

# **Meeting of West Berkshire District Council**

**Thursday, 10th September,  
2020**

**Questions and Answers**

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# **Council Meeting**

## **10 September 2020**

Questions and Answers



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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 Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Mr Graham Storey:**

*"Can the council provide an up to date valuation and expected yield on its commercial property portfolio?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development provided the following written response:**

"The latest valuation as at 31.3.2020 showed the portfolio's value of properties as £61.764m. The expected yield for these properties is 5.16% per annum of the property value. After deducting the cost of borrowing and management of the properties this provides net income of £0.58m or 0.94%."

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**(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Ms Paula Saunderson:**

*"WBC Placement Policy states the Council "does not have enough affordable supply to meet demand", so what is WBC's definition of an Affordable Care placement, please?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care provided the following written response:**

"Perhaps the wording in the Policy leaves something to be desired (it comes from the previous version), because WBC does not have a fixed definition of an affordable bed since, fundamentally, the price of supporting individuals will depend upon their specific care needs.

The statement in the policy is seeking to explain that care home beds available near West Berkshire (but not within its borders) are often less expensive (this is particularly true if one looks to the west of the district). It is also true that there are a number of relatively high-cost care homes within West Berkshire. Consequently, if the council only commissioned beds in care homes within West Berkshire, there would be a very significant pressure on the budget (and you will appreciate that the Policy makes this clear at 2.6)."

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**(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Ms Paula Saunderson:**

*"How many 'affordable' placements are there available in West Berks, excluding Walnut Close?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care provided the following written response:**

"As stated above, we do not have a fixed definition of an affordable bed because the price of supporting individuals will depend upon their specific care needs."

Excluding Walnut Close, there are 15 care homes (12 in the external market plus the other three WBC ones) providing 712 beds for older people, 595 beds in the external market and 117 in the other three WBC homes.

There are a further 29 homes for people with Learning Disabilities but I take it that the question relates to older adults.

Of the 12 external market care homes for older people, we commission beds in all of them, although in some cases this may be due to arrangements where family members 'top up' the Council's contribution (as referred to in the Placement Policy). We currently commission 166 beds from external providers, to which is to be added the 117 beds in our own care homes."

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**(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Ms Paula Saunderson:**

*"What is the current average price paid by WBC for an externally purchased placement?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care provided the following written response:**

"Taken from the latest new placements listing (2020/21) the average price for a placement is £928.40. This current figure is higher than pre-Covid-19 due to actions to expedite hospital discharges funded by government in response to Covid-19."

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**(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Ms Paula Saunderson:**

*"What is the current average price for a placement in one of the WBC managed Care Homes, excluding Walnut Close?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care provided the following written response:**

"For residential care, the average price at Willows Edge and Notrees is £831.00 per week. For residential care and nursing care (but excluding Funded Nursing Care) the average price at Birchwood is £861.00 per week."

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**(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Ms Paula Saunderson :**

*"How many Dementia placements are available in West Berks, excluding Walnut Close?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care provided the following written response:**

"88 of the 117 beds in the Council's care homes excluding Walnut Close (see above) are, or can be, dementia beds.

Of the 12 external market care homes for older people, three do not provide support to people with dementia. In practical terms, the total number of beds available to people with dementia in the external market is variable (because independent providers make day-to-day decisions about who they will place, based on demand and their ability to meet the needs of their service user group). "

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**(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Ms Paula Saunderson**

*“How many Dementia placements are available in WBC managed Care Homes, excluding Walnut Close?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care provided the following written response:**

“As stated above, 88.”

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**(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Ms Paula Saunderson:**

*“What are the WBC projections for the number of patients diagnosed with Dementia in the fiscal years ending 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 & 2025?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care provided the following written response:**

“The Council’s Adult Social Care service does not have a model specifically for projected diagnosis. It does, however, operate a Long Term Services (LTS) model which incorporates projections of client numbers based on their ‘primary support reason’ and the type of care they are expected to need. It is kept under regular review.

You are probably aware of the recent study by the London School of Economics and University College London which showed that people with dementia accounted for a quarter of all coronavirus-related deaths in England and Wales.<sup>1</sup> This means that predictions which pre-date Covid-19 must be reviewed.

