

# Questions and Answers

## Executive

Thursday 6 September 2018

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.

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

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**(a) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Ms Julie Wintrup:**

*"In what ways have you responded to the 21 recommendations made by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee Report, December 2017, 'Effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees'?"*

As Ms Julie Wintrup was unable to attend the meeting she has received the following written response from the Leader of the Council:

As you will be aware one of the functions of Scrutiny is to hold the Executive to account and therefore, as Leader, I am not in a position to oversee the work programme of Scrutiny.

The Council is, however, aware of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee Report into the "Effectiveness of Local Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees" and its 21 recommendations.

The Council always strives to improve whatever processes or governance we have in place and Overview and Scrutiny is no different. Our current model and the way it is operated already accords with a number of the recommendations set out in the CLGSC report. A review of the revised model of scrutiny is currently already scheduled to go to the November Governance and Ethics Committee meeting and these recommendations will be considered as one element of that review.

**(b) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Ms Julie Wintrup:**

*“In light of recommendation 18 of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee Report, December 2017, “Effectiveness of local authority overview and scrutiny committees”, how are you specifically promoting the role of the public in scrutiny?”*

As Ms Julie Wintrup was unable to attend the meeting she has received the following written response from the Leader of the Council:

I am a champion of scrutiny and firmly believe it has an important role in service improvement for Council and other public services.

The Council’s Constitution is clear on the role of scrutiny and the various governance measures which can be invoked. The main role of scrutiny is to hold the Executive to account. The Local Government Act 2000 introduced the Scrutiny function. It is very much up to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission to decide what it wants to scrutinise.

There are however mechanisms which allow Councillors and residents to feed into the scrutiny function.

Paragraph 6.1.5 of Part 6 (Overview and Scrutiny Rules of Procedure) allows for a Councillor to “Call for Action”. This procedure results in a time limited panel to be set up to look at a specific issue raised by a councillor which cannot be resolved through any of the Council’s other governance structures and processes.

In addition if the Executive think that OSMC can make a difference in any particular area then they can and have asked OSMC to review specific areas for them and to report their findings to scrutiny.

There is also a facility to enable residents to suggest possible topics for scrutiny. More information on how this can be done can be found at <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=29010>.

The CLGSC report makes it clear that scrutiny should not be used to promote party politics. The current framework for scrutiny recognises the role of elected Members both from a ward and scrutiny basis and provides them with open and transparent governance arrangements.

**(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People by Mr Chris Turner:**

*“What is the Council doing to support Kintbury Pre-School to ensure improvements following their OFSTED report so that early years provision can still be provided in the village?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young answered:**

Where early year’s provision has been judged inadequate or requires improvement by Ofsted, it is priority for West Berkshire Local Authority to arrange a significant programme of support, monitoring, intervention and challenge.

This ensures that providers in this position receive timely and appropriate support and can achieve significant improvement within an agreed timeline.

There are three main steps in this process which are as follows:

- The provider has to take immediate action to rectify any issues concerning the health, welfare or safety of children, where necessary seeking and responding positively to Local Authority advice.
- The Local Authority then works in partnership with the provider to identify the key steps required to secure improvements in the identified issues and an action plan will be developed to achieve the necessary improvements. The action plan will contain details of agreed actions, a timescale and who will carry them out.
- A member of our Early Years’ Service will visit the provider as appropriate to support and review this plan and ensure implementation of the action plan and to agree any adaptations as necessary.

So, following the inspection of Kintbury Pre-School which took place on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2018, the setting was contacted by letter offering our support. Since that time an action plan has been developed and the Early Years’ Service has been working with the staff to address the issues raised during the inspection, ensuring that at all times limited actions have taken place and that there is a clear plan for improvement in outcomes at the next point of inspection.

**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 Chris Turner asked:**

*“In light of what you said about an action plan, how is that progressing because I understand they are having difficulties appointing a replacement manager?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young answered:**

I don’t have the details on that, other than the action plan is being monitored and progressing but I will certainly find out for you in regards to a manager and provide that in writing.

**(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste by Ms Carlyne Culver:**

*“What proportion of households in West Berkshire have signed up for the £50 garden waste collection scheme?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:**

Thank you for your question Ms Culver. The number of people who have signed up for subscriptions to the scheme are 21,000.

**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 Carlyne Culver stated that:**

“Her question was about the proportion of households who had signed up across West Berkshire and not the number.”

