

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday 4 May 2017

West Berkshire Council is committed to equality of opportunity. We will treat everyone with respect, regardless of race, disability, gender, age, religion or sexual orientation.

If you require this information in a different format or translation, please contact Moira Fraser on telephone (01635) 519045.



WestBerkshire
C O U N C I L

This page is intentionally left blank

Executive Meeting

4 May 2017

Questions and Answers



Public Questions as specified in the Council's Procedure Rules of the Constitution

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships by Mr. Peter Norman:

Question:

“Does the Council accept that poor air quality as a result of road pollution is a major killer in this country and a significant factor in the rise of respiratory diseases in our youngsters?”

The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:

Thank you Mr Norman.

In line with the most recent briefing for Directors of Public Health which was in March 2017, the evidence base for linking long-term exposure of everyday air pollutants over several years contributes to the development of cardiovascular disease, lung cancer and respiratory disease. It also states that there is a disproportionate impact on the young, the old, the sick and the poor.

Adding to this, recent reports from both Defra and Public Health England do highlight the link between air pollution and road traffic, as you highlighted in your question.

More information on what the Council is doing about it is available in the Annual Status Report published on the website, under the requirements of the Environment Act 1995.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Mr. Peter Norman asked the following supplementary question:

“Given what you stated about air pollution, and I know that from the Newbury Weekly News today that there is a consultation on an additional junction on the A339, a concern when it is proposed to build new homes at either end of the A339 and this is our worst air polluter. In addition, the new junction at Fleming Road, which is directly opposite a skate park and a child's playground, has no screening against it what so ever. So is this a detrimental step, in terms of our managing air quality locally?”

The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:

In my mind, the improvements to the A339 that are out for consultation at the minute, should go towards, certainly in the short term (as I don't know how the traffic is going to go, it's not been modelled beyond 2021 at the moment), that should go towards helping the air quality at the junction you mentioned because most of it is down to sitting traffic, if that traffic is moving it is actually easing the issue, there are other things I think we can look at and can bring in, along with colleagues across Highways, Transport and Public Health.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Mr. Peter Norman:

Question:

“Given the go ahead to build 401 homes in North Newbury because of the ongoing issues with the delivery of Sandleford is it time for the Council to re-appraise its housing strategy before it finds all three of the shortlisted strategic housing sites built upon and Newbury left with no green spaces?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you Mr Norman.

Council on the 9th May is being asked to adopt the Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document which completes the Local Plan for the period up to 2026.

However, as you are aware the Government has indicated that more needs to be done to provide the housing that West Berkshire and the country needs. Work has already begun on the new Local Plan which will cover the period up to 2036 and the annual requirement for housing has been raised from 525 to 665 dwellings per annum.

Whilst the Council is committed to maximising the potential of using brownfield development opportunities without compromising our existing employment land, it is clear that some development of greenfield land will continue to be necessary. Where such development is deemed necessary then the Council's existing policy on Green Infrastructure will be used to ensure high quality multifunctional open spaces that are appropriate and are included.

The new Local Plan will of course be subject to public involvement and I look forward to your positive contributions.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Mr. Peter Norman asked the following supplementary question:

“I take on board what you are saying with your answer but are we not in danger? When the Core Strategy was first put out to consultation, three strategic sites were considered: North Newbury, Siegecross and Sandleford. Are we not in danger now of seeing all three of those sites developed and has the Council not been misled over deliverability of Sandleford?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

To answer your question first with regard to Sandleford I don't think we've been misled over deliverability and when we put out the call for sites in 2012, North Newbury was not worked up as a site and was never taken forward.

I think it is inevitable within the new call for sites that we will see several sites come forward that could be viewed as strategic sites, but as I have just said Mr Norman we have had a call for sites, obviously we are currently analysing those sites and we will be making proposals at the appropriate time.

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Mr. Peter Norman:

Question:

“Is the Council aware that other local authorities have taken direct control of delivering housing projects on their own land, and in the case of Norwich this has resulted in 60% of the housing delivered being not only affordable but the housing built are passive housing with very low running costs and low carbon footprint? i.e. of a far higher environmental standard than those proposed by the Council’s own development partners.”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Yes the Council is aware of what is happening around the country. However, unlike Norwich and many other local authorities, this Council does not have a lot of its own land on which to develop, which would ensure affordable housing is delivered at the right level. It is a shame that you failed to acknowledge the work that this Council did with Policy CS15 of the Core Strategy back in 2012 which required Zero Carbon homes.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Mr. Peter Norman asked the following supplementary question:

“Well the fact is that Zero Carbon homes are not being delivered and in light of the information from Norwich that they are delivering 60% of affordable housing on their own land, should we not be considering such an option for Market Street which is in the Council’s possession?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

The agreement for Market Street is already advanced and that is not an option for us Mr Norman. I have already mentioned that we have very little land.

(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Acting Leader, Health and Wellbeing by Mr. Peter Norman:

Question:

“Does the Council agree with me that a key long term aim in creating sustainable future and good health in our youngsters is to encourage them to walk and take active exercise?”