Our current forecast is that the number of clients 65 and over with dementia requiring a Long-Term service will increase by 2.4% for 2021/22 and 2.5% for 2022/23. However, the current year has seen a 16% reduction on last year’s total and, as anticipated by the reference to the LSE/UCL study above, we will undoubtedly need to re-evaluate these numbers as we review the LTS model.”

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**(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Ms Paula Saunderson:**

*“How do these compare with the CPEC published projections of the number of patients diagnosed with Dementia for West Berkshire?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care provided the following written response:**

“First, as referred to above, we must recognise that Covid has radically altered the requirement at least in the medium-term.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ltccovid.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/International-report-on-the-impact-of-COVID-19-on-people-living-with-dementia-19-August-2020.pdf>

Next, trying to compare CPEC projections with a modelled/anticipated WBC projection is not comparing like with like – because for our assessment we will start with the number of people with/projected to be diagnosed with dementia, of which a subset will be the number of people who need long-term services, of which a subset will be those who will need a care home, of which a subset will be those that will need a care home bed commissioned by WBC (rather than by themselves or the Clinical Commissioning Group).

In other words, growth in the number of people with a dementia diagnosis will not translate straightforwardly into demand for council-commissioned care home beds.”

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**(j) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Ms Paula Saunderson:**

*“Does the Council have any plans to address the predicted shortage in affordable supply of placements?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care provided the following written response:**

“Once again, I refer you to my answers above, viz that we don’t have a fixed definition of an affordable bed (/placement) because the price of supporting individuals will depend upon their specific care needs.

Having said this, the Council’s Adult Social Care service has developed a plan to set out our position as a provider in the market. This paper has been revised in the light of Covid-19 impacts and will be taken through the relevant Executive Cycle in due course.

In addition, the Council has updated its Market Position Statement which will be published once it has been through the sign-off process. This will articulate our expected demand for the benefit of external providers.”

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**(k) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Mr Paul Morgan:**

*“Is the primary reason that the Council is now suggesting turning the LRIE into a housing estate driven by the need for a plan ‘b’ in the event that the Sandleford link development does not go ahead?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development provided the following written response:**

“The redevelopment of LRIE was first proposed in the Newbury Town Centre Plan (2006) long before development at Sandleford was proposed in the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2010) and has nothing to do with Sandleford Park and any residential development there.

In the local plan LRIE is a protected employment area (PEA), although policy ADPP2 states *“Regeneration of the Faraday Road area immediately to the east of the town centre for mixed use and office developments will create additional jobs and improve the environment of this part of the town. Permission has been granted for an office building of over 7,000 sq.m, a restaurant and hotel”*.

The recently published LRIE Masterplan was commissioned by the Council as land owner and it is the view of its agents, that now 10 years on, residential may form a greater part in the “mixed use” as outlined above.”

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**(l) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Wellbeing by Dr Julie Wintrup:**

*“How many contact tracers are now employed and trained by the West Berkshire's own Public Health team and how many by private companies?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Wellbeing provided the following written response:**

“The Government’s new Test and Trace Service continues to be the primary source of contact tracing across England. This is supported by regional Public Health England Health Protection Teams that provide contact tracing for outbreaks in high risk settings.

Over the last few weeks Public Health England has been supporting the roll out of local contact tracing to track people who have tested positive for covid-19 but who have not provided any details to the test and trace service. Local data and community knowledge can be used for a more targeted approach to contact as well as provide support for those who need it during isolation. Local knowledge and intelligence can also be gathered and used to act quickly if a breakout at a business or large gathering has occurred.

As this time, priority for training and support to develop a local contact training solution is being provided to those areas on the Government’s ‘watch-list’ who are experiencing high incidence of COVID-19. Data on the number of positive cases and contacts being successfully contacted and followed up in West Berkshire remains good.

We do not currently employ any contact tracers at the Council, but are currently working with our neighbouring local authorities to make plans for the roll out of a local solution to contact tracing should this be needed to complement the national system. This will likely involve the training of existing staff across the council.

Given that Test and Trace is led by the Department of Health and Social Care, we do not know the number of call handlers who are employed by private companies.”

