for all our Council homes
- Providing high quality safe and reliable services for older people, people with disabilities, people with mental health problems and other vulnerable adults - maintaining the Council's current eligibility criteria and offering choices on how individual care needs are met, both at home and in high quality appropriate residential placements, such as Extra Care Housing
- Working to reduce traffic congestion, particularly in the town centre, taking account of the recommendations of the Transport Commission. This Council will also support the introduction of car clubs to Reading as a means of reducing congestion and also reducing the number of cars on our roads. Further, this Council will investigate the possibilities for introducing charging for lorries passing through the town which add to congestion and lower our air quality.
- Promoting public transport and cycling as alternatives to the car, working to overcome South Oxfordshire's resistance to a third Thames Bridge, and making sure Reading benefits to the full from the £664Million for revamping

Reading Station, which is one of the biggest investments in public transport in the country

- Working in partnership to continue to regenerate areas of Reading, both in the centre on sites such as the civic area and the station, and at a neighbourhood level with schemes such as the Dee Park Regeneration.
- Ensuring protection of the town's open spaces, including Kennet Meadows and Kennetmouth, and seeking to add to them
- Developing plans for a new, larger, state of the art theatre to replace the ageing Hexagon and a modern, improved central library, as part of the regeneration of the civic centre area
- Promoting access to sport for all, with the Sport Reading partnership helping Reading children participate in a minimum of 5 hours of sport and exercise a week
- Developing better mechanisms for consulting communities on issues of local concern and for local communities to request action by the Council on their local priorities
- Maintaining Reading's generous support to the voluntary sector, working to provide a new resource centre for smaller voluntary organizations and helping local groups and ethnic minority organisations who are keen to develop their own community facilities
- Enforcing against breaches of standards by private landlords, including health and safety, infestation, failure to clear rubbish, and overcrowding and continuing to work with the police and the magistrates to crack down on graffiti vandalism, and investing in graffiti cleaning teams