

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday 18 October 2018

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WestBerkshire
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Executive Meeting

18 October 2018

Questions and Answers



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

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

Question:

“Would the Council consider saving money by not cutting verges so often and instead allowing wild flowers to grow for the benefit of pollinators?”

Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services answered (in the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport, Environment and Countryside):

Thank you for your question and your suggestion.

You make two points: one about how we can help pollinators thrive in West Berkshire and one about potential cost savings.

I would also add the all important third factor of safety on the highway and that is where I will start. I would like to be clear from the outset that not all verges are suitable for an amended cutting regime. Sight lines must be clear and the width of the carriageway protected for drivers, pedestrians and all road users. Safety must come first.

But, that said, other verges will be suitable.

Where it is safe and practical, we have an ambition to encourage wildflowers and so provide bee, moth, butterfly, wasp, beetle and hoverfly pollinators with the environment they need. I have asked officers to develop a plan for West Berkshire's roadsides, which will include identifying which are the verges suitable for a new management regime. We know we have a very great deal to do and that it will take time, but we are already looking at best practice around the country as well as drawing on expert advice such as in the charity Plantlife's 'Good Verge Guide'.

You refer to cost-savings – something that Plantlife suggests may be realisable - but we need to learn more before we make them an objective. When we have a better understanding of what is possible and most beneficial, we may find savings available.

But what matters now is the pollinators, as you say, but more than that, it's about biodiversity in our verges - the flowers, shrubs, insects, invertebrates, small mammals –all contributing to the beauty and health of West Berkshire. We intend to get this right.

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 Culver did not ask a supplementary question.

(c) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Mr Thomas Tunney:

Question:

“Given the £2.8m forecast overspend that the Council is having to try and bring under control, how can the organisation defend the employment of a Conservative Group Support Officer at Grade J £33k-£39k paid for by local taxpayers?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

This post of Group Executive (the title you produced is incorrect) is part of the approved establishment and, as such, is dealt with in the same way as any other vacancy in the Council. Officers have considered the need to fill this post in the light of the current challenging financial situation and have decided that on balance the post should be filled.

The Council has a policy in place whereby any Group on the Council, which has at least 10% of the total number of Councillors, would automatically be entitled to some form of Group support. Following the recent by-election a Group Executive Officer was also appointed for the Liberal Democrat Group.

Group Executives were introduced by the last Labour Government to support Councillors to be more effective. I did a job search a few days ago and I found three similar posts being advertised to support Labour Councillors.

Although the post is politically restricted it is not a Political Assistant as referred to in Section 9 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The primary function of the role is to act as a conduit between Officers and Members. It should also be of note that the role is line managed through Democratic Services and does not report directly to myself.

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 Tunney asked:

“Does the Council believe that local people would rather have a Group Support Officer operating for the benefit of the Conservative Party, rather than a fully qualified social worker, an experienced teacher or a Wash Common Library?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

I think what people want are the most effective services that can be provided, and I believe this post is part of that overall picture.

(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communications by Mr Peter Carline:

Question:

“Following a recent poll by the Newbury Weekly News on a second Brexit referendum (87% yes, 13% no), will this council join other councils in supporting a people's vote - or better still support the revoking of Article 50?”

As Mr Carline was unable to attend the meeting he has received the following written response from the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communications:

No motion concerning either Article 50 or a 'people's vote' has been presented to full Council, so the Council has no formal position on this at this time.

(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communication by Mr Paul Morgan:

Question:

“What evidence did WBC take into account and what consultation took place to support the decision as outlined in the June press release relating to Newbury Football Club?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communication answered:

Thank you Mr Morgan for your question.

Back in 2003, the Council initially publicly consulted on plans to redevelop the London Road Industrial Estate. This contributed to the production of the Newbury Vision 2026. Within that the London Road Industrial Estate was established as an employment area.

