



**Reading**  
Borough Council  

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Working better with you

# Working better with you in Neighbourhoods



# 1. Our Vision for Neighbourhoods

Our vision is to foster cohesive, attractive and thriving neighbourhoods where people want to live and work and to address and reduce inequality by 'closing the gap' between the most and least deprived neighbourhoods. Our aim is to work with partners and communities to create vibrant, thriving neighbourhoods and to work together to deliver joined-up services at a local level. Our experience accepts that a one size approach does not fit all as every community is different. Both our engagement and delivery will reflect this.

Where we live and the quality of our immediate environment has a huge impact on our quality of life and wellbeing. This includes the physical environment - the cleanliness of our streets, places for children to play, green spaces and so on; but also how we feel about our neighbourhood - whether we feel safe, have a sense of community and get on with our neighbours.

The Council is committed to working with local communities and partner agencies to improve the quality of life in our neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods need to meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents and to be safe, well run and attractive places in which people want to live and work. They need to be inclusive places where local people are empowered to shape, feel ownership and contribute to the life of their neighbourhood.

## A number of key principles underpin our approach:

- To 'think neighbourhood', ensuring that we have a holistic understanding of the needs of local areas and how these impact on each other, and that we take a strategic approach to meeting these needs, not confined by service boundaries.
- Ensuring an integrated approach to delivering services across Council departments and other agencies - joining up services on the ground rather than working in silos.
- Engaging with communities to understand their needs, their experience of services and what works to inform service provision and approaches to tackling local issues.
- Working collaboratively with and empowering communities to make the changes they want in their neighbourhoods, to develop services and to support each other.
- Targeting resources effectively - with more resources focused on those areas of greater need.
- Intervening early before issues, needs and costs escalate - as prevention is better for everyone than trying to put things right afterwards.



We also acknowledge and accept that there is no simple or agreed definition of a 'neighbourhood'. Our approach recognises that definitions and boundaries will vary depending on context.

Every neighbourhood has its own identity and needs and, respecting that, our approach will reflect this - there can be no 'one size fits all' solution to tackling local needs and structures will be flexible, building on what works, and responding to community energy and focus. From time to time all areas experience problems and we will respond to tackling these 'hot spots' with specific interventions.

### **Think Neighbourhood - joined-up local services**

Our approach places a strong emphasis on neighbourhood working. Teams will operate in dedicated 'patches' co-ordinating services being delivered between them. The intention is that our teams and partners will improve the way in which they work together, aligning resources and co-ordinating activities and service delivery to make the best use of diminishing resources and deliver the best outcomes for local communities. Working together at a local level enables Councillors, teams, partners and residents to identify where outcomes could be improved through greater integration of activities between those involved. To support this approach we are organising more services on a patch basis aligned with Ward boundaries. This will see Officers and teams working together to deliver on neighbourhood priorities in a holistic way.

### **Engaging and enabling communities**

As a Council we have also been determined to develop a new relationship with residents, one in which residents can be confident that their voice is heard, where we work with local people to find solutions that are right for Reading and right for their community. Our approach will continue to maximise opportunities for residents to get involved and will create greater scope for communities to tackle some issues for themselves. We want local people to feel real ownership of their local neighbourhood - and ownership of the solutions to meeting its needs. Our starting point is listening to local people about the services and issues that are important to them and their communities, and working better together to deliver our shared priorities. As local communities face economic austerity and public services face further funding reductions, it has become more vital to build strong communities - supporting local people to build on their own strength and assets and enabling them to play a part to meet local needs. Working together we can achieve more and are greater than the sum of our individual efforts - sometimes with very little resource but a lot of goodwill, energy and creativity we can achieve a great deal through partnership. This is the way we will be able to do more with less, at a time when there is much less money around. And it is the right thing to do because everyone - not just those at the top - deserves a chance to shape their own lives and help to shape their community's life too.

