

Questions and Answers

Council

Thursday, 13th September, 2018

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WestBerkshire
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Council Meeting

13 September 2018

Questions and Answers



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

(a) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Mr Gabriel Stirling:

“Why has Dominic Boeck not been removed from the Executive Committee given the verdict of the Council's Governance and Ethics Committee on his Twitter activity?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

Thank you for your question, Mr Stirling.

The Committee took into consideration the fact that Councillor Boeck had already removed the offending tweet, had publicly apologised, had cooperated with the Committee and investigator and resigned from his post as Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing.

As members of the Advisory Panel and Governance and Ethics Committee are very experienced in these matters and had taken considerable time to assess the complaint in some detail, I value and accept their advice.

I am confident that Councillor Boeck does not hold the views of some of those taking part in the Twitter thread that he inadvertently retweeted. If he did, he would have no place on the Executive or the Conservative Group.

Councillor Boeck understood that, although he would never discriminate against any group, there might be some in LGBTQ+ community who would feel concerned about him chairing the Health and Wellbeing Board given the nature of the retweet. He therefore, unilaterally took the decision to step aside from that role to reassure this community that West Berkshire is a safe and tolerant place for them.

It is worth putting on record that I agree with the Governance and Ethics Committee assessment that Councillor Boeck was seeking to draw attention to a thread rather than endorsing a transphobic view.

It is for those reasons that Councillor Boeck remains on the Executive.

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 Gabriel Stirling asked the following supplementary question:

“As Executive Members, agree policies, including mental health policies , should you not show leadership and not have him in any position, and also make sure that you as a council do not endorse any views that are at odds with the values that you are supposed to uphold?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

I would draw attention to some of my comments earlier. This has gone through a fairly long process, which has included members of the opposition Liberal Democratic Party, who clearly do not endorse the view that you just suggested.

I am tolerant of many things, but I am intolerant of intolerance. As I know that Councillor Boeck does not hold the views that are being ascribed to him I didn't take an issue with appointing him to that role. I work in a field where inevitably human mistakes get made. I believe we actually need a culture where we learn from genuine mistakes.

I believe Councillor Boeck had a lot to offer that portfolio, however he took that decision to move on.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communications by Mr Simon Pike:

“Following the comments on 5G made by Councillor Frederickson at an Executive Meeting in June, what further consideration has the Council made to participating in the Rural Connected Communities project that is planned by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development answered:

And I would like to thank you to Mr Pike for his excellent question.

I can say that substantial work has already been undertaken in regards to preparing for bids for rural connecting communities scheme that Mr Pike describes in his question.

This is with both the LEPs digital infrastructure group and directly as a Council ourselves so to that end I can confirm that West Berkshire Council has already signalled interest in this scheme through the department of digital, culture, media and sport. And we are also engaging Vodafone themselves in working with them to develop a West Berkshire rural testbed proposal.

We will obviously wait for further confirmation from the DCMS in regards to when that bid will be formally open. As Mr Pike describes, it is already referred to in Government consultation literature and we look forward to hopefully playing a very very active role in an extremely exciting project which I’m sure you all agree will have an enormous benefit to our community.

As Mr Pike was unable to attend the meeting he received a written response and did not ask a supplementary question.