This scheme was then refreshed in 2013, I believe on the 24 June that year, for further consultation with multiple different organisations, residents and businesses on the London Road Industrial Estate, again the intention to move football out of the London Road Industrial Estate to enable the regeneration of the area in regards to employment space was further considered and consulted on. So through these processes; businesses, organisations and residents were engaged, not just in the sense of the consultation, but also in public drop in workshops.

Further, I also stress, in your role as the Chairman of the Newbury and Community Football Group, representing the groups that you do, including Newbury Football Club, we have kept you informed as to our plans and as they have progressed.

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 Morgan commented: My question is relating to the press release on why you decided to change it into a multi-use 5 a side pitch.

A discussion then ensued on the content of the actual question submitted by Mr Morgan.

Mr Morgan presented the Leader of the Council with a copy of the wording of his original question.

The Leader of the Council asked (Stephen Chard, Clerk to the meeting): Are you able to confirm whether that was the question that was submitted?

Stephen Chard confirmed: I think the advice to Mr Morgan was that he couldn't include a statement in the question, so with the agreement of yourself (Mr Morgan) that would be the wording of the question on the agenda. The supporting information in the submission was provided in the briefing note. That would have been the advice.

The Leader of the Council: Can I suggest, as I think you obviously want to make sure this question is answered publically, that I get Councillor Fredrickson to answer this question outside of the meeting, publicly, in writing, in the next few days and you can ask your supplementary question. We can put any correspondence in the public domain.

Mr Morgan commented: I have to accept that, but it's a very important question, and you haven't answered the question so I am very disappointed but I accept what you're saying. I will look forward to your response and I will ask a supplementary question in due course.

The Leader of the Council: I want to get you a comprehensive answer and not an off the cuff answer, which this would be, so let's get you a comprehensive answer as quickly as we can.

On 30 October 2018, the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communication provided the following response:

Dear Mr Morgan,

Thank you for your question and following clarification. Whilst the decision to turn the Faraday Road site into a multi purpose games area did not require public consultation (the change does not require planning permission), we still engaged both Newbury FC and the Thames Valley Football League when considering expanding the use of the site to cater for both football and other sports.

In this discussion with Newbury FC, the club stated that NCFG (the group I believe you Chair), does not represent them in any way. If true, this is at odds with how you have represented your group to this Council. Can I then recommend that you edit your website, as it currently lists Newbury FC as a member.

As agreed at the Executive meeting, we will add this response to the public minutes.

On 1 November 2018, Mr Morgan provided the following response:

Dear Councillor Fredrickson,

Is the email that you sent to me on 30th October your response to the question that you did not answer at the Executive Meeting on Thursday 18th October 2018?

If it is, I must remind you, that you have not answered my question, which is:

"What evidence did WBC take into account and what consultation took place to support the decision as outlined in the press release" *(the details of the press release was confirmed to have been provided to you and all Councillors at the Exec Meeting in your briefing packs and it is detailed in my email to Executivecycle on 5th October 2018 and fully acknowledged by Moira Fraser on the same day)* I notice that the press release is no longer on your website – is there any specific reason why it has been removed?

<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/article/35379>

I genuinely find it difficult to understand why it is taking you so long to respond to my question especially as the press release in question is attributable directly to you. Again I request that you actually provide a response to my question as written.

You also say in your email response of 30th October "As agreed at the Executive meeting, we will add this response to the public minutes"

This was not the agreed action at the meeting. The action that was agreed is:

1. You did not answer my question in an open and public forum, and consequently you were requested to provide me with a response that did actually answer the question that I asked.

2. As my question was not answered by yourself at the meeting, it was agreed that a follow-up meeting would be arranged where you can provide me with a verbal response (as should have been done at the Executive meeting). I would then have the opportunity of asking you a supplementary question, depending of course on your response. It is this response that should be recorded and issued as part of the public minutes.