### **Targeting resources**

Support and structures are in place to involve and work with communities across the town. However, it weakens communities when the gaps between the rungs on the ladder of opportunity get wider and wider. Our goal is to narrow the gap between the neighbourhoods with the best and worst outcomes (health, qualifications, employment and so on). We know that there are significant variations in the quality of life across Reading. Different neighbourhoods and different communities experience variations in health, income deprivation, educational achievement and levels of crime and these issues are often interlinked. Our approach consciously focuses greater resources to make a difference in the most deprived areas to improve outcomes overall.

## 2. Our Commitments

### We will:

- Keep local Ward profiles updated as a resource for the Council, its partners and local people
- Provide a 'place profile' which incorporates soft intelligence gathered through understanding the community's story and feedback on their experience of services and living in Reading.
- Keep under review 'priority neighbourhoods' and the deployment of community development resources across key organisations in the town.
- Develop area based teams to co-ordinate the maintenance of our environment and public spaces.
- Review the configuration of services provided at a local level to identify opportunities to co-locate and better join-up neighbourhood services, including in 'community hubs' in key areas.



- Continue to develop and support neighbourhood networks and NAGs as routes for local people to engage in issues of concern at a local level, and to work with resident and community groups to support local action for change.
- Continue to ring-fence budgets for local people to bid for and allocate to local, neighbourhood priorities, particularly in priority neighbourhoods.
- Encourage different ways for people to get actively involved in their communities and solve their own problems.
- Train and invest in frontline workers to enable them to harness community strengths.
- Continue to fund infrastructure support for voluntary, community and resident groups to develop and thrive.
- Recognise the potential of services delivered from within the community.

### 3. Introduction

The *Reading 2020 Partnership* (our Local Strategic Partnership or LSP) brings together key partners from all sectors across Reading – public, private, voluntary, community and faith – to develop a long term vision and strategy for the town. ‘A Vision for Reading in 2030 and Beyond’ our Sustainable Community Strategy, describes a collective ambition for active neighbourhoods:

*Everyone has a part to play in shaping the future of their local neighbourhood. Communities will take responsibility for their local neighbourhoods, assisted by local public organisations.*

The Sustainable Community Strategy set out the case for a new way of working across sectors and with local people – enabling individuals to take control of their own lives, collaborating with one another to share problems, to act individually and collectively to improve quality of life. This priority recognised that everyone has something to contribute and can make a difference in their community.

In the same year, Reading Borough Council launched ‘Working Better with You’ as a campaign to improve residents’ involvement in decision making across the wide range of services provided by the Council. The ‘Working Better With You’ principles which underpin this strategy and our approach to neighbourhood working are:

- Greater resident engagement in shaping decisions and determining services
- A more integrated and adaptable organisation
- Stronger partnerships with others to deliver services
- More locally focused on neighbourhoods and responsive at a local level
- Most appropriate delivery methods chosen according to residents’ views and needs and budget available



## 4. Understanding Local Needs

The Council and its partners collect a range of data about the needs and nature of our community. This information provides a helpful backdrop to our Neighbourhood strategy and helps to inform key priorities.

### **Borough-wide:**

A regular Reading Residents' Survey collects information on the perceptions and behaviours of residents and provides data to inform improvements to services in the town. The survey is one of a number of activities to support the Council's 'Working Better with You' approach. It provides a statistically valid sample of responses from residents about what it is like to live in Reading.

The last survey was conducted in 2012. The survey found that satisfaction with services in Reading's neighbourhoods remains higher than the national average. Eight out of ten people were satisfied overall with their local area as a place to live, with a jump of 8.4% in satisfaction from 2009 to 2012. The percentage of residents who feel the level of crime needs to be improved has reduced from 36% to 29%.

In 2012 respondents felt that the most important factors in making somewhere a good place to live were the level of crime, followed by good schools and good neighbours. More than two-fifths (46%) of respondents felt a strong sense of belonging to their immediate neighbourhood, and this tends to increase with age.

Issues which people felt were most important and a priority for improvement included crime, clean streets, road and pavement repairs and affordable decent housing.

Overall, satisfaction on key measures has improved in recent years and the Council is committed to continuing to work with residents and our partners at a neighbourhood level to make a difference and tackle issues of local concern.