The Portfolio Holder for Acting Leader, Health and Wellbeing answered:

The answer is yes absolutely. It is very much part of the public health agenda, I think we spend a huge amount of time on the health debate and talk about NHS statistics and we don't spend enough time talking about a lot of the public health issues that surround that and stop people getting ill in the first place.

There is an analogy which gets used about public health in that normal health care is about rescuing people from the river. A lot of our current health issues are lifestyle related, far too many people fall in that river and it is very expensive to get them out of that river again. Public Health is about stopping people falling in the river in the first place. So absolutely, totally behind that agenda.

Relating that to children, it's about learning behaviours, what children learn in the home and at school is very important and we put quite a lot behind that in this authority and I can highlight many different examples of this but particularly highlight the active travel strategy to you. I can happily supply lots more information on this if you want it.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Mr. Peter Norman asked the following supplementary question:

“I will be grateful for that. Preventative health care measures are especially important but it does link to the development proposal which is for a primary school in South Newbury by Sandleford, which is in a location where the majority of parents are going to drive their children to school rather than walk them to school, which seems to me to be encouraging the wrong sorts of behaviour. Should we not be looking for schools which are closer to their catchment areas?”

The Portfolio Holder for Acting Leader, Health and Wellbeing answered:

I think you are introducing a completely new subject to the question you've asked. I don't recognise the scenario you've just painted. We are very positive about trying to ensure that children travel to school in an active way that enhances their health.

(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Environment by Mr. Peter Norman:

Question:

“Is the Council aware that neighbouring Councils have a far higher recycling rate than West Berkshire and if so what lessons can be learnt from them?”

The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Environment answered:

Thank you for your question Mr Norman.

West Berkshire's recycling rate last year (2015-16) was 51.8%, which is above the national average of 44% and higher than most of our neighbours. Only the Oxford authorities have a higher recycling rate than West Berkshire and actually those three authorities combine into one collection disposal process so you could argue that we are second highest. We do look at opportunities to improve our recycling services, we regularly monitor our services and we regularly meet with our neighbours to share best practice. That has led to us, over the last couple of years; in 2014, adding aerosols to our kerbside collection service, and also introducing the recycling of hard plastics at our HWRC. In 2016 we increased the size of cardboard accepted into recycling.

So yes we are learning and we are seeking opportunities at every chance to increase our recycling rates.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Mr. Peter Norman asked the following supplementary question:

“It does come back to this question of the destructive cross charging going on between us and other local councils and what can be done to stop that, so that we are encouraging people to recycle as oppose to fly tip or take other measures which are destructive to the countryside?”

The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Environment answered:

We do encourage our own residents to recycle. We have an education information service that we offer to our residents to help them increase their recycling rates. I'm not quite sure if I follow your point about cross charging because most of our recycling is done through kerb side collections so we collect our resident's household waste and recycling.

(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Ms. Judith Bunting:

Question:

“As the Council's adopted Core Strategy requires the protection and enhancement of green infrastructure and cultural facilities in West Berkshire, including named outdoor sporting facilities, what investment is planned to safeguard and enhance the protected community green infrastructure and cultural facility at Newbury Football Ground in Faraday Road?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you for your question.

Policy CS18 is clear and I will quote it “Developments resulting in the loss of green infrastructure or harm to its use or enjoyment by the public will not be permitted. Where exceptionally it is agreed that an area of green infrastructure can be lost a new one of equal or greater size and standard will be required to be provided in an accessible location close by”.

Therefore, not every bit of existing green infrastructure will be safeguarded or enhanced within West Berkshire.

Whilst I'm sure you are aware that the football ground has been registered as an asset of community value, the Council has none the less been investigating options for alternatives for AFC Newbury such as ground share, and although AFC Newbury has many junior sides, these play at a variety of other locations within the community.

You refer to a cultural facility at Newbury Football Ground, but I am unaware of any other cultural offering apart from bingo. West Berkshire, and Newbury in particular, has a varied cultural offering which serves its residents well.

With regard to outdoor sporting facilities, the Council, together with Sport England, has commissioned a review of the playing pitches in the authority and this is due to report in 12 months time.

Finally, I would say that the Faraday Road redevelopment will of course provide much needed housing space for businesses to grow within Newbury.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Ms. Judith Bunting asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you for at least a partially constructive answer there. Baring in mind that in excess of 500 people, including 350 children, play club based football in and around Newbury each week, would the Council not see it fit to bring those children together and to create a cultural facility because football is after all part of British culture in that area? And with this in mind are Councillors willing to work with the Newbury Community Football Group on a progressive strategy to protect and enhance the football ground with a view to encouraging a positive attitude to exercise, health and wellbeing right at the centre of Newbury and which is at the centre of the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you for your question. We are very committed to a positive Health and Wellbeing Strategy, not just for the residents of Newbury Mrs Bunting, but for the residents of the whole of West Berkshire.