I have copied the leader of the Council to ensure that I receive the response as agreed at the meeting. I look forward to hearing your answer at a meeting that can be arranged within the next 5 days. Please note that I will be away on annual leave from 7th November and if a meeting cannot be arranged before then I nominate John Stewart and / or Lee McDougall (both copied on this email) to stand in for me.

In response to other points made in your email to me of 30th October 2018, please see below

- NCFG was formed, in late 2015, as a direct response to West Berkshire Council's "vision" to demolish the town's main football ground and stadium as part of a larger land redevelopment in the London Road Estate area **without** any commitment to provide a replacement. It was Newbury Football Club who asked other football organisations (who had also used the ground) for help to protect the ground, as a consequence NCFG was formed.
- Newbury FC were a founding member of NCFG and have been an active participant for the past 3 years. We have not been advised directly by Newbury FC that they no longer want to be part of NCFG, but we will of course write to them to clarify the position.
- NCFG has a broad base of members that represents over 500 players and volunteers in and around the Newbury area. NCFG is a sum of its parts and is not / should not be confused with solely Newbury FC.
- NCFG have close ties with and an ongoing dialogue with Sport England and the Football Association regarding existing and future needs / requirements to support our national game and the wider and every increasing health and well-being agenda
- Certain members of WBC continue to deliberately conflate Newbury Football Club with Newbury Community Football Group, which we have pointed out in both our stage 1 and stage 2 complaint against the Council. It seems that you are still deliberately doing this. For the avoidance of doubt NCFG was formed to protect and enhance the facility for the WHOLE community. It is equally important to us that ladies' football, youth football, veterans' football and of course senior men's football teams have a first-class facility that can be used and enjoyed for organised matches and training throughout the year.
- NCFG believe that a town of the size and stature of Newbury needs to retain and develop a first-class football facility (a dedicated and well-maintained playing surface, floodlights, spectator seating area, changing facilities and a club house all of which is protected by perimeter fencing) that can be the home venue for teams that can compete in the National League System and is also freely available to the whole football community for organised training sessions and matches.
- The importance of the Faraday Road ground for the local community is well established and well proven and the Faraday Road Football Stadium and Clubhouse Ground is listed as an **ASSET OF COMMUNITY VALUE**.

NCFG has and always will be pleased to enter into discussions with all parties regarding the provision of football facilities in Newbury.

On 6 November 2018, the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communication provided the following response:

Dear Mr Morgan,

I hope this email finds you well. I can confirm that the email I sent to you on 30 October is my response to your supplementary questioning, where you have specified that the decision you are referring to is that to develop a MUGA. I hope that the press release you quote, my further answer and the response to your Section 2 complaint provide a clear overview of the Council's process.

As for the other actions you list, these were demands you made. The minuted agreed actions from the meeting were to provide a written response to your question once you had clarified how the question was to be understood and to see this added to the minutes. Both of which I am happy to do.

You are also very much entitled to ask a supplementary and any further questions you may wish to ask at future meetings of the Executive.

As a final note - I fully and completely understand that you do not support the Council's plans for the Faraday Road site. However, through working with Newbury FC, the Council is exploring providing new football facilities in Northcroft. If you do support developing football facilities in Newbury, I hope you see that as good news and an exciting prospect. If so, I hope that could one day lead to a genuine collaboration with your group - for the good of everyone playing football in Newbury.

(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste by Ms Susan Millington:

Question:

“Given that a great many ratepayers, now feeling obliged to pay £50 annually for green bin collections, would have chosen to pay only for the spring and summer period, why did West Berkshire Council never publicise the option of a collection service from March to August 2019 at £25 (which is in fact available, although hidden in the terms and conditions section of your online information about this service), not in your letter to all ratepayers or in any other communications”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:

Thank you for your question Ms Millington.

You are not correct in your assertion that we did not publicise the March to September 2019 collection option, as it was displayed clearly in our Terms & Conditions which all subscribers confirmed they had read, before subscribing to the service online. Those who subscribed to the service over the phone or sent in payment by cheque were sent hard copies of these.