### **Local Level:**

Reading is not a homogenous area - different neighbourhoods have different characteristics and needs. Understanding these can be very helpful for agencies in planning services and targeting resources.

Ward level 'profiles' have been produced as part of Reading's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. These provide a tool for promoting Ward conversations based on evidence of local need and provide the facility to utilise more local level data in promoting and planning localised services. These Ward profiles can be found at <http://rbccm.web-labs.co.uk/jsna-reading/borough-profile-overview/ward-profiles/>.

These area profiles present data on a wide variety of topics including population characteristics, deprivation, poverty and access to services, economy and enterprise, education, health, and community safety using results from the 2011 Census and other data sources. Each profile includes a 'spine chart' showing how that Ward compares to Reading as a whole and nationally against a range of indicators.

Over time the profiles will also make it easier to assess change and the impact of action at a local level against key indicators. The profiles will be further developed over time and will be refreshed and updated with new data.

The Council has also produced handy 'Ward snapshots' providing summary data about each Ward in an accessible 2 sides of A4. These are available at <http://www.reading.gov.uk/council/profile-of-reading-borough/ward-profiles>.

A number of national websites also allow data to be produced for much smaller areas than Wards or 'super output area' (Census and Public Health data is available at this level for instance with the latter including interactive maps). Public Health data can be found at <http://www.localhealth.org.uk/>. Census 2011 data can be found at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/census-data/index.html>.

### An example of a Ward level 'spine chart':

Category	Indicator	Minster	Reading Average	Ward Range Worst	Local Authority Average	Ward Range Best
					Worst ← ----- Best →	
Deprivation & access	Indices of Multiple Deprivation - IMD (2010)	23.2	19.9	33.0		4.7
	% children in Poverty (2010)	25.4	20.7	34.5		2.6
	Access to Services - IMD domain (2010)	24.4	23.4	28.1		17.9
Economy & Enterprise	% JSA Claimants (November 2012)	4.2	3.1	4.9		0.8
	Post-16 Qualifications - % Level 3 or higher (2011)	48.6	48.3	28.0		68.6
Education	% key Stage 2 Level 4+ (2012)	65.3	77.2	65.3		94.8
	% 5+ GCSEs A*-C (inc Maths and English) (2012)	55.2	59.4	40.2		100.0
Health	All Cause Mortality <75 (2008-10)	136.4	107.1	153		52
	Life Expectancy - males (2008-10)	73.6	78	73.6		84.7
	Life Expectancy - females (2008-10)	79.3	83.1	79.3		88.0
	Emergency hospital admissions for all causes (2010/11)	88.7	82.5	99.0		58.3
	% low Birthweights <2500g (2008-10)	9.2	7.3	9.2		5.2
Housing	% occupancy rating - bedrooms -1 or less (2011)	6.5	5.9	9.6		0.6
	% no Central Heating (2011)	4.2	2.9	5.6		0.8
	% socially Rented (2011)	19.7	15.5	35.7		0.7
Community Safety	Crime rate per 1,000 (2011/12)	61.1	64.3	284.7		17.3
	Anti-social Behaviour rate per 1,000 (2011/12)	20.3	20.0	67.5		4.3
	Theft and handling stolen goods rate per 1,000 (2011/12)	19.8	24.3	174.7		1.7
	Criminal Damage rate per 1,000 (2011/12)	7.3	7.3	16.9		1.7

#### How to read the spine chart:

The shapes on the graph represent the value of the ward compared against the Local Authority average. If positioned to the right of the average line this suggests the ward is performing 'better' in a particular indicator, to the left suggests it is 'worse'. This does not necessarily mean higher or lower values, e.g. high GCSE attainment is 'better', whereas a high crime rate is 'worse'. The light grey rectangle represents the range between the 'best' and 'worst' wards in the local authority. The yellow circles represent values that are within the 75th and 25th percentile for that indicator, or where most values typically lie. The black triangles represent values that are better than the average, whilst the blue diamond shows values that are worse.