I have already said that the 350 children who play club football, do not currently play at the Newbury Football Ground and I think that is absolutely right and proper because parents are then not polluting Newbury by driving their children into Newbury, but driving them to places where they live nearby and I think that is absolutely right, lawful and proper.

We are always willing to work with any organisation which comes forward to us with a positive proposal.

Members' Questions as specified in the Council's Procedure Rules of the Constitution

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People by Councillor Mollie Lock:

Question:

"How many schools have accessed the Emotional Health Academy since its commencement and how many children does that total?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People answered:

I must thank Councillor Lock for her question, as it enables me to highlight, ahead of Mental Health Awareness week, next week, the innovative work of the Emotional Health Academy.

For those who don't know, the Emotional Health Academy is unique to West Berkshire. Its mission is to provide emotional health support earlier for children and families before the problem becomes more severe.

So far, to date, the Emotional Health Academy has supported 32 schools who have bought specifically into it. The total number children, based on figures as of the 24th April 2017, is 1,198 who have accessed support from the Emotional Health Academy.

The Chairman asked: *"Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?"*

Councillor Mollie Lock asked the following supplementary question:

"I appreciate and I understand the great value that the Emotional Health Academy has. My one query is that, I understand that schools may find it difficult to access due to the cost. Will you do anything to help this, so that all schools, including small schools, will be able to access this service?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People answered:

All schools have the option of buying into the service. However, the service can also be accessed via parents, carers and directly through young individuals themselves from the community. So there is an opportunity to self refer through the community, so that every child can have access to the Academy.

The approach taken by schools is slightly different, it tends to be more group work, group focused. Whereas the community services tend to be more clinically led via one to one type services. So there are several options out there and we would encourage schools to access the Academy.

Many schools have different ways of addressing emotional health in children, some of them are prioritising using the Emotional Health Academy, others are prioritising using their ELSA's

(Emotional Literacy Support Assistants) or Academy Support Workers. So that option remains there.

(b) Question submitted to the Acting Leader of the Council by Councillor Lee Dillon:

Question:

“When will the outstanding data for Q3 performance report get published i.e. request for Q3 figures for affordable housing?”

The Acting Leader of the Council answered:

The short answer is the 18th July 2017, but I will endeavour to get that information to you earlier. However, I will hopefully be able to answer any supplementary.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Councillor Lee Dillon asked the following supplementary question:

“What are we doing to ensure that we get our quarterly data in on time for our quarterly reports?”

The Acting Leader of the Council answered:

I think this data should have been available earlier, so I will be taking this up with relevant officers to provide the data as soon as practically possible.

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships by Councillor Billy Drummond:

Question:

“When does the Joint Protection Partnership aim to have the Public Protection Community Fund launched by?”

The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:

This is a great initiative that will see some of the funds confiscated from those who are sentenced of crimes, investigated by the Public Protection Partnership where it is appropriate under the Proceeds of Crime Act.

These will be open to bids for community solutions that will reduce the likelihood of these crimes and also support victims.

Even before this was being set up, the Council has track record of this because if you remember the victims of the fraud at Cameo Antiques, we awarded compensation money to victims that we could identify for that. So that is the sort of thing we were thinking of.

The principle of the Public Protection Community Fund was agreed by the Public Protection Joint Committee on the 14th March 2017, which was part of the wider paper that included this.

The proposal for the process to deal with applications will be going to that Joint Committee at its meeting in June 2017. We then intend to implement it as soon as possible after that.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Councillor Billy Drummond asked the following supplementary question:

“Given that decisions will be made on the best applications, rather than geographical spread, what is this Council going to do to make sure local groups have the best chances of submitting bids that will be successful?”

The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:

Well I think through promotion, but that is also down to every individual council as well to promote it and we will make sure we get information out to them.

In terms of the funds coming through, it's not so clear cut across boundaries now, very often crimes move across boundaries and one area might be investigating it even though the victims are in another area. It would be very difficult to say 'that pocket of funding is for that particular area' and divide it up like that.

It is a very successful shared service and I think the principle of that shared service should continue when we implement this.

(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships by Councillor Lee Dillon:

Question:

“Why doesn’t the Council monitor levels of Sulphur Dioxide in air quality monitoring?”

The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:

Sulphur Dioxide is generally associated with large industry and recent reports by Defra and Public Health England suggest that emissions will reduce by 73% from 2005.

We do not believe that any locations within the District are likely to be exceeding the air quality objective. Nationally, the Environment Agency regulate industries that are most likely to cause Sulphur Dioxide emissions through permits.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Councillor Lee Dillon asked the following supplementary question:

“We don’t think that we have any areas, but we don’t know. Do we have a risk map in place of those that we suspect might be nearing the limit and do we then randomly look to sample those areas?”

The Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships answered:

Yes, there are small scale industries within our District and they are under a permit scheme from the Council and Environmental Health are working with those businesses to encourage them to use low sulphur products.

This page is intentionally left blank