The £25 charge was never intended to be an option as you describe it, rather, it was to ensure that those who joined the scheme late would not be penalised for joining late.

If there were residents who decided, following their initial subscription and having received the pack with their stickers and the terms, that they would prefer to wait until March, they could have cancelled their subscription within 14 days without any penalty.

At the press launch of the service on 30th July, I made it clear in my response to press questions that this option would be offered to residents from March 2019.

As all keen gardeners know, September is the start of the autumn gardening season, when gardeners put their gardens to bed and cut back and prune foliage. So September was an ideal time to start this service.

I am sure you want to encourage garden waste recycling year round as much as I do, which is why we have offered residents the opportunity to sign up for the garden waste collection in March, although of course, they can sign up for the service throughout the year, as we do not restrict accepting payment to either September or March.

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 Millington asked:

“The Green Party asked two questions of this Executive meeting on the 14 June 2018 asking about the potential to reduce the green bin charge for those people that couldn’t afford it, and were told that there wasn’t that option, and clearly there is. So will you be prepared to commit here to refunding people who only want and only need six months, so that they can have a fair collection?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:

Well the people who have already subscribed from September are already enjoying the service, so no.

(j) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport, Environment and Countryside by Mr Lee McDougall:

Question:

“West Berks Council is one of the only Local Authorities to not have a Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) in place, I understand that at Sport England's request a draft PPS is now being written. Can you advise when the public will be able to read the report and advise if WBC committed to adhering to any recommendations the PPS makes, including the retention of existing sporting facilities?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communications answered (in the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport, Environment and Countryside):

Thank you for your question Mr McDougall. The West Berkshire Council Playing Field Pitch Strategy (PPS) is being drawn up in collaboration with Sport England who are part funding. By the end of October, West Berkshire Council and Sport England will have signed off what is referred to as Stage C of the PPS, the supply and demand assessment phase, which requires detailed input from all major sports. Once Stage C is signed off, consultants will then draw up recommendations for managing supply in the future. The recommendations phase of the document will again be reviewed and approved by all parties and once this is completed, the finished PPS report will be approved and adopted by the Council and published on the Council website. This is likely to be in early January.

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 McDougall commented:

‘Wasn’t sure if you answered the second part of the question, would you adhere to the recommendations?’

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communications answered:

I will wait to see what is recommended.

Mr McDougall asked:

“So if the PPS recommends that Newbury football ground shouldn’t be turned into a multi-purpose turn up and play pitch, would you reopen the ground to its intended purpose?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communications answered:

I want to see what the recommendations are first Mr McDougall.

Mr McDougall asked:

“If it was recommended, would you support it?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Communications answered:

I would want to see what is recommended, obviously a consideration if this happens.

(k) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport, Environment and Countryside by Mr Stephen Masters:

Question:

“Does the Executive agree that if we as a community are serious about improving air quality in West Berkshire we should be drastically reducing our dependency on the use of automobiles on our roads and this should be a priority in any strategic planning?”

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture answered (in the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport, Environment and Countryside):

Thank you for your question. You ask two questions, which are very intimately linked.

First – air quality. We are serious about air quality. As I will expand in response to the next question, we proactively monitor air quality and plan for further improvements: most importantly, the levels of Nitrogen Dioxide, the pollutant that worries us most, have been reducing in West Berkshire over the last 5 years to 2017. Whilst we want it to be better, our air quality on the whole is good.

Secondly, car dependence. We agree that cars can have an impact on air quality and indeed the environment more widely. The Government agrees too, as can be seen in the national commitment to end the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040 and its legally binding targets to reduce emissions so that the effects of air pollution on health are halved by 2030.

To us this is the key – accelerating technical and other innovations whilst at the same time promoting informed choice.