## 5. Neighbourhood Working

Delivering effective services in neighbourhoods is underpinned by listening to and working with local people about what matters most to them and by effective and joined-up working across service providers. It's about joining up services on the ground.

### Patch Based Working

The Council has reviewed the way we deliver services on a local area basis and, in particular, looking at how we can ensure a co-ordinated approach to maintaining the environment or 'public realm' including highways maintenance, street care and open spaces. We know that good quality, clean and attractive neighbourhoods can make a significant difference to quality of life and health. A new approach to working has been trialled under the banner 'Love Clean Reading'. As noted in the section above, clean streets and well-kept roads, footpaths and open spaces are a top priority for local people and the Council is committed to maintaining neighbourhood environments to a high standard and increasing the sense of civic pride which local people feel.

#### Love Clean Reading - co-ordinating local services

More than 130 streets across Reading were deep cleaned as part of a new initiative by Reading Borough Council called 'Love Clean Reading.' Council teams converged on local streets for a concerted clean up, co-ordinating a range of services and carefully sequencing work to maximise impact. This included street sweeping, verge edging, gulley emptying, weeding, tree pruning and clearing vegetation. Residents were given advance notice of the works and following the 'blitz' residents and local businesses were sent a feedback form to get their views on how effective the work was. This is the sort of work the Council carries out on a regular basis across all of our neighbourhoods. What is different about this approach was organising teams to work in neighbourhoods at the same time to make a real difference.



The Love Clean Reading initiative represents the first step in creating a highly integrated, neighbourhood based public realm maintenance programme and the introduction of new technology will further improve the efficiency of inspections, repairs and co-ordination. Building on this success the Council has improved the co-ordination and delivery of services at the local level through a new structure which mainstreams and embeds this thinking and approach more widely.

A new team has brought together a number of functions so that all elements of 'caring' for the streets are within the same service. New area-based teams provide a greater neighbourhood focus to ensure the effective co-ordination of services for local residents. Each area or patch will have a designated Neighbourhood Officer who will work locally to engage with the community and provide a single point of contact within the Council, covering inspections and liaison for all Council land (Highway/Housing/Open Spaces/Parks). The Neighbourhood team will offer a single point of enquiry for residents about their local environment.

The Borough will be served by 9 teams, based on current resources, with patch areas based on Electoral Ward boundaries, recognising this is a pragmatic approach to locality working. This recognises in reality a best fit "cluster of neighbourhoods". Whilst geographically a much smaller area, the town centre has a designated team reflecting its unique needs and composition. See Appendix 1 - map of area-based teams.

Taking this approach further, each area will also have designated Community Safety, Housing and Neighbourhood Involvement Officer contacts as part of wider 'virtual' teams. This means that local people will know who to contact for help in their area with named individuals in a local team, offering better co-ordination, improved customer service and accountability. Core functions covered by the wider team will include:

- neighbourhood environmental inspections and co-ordination
- scheduling of neighbourhood service delivery
- parks and open spaces (maintenance)
- refuse collection and recycling
- Anti-social Behaviour and Community Safety
- neighbourhood initiatives



Bringing teams together in this way offers best value through reducing overheads and also offers better customer service with increased flexibility to respond to demands. The Council will continue to develop this approach to local co-ordination over time.

The aim is to ensure a 'one Council approach', with a strong resident-focused ethos and a commitment to getting it right first time. This means a single point of contact for reporting problems, residents only having to report a problem once and one area-based team working together to put things right. Improving the local environment will increase community pride and ownership of their area and encourage local people to then get involved to make an area even better.

#### **RESCUE - cleaning up wild places**

Reading's waterways and woodlands are the focus of annual Rivers and Environmental Spaces Clean-Up events (RESCUE). Business and local volunteers give up their time to clean up rubbish in hot spot areas. In October 2013 a major two-day operation fielded a dozen teams who cleared up an amazing 4 tonnes of unsightly waste from some of Reading's most beautiful wild spaces. The Council and Thames Water sponsor and support the events which harness a huge input from community volunteers to make Reading greener and cleaner.