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:**

The number of households in West Berkshire that are eligible for the scheme, because of course there are some households, apartments etc, that have not got a green bin scheme, are 55,000 suitable households. We modelled the scheme on a 45% uptake and we are on track to achieve 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?”*

**Ms Carlyne Culver asked:**

*“Do you have an update Councillor Cole on when people who no longer want their green bin will have them taken away?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:**

If people contact us, we will arrange to pick up their green bins. They can contact the Contact Centre from now.

**(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport, Environment and Countryside by Ms Carolyn Culver:**

*“What representations has the Council’s Executive made to Richard Benyon MP calling for more funding from central government to support people living in rural areas with transportation?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport answered:**

Thank you for your second question, Ms Culver.

The Council meets the challenge of providing public transport across the District. If you look at the map of services on our website you’ll see a genuine network. We have, contrary to the implication in your question, already won significant additional funds from central government for local transport. More importantly, we have been creative in finding new ways to provide transport, while offering good value for money to the council tax payer.

These additional funds from central government:

Firstly transitional funds, as I think you probably know this Council won transitional funding from Central Government - a result of informed, forceful and successful lobbying. We have invested £300,000 of that into transforming public transport.

Secondly, funds for our ‘Connecting Communities’ project: this was another £169,000 from Central Government, so we are talking almost half a million pounds of additional funding from Central Government for transport here, so that is not loose change. This Connecting Communities project, by encouraging more efficient use of resources, has made life better for our more isolated residents. As an example, in the middle of the day when our vehicles might otherwise be idle, they’ve been used to provide non-emergency patient transport on behalf of the ambulance service so that’s a real win:win.

Also, as part of this project, we’ve also simply let people know about our services, we have our website, Twitter, localised posters and leaflets for parishes, and we find that sometimes it is these little things that make a difference, not the more grandiose, unaffordable schemes that other parties favour, but these are rooted, community driven, practical options such as those that emerged from ‘Connecting Communities’.

If you were to ask me about public transport in West Berkshire, I would say it is characterised by being innovative. From the big (our new bus station) to the use of technology (smart ticketing, contactless, the ‘Transport Near Me’ journey planner, live times on our website, the Kennections App, vehicle tracking) to the human (our latest video that successfully recruited new volunteer drivers). It works well, is cost effective and that is because the components of our transport system complement each other. We have:

- Our statutory transport
- Private or commercial operators
- Our own in-house services
- Community transport

I am not quite sure your question quite recognised the breadth of the offer.

- Statutory transport, for example to a day centre, is available as of right to all eligible residents based on need and that is irrespective of where they live.

- Our commercial operators offer excellent services that pay their way. Some reach smaller rural communities; for example if you want to go from Inkpen to Newbury, Kennnections Service Number 3 is for you; Hungerford to Chilton Foliat, then you want Thamesdown 46.
- The Council's in-house service, sometimes with Parish Councils. Some of our transitional funding was used to buy additional mini-buses to preserve and enhance services that are important to our communities but not of interest to commercial operators. I can send you the details, and there is lots of detail, but an example would be Service 5A between Brightwalton, Peasemore and Newbury.
- Then we have the heroes of West Berkshire's Community Transport, the volunteers who arrange trips, take people to appointments, the shops, sometimes the theatre. As part of our centrally funded Connecting Communities project, we have an outstanding officer who has worked with community groups to put them on a sustainable footing. To some West Berkshire has granted mini-buses, and to all we give a grant. Astonishingly, these community schemes provided more than 75,000 passenger journeys last year.

Together these components are making up an ecosystem that links people and communities, including our rural communities, by many more than 2,000,000 passenger journeys each year.

We have had encouragement and support from all our MPs. Richard Benyon, Alok Sharma and John Redwood. You asked specifically about Richard Benyon MP. Bus services aren't something we have discussed specifically, although his public interest in other parts of my portfolio – in transport, in safety and investment into infrastructure have been very much valued and made a difference.

We feel that this Council, this Executive and West Berkshire could not have a more stalwart friend than Richard Benyon, someone who is an expert in rural matters. In fact, just before the recess you might have seen that Richard was yet again raising the matter of local government finance in Parliament, citing the experience of West Berkshire.

To sum up, Richard Benyon MP champions this District. We have been as a District successful in accessing significant, additional central government funding for transport. We have spent it wisely and we feel we have a network of transport services that, while not perfect and we know there are gaps, is healthy and cost effective, and we think that we will be able to grow it over time.

**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 Carolyne Culver did not have a supplementary question and she gave thanks for the comprehensive answer.



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

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No member questions were submitted.

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