The ability to make informed choices, we are pleased to say, is inherent in our strategic plan - West Berkshire's Local Transport Plan - which has the vision and I quote 'To deliver effective transport solutions for all by increasing choice and minimising congestion'.

It is a plan that concerns itself with widening travel choice, reducing congestion, climate change resilience, carbon reduction, improved air quality – while, and this is crucial, supporting a thriving economy and personal freedom.

It is worth remembering that our Local Transport Plan was written after extensive public consultation which saw support from the practical, ambitious, far-sighted and empathetic people of West Berkshire for a 'mixed approach' to transport strategy. A quote from that plan is, *'To give more emphasis to developing sustainable travel options in the District to provide more choices for people to make journeys, particularly in urban areas, whilst accepting that car travel is likely to remain the principal choice for many in rural areas.'*

Supporting people to make the best choices will also be a theme in the next Local Transport Plan on which we have already started work.

In West Berkshire we are not waiting for the future – we are doing plenty now.

In another question tonight you mention bus services. We do have a good network. 2.3 million bus journeys began in West Berkshire last year – which is an impressive number. We are also investing in cycling infrastructure, not only the superb multi-million pound national route 422, but

also in additional cycle parking planned for our railway stations, planned work for cyclists on the canal tow path and now the Hermitage to Hampstead Norreys railway path.

We are installing more electric charging points – starting with the centre of Newbury. We are investing in our railway stations and our new bus station is about to be commissioned. We are encouraging smarter choices and travel planning through our planning process.

Overall, on top of all this capital investment, we will spend almost £2m supporting public transport, with our spend on home to school and adult social care transport on top of that.

We are serious about air quality. It is improving in West Berkshire and it will continue to do so as we, for example, smooth traffic flows, support healthy and environmentally friendly travel choices, and invest to encourage new types of vehicle.

We will continue to plan for alternatives to car travel, making real, substantial changes such as those I have already mentioned, but in doing so we do not intend to demonise the car driver.

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 Masters asked:

“In terms of giving more choices, we have a very good extensive service already in existence with Vodafone and I have spoken with people who consider that the Council should proactively negotiate use of this service. Do you, in your capacity as Chairman of Health and Wellbeing, feel that this can be an easy win, in terms of opening up the Vodafone buses, and getting more people out of their cars, as this would be beneficial to air quality and offer more choices.

I have also spoken to our MP, who supports such a scheme in principle, and would be happy to co-ordinate a meeting between the Council and Vodafone if requested.”

The Leader of the Council answered:

I am happy to look into this and I will get an answer to you on that particular subject as soon as possible.

Written answer provided to Mr Masters by the Leader of the Council:

This matter has been looked at many times over the years. The problem with establishing a scheme that incorporates fare payers on the Vodafone services is that all the Vodafone staff using the bus would then be subject to a tax for a benefit in kind.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste by Ms Carolyne Culver:

Question:

“How much has the council spent so far during this financial year on collecting fly tipped waste, compared with how much it spent on the same task during the whole of the financial year 2017/18?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:

Responsible householders do not fly tip. Everybody has a duty of care to ensure that any person or company employed to remove rubbish from their property is licensed to carry waste and can provide the relevant waste transfer notes. The only exception to this is rubbish collected as part of a Council Service. Unfortunately if people do not do this, their waste could be fly tipped which is a criminal offence and the householder could be fined.

The good news is that for quarter 1 of this year the number of reported fly tipping incidents and associated clearance costs have gone down.

In terms of the number of reported incidents and associated costs, the number of fly tips for quarter 1 of this year is 191 and the cost is £15,903. For last year, quarter 1, we had 228 fly tips and the associated cost for that was £16,310.

We would urge everyone to promote legitimate waste disposal routes, which are using the Council collection services, household waste recycling centres, home composting or using a licensed waste disposal company. If you see a fly tip on public land please report it to the Council online via ‘Report a Problem’, or by contacting our customer services team.