### Promoting green space in Minster

Following feedback from local consultation exercises, the need to access local green space was highlighted as a priority by local residents. Many of these residents live in flatted accommodation, such as the high rise blocks in Wensley Road. A working group involving Council staff from Thriving Neighbourhoods, Housing, Parks and local people developed a leaflet promoting a walk in the Kennet meadow that will encourage people to take advantage of their local “countryside”. Signage will also be installed, and joint work with the local Primary school will get young children appreciating a previously unexplored green space on their doorstep.

### Community Hubs

There are some services which need to be universally available and provided consistently across the town. Other services, schemes and initiatives will be targeted to reflect local needs. Reading is a compact town and is well connected to the centre by frequent bus services. However, the Council recognises the importance of people being able to access some services and facilities in their local centre.

The Council has started a process to review the delivery of services at a neighbourhood level to make the best use of community facilities and buildings. Services have often evolved at a local level, incrementally over time, and so services may not be configured in the best way - or make most effective use of scarce resources at a time when funding for local public services is diminishing. Reviews will look at ways of better joining up services to add value and encourage people to access a greater range of resources, the help and support available in welcoming environments. This might mean bringing services together in new ways, co-locating, and using buildings differently. Local people will be involved in these reviews and in shaping the way services are delivered locally.

At the heart of this approach is making neighbourhood facilities vibrant, well-used, sustainable, with local people having a strong sense of ownership and pride in those facilities. A more integrated model of service provision is more sustainable, offers potential to improve efficiency, and to improve quality of life and have a greater impact on increasing skills and employment, reducing debt, improving outcomes for children and families, reducing crime and anti-social behaviour through services working more closely together. Many public buildings already offer a range of services.

Work is underway with the Whitley Community Development Association (Big Local) in South Reading to review services provided in the area and to consider options for the redevelopment of the South Reading Youth and Community Centre to better meet local need and to provide a community café offering a welcoming and accessible place for local people to meet. In Dee Park, the Council and Catalyst Housing Group are working closely with the local community to make the most of current facilities during the regeneration of the estate and to plan and influence the design of the new community facilities which will be delivered in the next phase of the regeneration. Work in other areas including Southcote, Amersham Rd and Dee Park will follow a similar approach to these established projects - engaging local communities and partners in rethinking local service delivery and use of public buildings.



## 6. Working with Local Communities

There are a range of ways in which the Council and its partners seek to engage local people to influence decision making and the development of services. Some opportunities are Borough-wide but we recognise that issues of concern for local people often relate to the local area where they live or operate their business. Research shows that people are most likely to engage with services and policy making at a very local level. This is especially likely in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where people's choices are more likely to be dictated by their immediate surroundings.

There is a range of benefits to talking to people at a neighbourhood level:

- neighbourhood is the most effective level at which to engage citizens and service users;
- gaining a better understanding of local issues and how they interact;
- fixing "little things" can be inexpensive but very valued by local people;
- local knowledge and an 'area voice' increases chances of the right investment;
- information sharing and mutual understanding improves;
- local outreach and engagement increases take up of services.

We want to work *with* local communities to understand their needs, their experience of living in the area and their priorities. Going beyond just listening, we strive to work collaboratively with and to support communities to make the changes they want in their neighbourhoods, to develop local initiatives and to support each other.

With limited resources, the Council will engage with local communities at three levels, with greater resources being targeted to make a difference in the most deprived areas:



Level 1: Universal - every neighbourhood will:

- o have an opportunity to contribute and raise local issues through the Neighbourhood Action Group structure with a particular focus on crime, nuisance and anti-social behaviour (see below)
- o have a patch based team delivering key street scene and community support services with named contacts as above.
- o have access to peer led support for any neighbourhood group via the Council-funded Reading Neighbourhood Network (RNN)

Level 2: Problem-Solving - specific targeted interventions

- o from time to time, a neighbourhood will require some specific intervention, which is usually time limited, to tackle a specific issue for example a spate of vandalism or car crime, environmental graffiti, litter, fly tipping, land issues, highways, and environmental maintenance.
- o or there may be issues unique to that neighbourhood - such as a Planning issue or population need.