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 Culver asked:

“How much was spent in the entire 2017/18 financial year and how many incidents were reported?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:

The total for the last financial year was £65,203 and a total of 817 incidents.

(d) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Mr Thomas Tunney:

Question:

“Why do cuts and belt-tightening apply to all operations of the Council except the activity of Councillors themselves, who also benefitted from a 16.5% allowance rise which would appear to provide adequate resource for carrying out much, if not all, of the role?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

Thank you for your question. All sections of the Council have been subject to belt tightening – including Councillors.

Councillor allowances last year rose in line with Council staff (2%). There will soon be a reduction in the number of Councillors, of about 20%, which will result in a saving of circa £75k.

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 Tunney asked:

“Do you think that Councillors should be paid on an attendance basis, on their performance?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

I am not sure that attendance is necessarily a measure of performance and there is a huge amount of the role of the Councillor which happens outside of this Council Chamber and outside of this building, and this activity probably doesn't get the publicity in comparison to the level of publicity given to what happens in this Chamber. It is a system that used to be in operation but I don't think that would improve matters.

(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport, Environment and Countryside by Mr Stephen Masters:

Question:

“In the Executive’s opinion did the cuts to rural bus services help reduce car use and improve air quality or more likely have a detrimental effect?”

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture answered (in the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport, Environment and Countryside):

The short answer is that there is no evidence to suggest that changes in rural bus services have had a measurable detrimental effect on air quality.

We understand the fundamental importance of the air we breathe and that is why we call on expertise across the Council – in Environmental Health, Planning, Transport Policy and Highways – and through our relationships with partners – the Berkshire Strategic Public Health Team and Public Health England - to develop a wide-ranging and effective Air Quality Strategy.

Our most recent Air Quality Annual Status Report was submitted to DEFRA as required in May and is now available on our website.

The implication of your question is that the transport choices that people make are among the factors that determines air quality and I think we all agree on that.

In terms of individual choices, for example, to choose to walk or cycle if and where we can – and making these choices easier is one of the principles of the Local Transport Plan.

Our aim is to create a sustainable transport system that connects communities and is good value for both council tax payers and for fare payers - and we think we are going a long way towards meeting that aim. A mix of private providers, the third sector and our own in-house services offer both statutory and other journey opportunities, providing a network across West Berkshire of genuine alternatives to private car journeys.

We have been open about the fact that we have had to make changes in the name of financial responsibility. As our residents expect, we look for value for money and have indeed made savings. What we have done in response to the financial challenge is innovate. We have a strong record of building strong and effective partnerships, adopting new technologies, communicating better and investing as strategically as we can to support a good rural transport network.

Rural transport is yet another area in which we could spend every penny we have – but even if that were an option, which it clearly isn’t, air quality would not be helped if we ran empty or under-loaded vehicles.

We think we have the balance right, but are always looking for new opportunities to serve our residents, where there is demand and a practical means of meeting 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 Masters asked:

“If there is no bus service, it is not an option or a choice and people are clearly not going to use it, surely it’s better to have a choice. Transport strategy is to give options to residents as you said on both your answers.

We need to allow people to see that the choices are worth their while. If they are not there, they are no choices.

The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Transport, Environment and Countryside answered:

I understand, more of a statement than a question, but I understand what you are saying. As you heard from Councillor Clifford’s response, it is a balancing act, between financial responsibility and providing a choice. Wherever we can we provide that choice.

In terms of air quality, we understand that the availability of bus services make a difference to car transport, but we don’t want to influence that in the wrong way.

(e) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Mr Thomas Tunney:

Question:

“How does the Council propose to be taken seriously as an authority on the social media activity of staff when one of its own Executive has been found culpable of sharing deeply unpleasant views, emerged without any notable censure and further allowed to remain on the group executive?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

Officers of the Council are bound by the Officers Code of Conduct which contains guidance for officers on how to use social media appropriately. An updated Officers Code of Conduct was in fact considered and approved by Council in March 2018.

Members are also bound by a Members Code of Conduct, and a Social Media Protocol for Councillors. This contains guidance on how to use social media by Councillors.

I can confirm that the Council has robust procedures in place to ensure that appropriate standards of conduct are observed by both officers and members when using social media.

I would refer you to the answer I gave to a very similar question at full Council on 13th September.

The case you refer to went through a comprehensive process which involved Conservative Councillors, Liberal Democrat Councillors, Parish Councillors and independents. They concluded that it had not been the intent to endorse the unpleasant views which formed part of the tweet chain. Despite recognising that these views had been previously endorsed in error they applied sanctions which I am sure you are aware of.

This was a mistake which was very similar to the mistake that Jeremy Corbyn made when he seemingly endorsed a repulsive anti-Semitic mural on social media.

Many far more eminent than myself have spoken about mistakes:

I quote Churchill: ‘All men make mistakes, but only wise men learn from their mistakes’.

Another quote: ‘the only man who never makes a mistake is the man who has never done anything’ - Theodore Roosevelt

Or perhaps more poignantly: ‘I make mistakes like anybody else, I will make mistakes and you have to reflect on it, and you have to listen to people that is the key’ – that is from Mr Jeremy Corbyn.

It is perverse to pursue a mistake in support of either mental health or equalities.

At Conservative Party Conference, LGBT+ Conservatives General Council Member, Sue Pascoe, delivered a speech on the main stage, ahead of the Prime Minister. I think it is pertinent to reflect on what she said:

“Conference, I have come here today to tell you an amazing story. It’s the story of our party. It is my story.

This is a story about respect. It is a story about hope.

I always knew that our party stood for personal freedom, expression and opportunity.

I never knew I would test these values so thoroughly.

For you see Conference, I'm a woman with a trans past, and I stand here, amongst you, as an equal.

When I started my journey to be my true self many people deserted me.

My party, our party stood by me.

My MP, Nigel Adams, was there when I asked for help. He treated me with respect and dignity, with empathy and equality. Thank you Nigel.

Today our party has brought in same sex marriage, our 75 point LGBT+ Action Plan, is supporting transgender people with its proposed reform of the Gender Recognition Act and is taking positive steps to reduce homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools.

As I have blossomed I have grown in confidence in our party. I have seen it become more diverse and more inclusive of people from all backgrounds and cultures."

The full transcript is available on line.

I am not going to get into the cynical business of attacking others by innuendo and to score political points, I am here to be positive. As a political party, the Conservative party has a proud record of achievement, not words, on equalities. As Sue Pascoe mentioned it was David Cameron's Government that introduced the Same Sex Marriage Act. Margaret Thatcher was the first female Prime Minister. Ruth Davidson was the first openly gay leader. I could go back as far as Disraeli.

As a Conservative Council and as a Conservative Leader I am proud of what our party has achieved. Tolerance and respect are key values which underpin this Administration.

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 Tunney asked:

"It doesn't really answer the question, the Code of Conduct was obviously breached and there hasn't really been any kind of punishment for that, or any sanctions really?"

The Leader of the Council answered:

I believe I did answer that Mr Tunney, the whole issue went through complete due process. It went through independent councillors, Parish Councillors, Liberal Democrat Councillors, Conservative Councillors. The actions they have recommended have been followed.

(f) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Mr Thomas Tunney:

Question:

“Following the investigation of the councillor previously mentioned in question (e) what steps have been taken to provide social media training for all council members of all levels of understanding?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

The Council has a Member Development Programme to ensure that Members are kept updated with all relevant matters. This clearly helps to ensure that the Council works in an efficient and effective manner and that decision making processes are robust.

The Council does not undertake specific training for Members on the use of Social Media. However, the Code of Conduct training is undertaken on a regular basis by the Monitoring Officer and the Deputy Monitoring Officer, which details the clear obligations on Members in regards to appropriate standards of conduct.