**Level 3: Identified priority neighbourhoods will benefit from:**

- o resources targeted at these areas to support the development of neighbourhood initiatives - encouraging creative partnership working across agencies and the community, to leverage greater impact
- o a higher level of engagement with local people
- o action plans focussed on tackling deprivation, raising aspiration and improving quality of life in our most deprived neighbourhoods.
- o support for multi-agency neighbourhood networks

### **Universal Engagement: Neighbourhood Action Groups**

Reading's 13 Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) are area-based problem solving fora which bring together volunteer resident representatives from the community and local partners like the Council, the Police, businesses and schools and typically meet every 2 months. The NAGs are broadly focussed on crime, nuisance and anti-social behaviour and tackle the top priorities as identified by their communities. However, their remit extends to a wide range of local issues including environmental nuisance (fly-tipping, litter, graffiti); speeding; cycle safety; fear of crime (lighting issues, security); street drinking and so on - as well as crime prevention.

The NAGs are supported by the Council's Neighbourhood Initiative Officers and feed into the Safer Reading Neighbourhood Action Group Forum which advises the Community Safety Partnership. In areas where NAGs are less active the Council links into other well attended local residents' groups to avoid duplication of effort. Care needs to be taken not to overburden neighbourhoods with forums, committees and partnerships that are complex and overwhelming and so we work on the basis that structures are less important than willingness to work together, and take a pragmatic 'what works' approach.

The NAGs and other neighbourhood level groups provide a forum for sharing information, developing partnerships, for agencies and local people to enter into a constructive dialogue to tackle local issues and to improve the quality of life in the area.

#### **Oxford Road Crime Prevention**

Police, Streetcare and Community Safety colleagues worked alongside local residents from the Oxford Road NAG on a joint crime reduction/environmental project in and around the Central Swimming pool. This initiative involved leafleting local households with information on how to prevent burglary, cutting back hedges to improve sight lines and generally tidying up the area of graffiti, litter and fly-tipping.



### Exbourne Road Parking - improving road safety

The South Whitley Neighbourhood Action Group has been working on dangerous and illegal parking on Exbourne Road at school drop off and pick up times to reduce road safety risks. Working with the schools and Traffic Network Management, 'no waiting' parking restrictions are being introduced and the NAG group is now due to produce and deliver an educational leaflet for parents to explain the new parking restrictions around the same time as enforcement begins.



### Neighbourhood Networks in Priority Neighbourhoods

In Priority neighbourhoods the Council has established 'Neighbourhood Networking' groups. These bring together front line staff, community leaders, representatives of the faith, voluntary, business and statutory sectors and local Councillors to work together to untangle and effectively tackle often complex problems in areas of greatest need, to harness their combined energy, avoid duplication, develop the best solutions and make the most effective use of resources.

The Council will (as below) review the current use of resources and designated Priority areas and will work with partner organisations to increase the number of local networks to ensure comprehensive coverage of areas identified as a priority.

## Neighbourhood Budgets

'Participatory budgeting' directly involves local people in making decisions on the spending and priorities for a defined public budget. This can happen at different levels. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and other research has demonstrated the value of providing very local and direct access to a community fund to tackle problems at a neighbourhood level, with grant recipients themselves involved in grants panels. The aim is to make expenditure in neighbourhoods more transparent, ensure that it reflects local priorities, and to develop involvement and interaction within a community.

In Reading, the NAGs are able to identify community priorities and local people, residents and businesses can bid for small grants - in particular to support crime reduction, crime prevention and other related initiatives. Those proposing a project are supported through the process by their local Neighbourhood Initiatives Officer who can also provide crime reduction advice. Bids are encouraged and welcomed where they form part of a wider initiative to enable more effective and efficient use of funds.

In targeted Priority neighbourhoods, the Council Housing department runs the 'Your Community, Your Cash' scheme. This directly involves the community and local residents in developing, putting forward and approving bids to improve life in the local neighbourhood. A 'pot' of money is made directly available for communities and neighbourhoods to bid for. The bidding process usually takes place in 'full view' of the residents usually within a community event or fun-day style setting where residents vote for their favourite projects. Over the last few years a diversity of social opportunities and activities have been supported through Your Community Your Cash funding including homework clubs, Growalot - allotment schemes, youth projects and life skills training.