The next Code of Conduct training for Members will take place on the 6 November 2018.

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 Tunney did not ask a supplementary question.

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

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services by Councillor Jeff Brooks:

Question:

"What is the average margin paid to the temporary worker agencies on top of the agency workers costs?"

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services answered:

Thank you for question Councillor Brooks.

The Council is currently in the process of procuring a new arrangement for agency workers using a Managed Service Provider model for which we have done some research on profit margins that could be provided to you outside of this meeting if it is of interest.

We are currently in the process of evaluating the tender bids so I am not, unfortunately, in a position to provide any further information until this tender exercise has been concluded.

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 Brooks commented:

"This was a nice half volley and the reason it is a half volley is because I have been in this business for 35 years. I have run managed service programmes and I have offered to come and give you the benefit of my experience, which is substantial, in terms of acquiring an MSP and getting the savings you are looking for. That offer is still open, that was made in my absence by Councillor Macro about three months ago when you embarked on the managed service provider procurement process. The offer is still open but nobody has been in touch with me.

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services answered:

Thank you very much for your offer.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services by Councillor Jeff Brooks:

Question:

“Are agency workers paid the national living wage?”

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services answered:

The answer is yes. The National Living Wage is paid to all employees and workers aged 25 or over. Agency workers are covered by the National Living Wage. The National Living Wage is a legal requirement for all employees enforced by HMRC. Workers and employees aged below 25 are paid the age related National Minimum Wage and this includes agency workers.

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 Brooks gave thanks for the response and did not ask a supplementary question.

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste by Councillor Alan Macro:

Question:

“How was the part-year payment for the green bin charge publicised?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:

Thank you Councillor Macro for your question.

The part payment was announced at the press launch on 30th July 2018, and indeed Cllr Macro, I see you picked up on this in your Facebook posting on the same day.

Furthermore, you and your colleagues had detailed briefings from the waste team some months ago which gave you ample opportunity to raise your concerns. And, of course, diligent Members do disseminate information to their residents, which of course you did on 30th July.

However, there has been a suggestion that people would like this information to be displayed more prominently, and as such, I instructed officers yesterday to update the website accordingly and this has now been done.

To conclude, I am disappointed that you have chosen not to raise this with me directly before your question of this evening, particularly given that you have been aware of this payment option for so long.

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 Alan Macro asked:

“Until your instruction yesterday, the only place where this was documented was in the terms and conditions, and many people who purchase things online, are very aware of the fact that terms and conditions on websites can often run to many pages and use very strong legalise language. So usually people do not actually read the term and conditions, even if they check the box.

So would you not agree that this is a way of publicising it, if I can use that word, to get to the minimum audience so to minimise the number of people who actually went for this option?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Housing and Waste answered:

As I have just said Councillor Macro, there has been a suggestion that people wanted the information to be more prominent and we have done that. So it is now on the front page of the website, which I have just looked at this afternoon.

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

Question:

“How do you expect residents to take part in the Newbury Vision 2026 conference when it is being held during a working day?”

The Leader of the Council answered (in the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Community Resilience and Partnerships):

This Conference has been held at least annually for the last 15 years or so. It has always been held on a morning during the week and there has never been any feedback over that time that it should be changed.

It is designed essentially for professionals with an interest in matters relating to Newbury 2026. It is not designed for the public although in recent years the public have been invited to attend since there has been spare capacity within the Corn Exchange to accommodate them. A small number have taken advantage of the offer. A summary of the presentations are made available to anyone on request and the media are invited and generally cover the event quite extensively. There have never been any complaints from the public about being unable to attend.

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 Dillon asked:

“Do you think that attendance from the small numbers of the public would increase if you changed the timing of the event?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

That is possible, but that would change the nature of the event, but if you want to have a dialogue about that then then I am sure we can do so.

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