### Community Kids

In 2012 the Council piloted a new project called "Community Kids" with primary school children to give them a better understanding of anti-social behaviour and how it affects their families, community and neighbourhood. Activities are fun and the children get out and about to carry out inspections, design posters to deter unsafe or nuisance behaviour and meet Officers working to prevent anti-social behaviour. The project was a great success and the children involved really enjoyed helping to improve their neighbourhood and seemed proud of their community. Housing also funds activities in holiday periods to keep our younger residents busy - ranging from football, a radio project, hair and beauty activities and street dance.

## 7. Building Stronger Communities

Community empowerment is about having the conditions in place that allow local people to make a difference to improve their localities and which encourage them to believe it is both possible and worth it. In support of this the Council has invested in its own and external resources to support community development.

### Building the Capacity of Local Organisations

Recognising the value of a strong and diverse voluntary and community sector, the Council provides core infrastructure grants to Reading Voluntary Action (RVA) and the Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality (ACRE) to enable them to support smaller and emerging communities and community groups.

Reading Voluntary Action and the Council have worked alongside residents' groups and neighbourhood based organisations to establish the Reading Neighbourhood Network (RNN). RNN provides peer led support to over 40 neighbourhood groups, through encouragement, advice, practical support and training. Aided by their acclaimed website, RNN plays a key role in disseminating information and getting people connected.

In addition to the mutual support that flows between RNN's membership, they have also established key themes for action for 2014: combating social isolation in Reading's neighbourhoods and encouraging practical, locally based contributions towards Reading's 'Climate Change Strategy'.

#### **Amersham Road Play Activities**

A group of local women, who have got to know each other at the Caversham Children's Centre, have identified a gap in play provision for 5-12 year olds on the Amersham Rd Estate. With help from the Council, Earley Charity, Catalyst Housing, Radian Housing, Reading Voluntary Action and the Caversham Children's Centre, a community group (the Caversham Fund Group) has been formed that runs a term-time weekly after school play club for over 40 local kids. In addition, this group also co-ordinates the Amersham Road Summer Festival and is instrumental in providing the local energy that is helping to get a Community Association established and a Community Newspaper produced.

#### **Bell Tower Community Association Tackle Graffiti**

The Bell Tower Community Association, working in partnership with the Council's Streetcare Team and local businesses, tackled and eradicated an intensive spate of graffiti. Augmenting the work of our Anti-Graffiti team, local people were trained in the use of graffiti cleaning equipment/chemicals, undertook risk assessments, had paint donated by Drews Hardware and put in a lot of effort to rid their neighbourhood of this environmental blight.

## Community Development in Reading

Community Development seeks to develop people's skills to enable them to influence what happens where they live. Community Development workers help communities to bring about social change and improve the quality of life in their local area. They work with individuals, families and whole communities to empower them to:

- make sense of the issues which affect their lives and identify their assets, needs, opportunities, rights and responsibilities;
- plan what they want to achieve and take appropriate action;
- develop activities and services to generate aspiration and confidence.

A Community Development worker often acts as a link between communities and a range of public and voluntary sector providers. They are frequently involved in addressing inequality and projects often target communities perceived to be culturally, economically or geographically disadvantaged. A good deal of the work is project based, which means that Community Development workers usually have a specific geographical community or social group on which to focus.



The Council directly employs a team of 'Neighbourhood Initiative Officers' and these provide support to both the 'universal' Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) and are deployed strategically in those area of highest social deprivation (Priority neighbourhoods).

### Priority Neighbourhoods

Designated Priority neighbourhoods currently are:

- South Reading
- Amersham Road
- Coley Park
- Southcote
- Dee Park

These have been reviewed and additional areas have been identified where greater focus is required:

- Old Norcot
- Oxford Rd area
- Katesgrove

Other agencies, community leaders and the faith sector are also making significant contributions across Reading in developing the capacity of local communities, often employing dedicated Community workers. This includes workers employed by Reading Voluntary Action, Earley Charity, and Housing Associations (most notably Catalyst Housing Association in Dee Park and Amersham Road).

Reading Voluntary Action (RVA) have additionally recruited four "Community

Organisers", who will be located in Battle, Abbey and Park Wards. The Community Organisers programme is a national programme, and a grass-roots movement, seeking to build relationships in communities to activate people and create social change through collective action.

In some of the Council's Priority neighbourhood areas, the Council's Neighbourhood Initiative Officers will link in with Community Development work led by these other agencies, by providing a conduit and link to a wider range of Council and other statutory services.

Looking forward the Council needs to do more to facilitate the co-ordination of Community Development resources across sectors to prevent duplication and ensure alignment of activity at a local level.

RVA are also working to develop an online resource for workers across agencies engaged in Community Development activities - to include a range of information linked to interactive maps - on funding, key community work contacts, community notice boards and accessible community buildings.

#### **Southcote Community Association making a difference**

In collaboration with an energetic group of Children's Centre users, a range of community and faith groups have set up the Southcote Community Association which is energising local people to get involved, organising social events, producing a community newspaper and organising a children and young people's survey that will culminate in a summit to address and tackle the need for more play and activities for young people in Southcote. This local effort has been supported by a wide cross section of staff from the Library, Children's Centre, Housing and Thriving Neighbourhoods team.



Community Development work is also the foundation which underpins and builds capacity to support wider Council and community objectives. These include:

- supporting approaches to remodel services with and for service users in a way that starts with the individual or community and their needs.
- building community capacity to support increasing community self-reliance - enabling people at a local level to contribute to their local area and support each other, whatever their needs and at whatever stage in their life.

**Case Study: Neighbourhood based services for older people**

The 'Let's Talk Care' consultation in 2013 about Day opportunities for older people demonstrated a strong appetite for support to maintain the social connections people had valued as younger adults, very often based on their neighbourhoods. Whilst retaining a Day centre for older people who need specialist care, the Council is now shifting some of its resource away from traditional centre-based provision into supporting neighbourhood developments. A committee of volunteers in Caversham was supported to launch an Older People's Social Club at Amersham Road Community Centre in January 2014. A separate committee of volunteers is being supported to develop facilities in Southcote and to reach the most isolated older people there



The Council has also commissioned an organisation to pilot 'timebanking' in three areas of the town - Whitley Wood, Katesgrove and Southcote. The Council is also supportive of a fourth Timebank being developed in the Oxford Road area. Timebanking helps people identify the skills they can share with others and then exchange these skills in a safe and inclusive manner. By brokering exchanges of time credits between neighbours so people share different skills and experiences, time banks can enhance people's connection to their local community.

Timebanking has proved effective in other towns and is deliberately being tried out in different parts of Reading to help us understand better its potential to help people make more of their community. In particular it is hoped that older and disabled people or those living with long term health conditions are able to give and receive both companionship and practical assistance through those networks and therefore have less need for statutory support.

Timebanks have the potential of helping people to enjoy life in the community, feel involved, form friendships and prevent isolation. As this is a pilot exercise, it is expected that there will be a significant amount of learning to be gained from undertaking this project.

This strategy sets out the Council's approach to neighbourhood working, including enabling local people to take action and make their neighbourhoods better places to live and work. If you would like to get involved in your neighbourhood, contacts and sources of advice are set out below.

### Inspired and want to make a difference in your Reading neighbourhood?

For advice and information on getting involved in your neighbourhood contact:

Chris Bloomfield/Community Development Manager-Tel:0118-9372176  
[chris.bloomfield@reading.gov.uk](mailto:chris.bloomfield@reading.gov.uk)

Reading Voluntary Action (RVA) - Tel 0118 957 4124  
[info@rva.org.uk](mailto:info@rva.org.uk)

Reading Neighbourhood Network - Tel 07890 118167  
[info@rgneighbours.net](mailto:info@rgneighbours.net)