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**(m) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public health and Wellbeing by Dr Julie Wintrup:**

*“Is West Berkshire's Public Health team properly resourced and trained to provide the highest standard of finding, testing, tracing, and supporting people to isolate, and to maintain its other essential public health duties”.*

**The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Wellbeing provided the following written response:**

“As per question (i), training is currently being rolled out by Public Health England to support local councils in developing a local contact tracing solution. This training is targeting those areas where incidence of COVID-19 is high and the number of positive cases being contacted is low



The Council have previously received a Test and Trace Grant of £540,000 which is supporting our local public health response to COVID-19.”

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**(n) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic development by Dr Julie Wintrup:**

*“Is the Institute for Fiscal Studies' prediction correct in West Berkshire Council's case, in anticipating that without additional financial support from Government, it will be forced to slash services?” Is the Institute for Fiscal Studies' prediction correct in West Berkshire Council's case, in anticipating that without additional financial support from Government, it will be forced to slash services?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development provided the following written response:**

“The Government has provided £8.6m of un-ring-fenced funding to West Berkshire Council to fund the additional costs related to the Covid-19 outbreak. The Government has also provided an income compensation scheme that shares some of the income losses the Council has faced between the Council and Government. The Governance and Ethics Committee received a report from the Council's Chief Finance Officer in respect of the ongoing financial position of the Council as a ‘Going Concern’ at its meeting on the 24th August which concluded:

*“Having considered the assessment above and the overall financial strength of the Council, it is concluded by the Section 151 Officer (Executive Director for Resources) that this assessment does not contain an imminent risk to the going concern assertion”*

The report details in Appendix A some of the Covid-19 specific risks that have arisen on the response to these. The report can be found at <http://decisionmaking.westberks.gov.uk/documents/s86050/7.%20DRAFT%20Going%20Concern%20Assessment%20as%20at%2031st%20March%202020%20GE%2024.8.2020%20v2.pdf>

The Council is not looking to, nor is being forced to, reduce the services that it provides to the public.”

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**(o) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Dr Julie Wintrup:**

*“Is the Council confident that all Councillors are now properly trained in use of social media and are all upholding the seven Nolan Principles in their social media practices?”*

**The Leader of the Council provided the following written response:**

“At West Berkshire Council we recognise that social media can be an effective way for Members to keep residents updated with what is happening in their area. Making use of it is not compulsory however, and there are other ways Councillors choose to keep their communities Informed. Whenever councillors use social media, newsletters, local meetings or something else entirely they need to be mindful of the Code of Conduct.

Training on the Code of Conduct (which includes the Nolan Principles) and the use of social media has been offered to all Councillors following the May 2019 election. In addition all

Members have been provided with the Code of Conduct and a copy of the Social Media protocol.

As with all guidance given to Councillors, it is incumbent on individual members to follow the advice. The Social Media Policy states that 'Members should conduct themselves in a manner that is respectful of others but this does not prevent them from holding opposing views and expressing political opinion, but views should be expressed in an appropriate manner.'

Social media can help us connect with our communities and I'm satisfied the appropriate training has been provided for Councillors to ensure we use this tool responsibly."

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**(p) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Mr Alan Pearce:**

*"Please can the Council confirm after what date the public will be able to access on the Councils website the following CVS files comprising of Developer agreements, Developer contributions and Developer transactions?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing provided the following written response:**

"They will be able to be accessed from the 31 December 2020 onwards."

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**(q) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Mr Alan Pearce:**

*"After what date will the Council have submitted the URLs to the national register of developer contributions?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing provided the following written response:**

"This will be the 31 December 2020 too."

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**(r) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Mr Alan Pearce:**

*"In follow up to the answer I received at the Executive on 16 July 2020, please will the council immediately give details of all the identified highway improvements along the A339 that they are planning to discuss with the developer's consultants and a copy of any legal agreements (redacted if necessary) that had been made or are being considered?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside provided the following written response:**

"Thank you for your question. I can confirm that future improvements are planned along much of the A339 using funding from developments.

Improvements are planned to the A4 / 339 / B4009 Robin Hood Gyratory including widening within the southern end of the gyratory for southbound and westbound traffic that will also assist traffic leaving the B4009 arm.

Further improvements are planned on the A339 between Swan Roundabout and St Johns (Burger King) Roundabouts which will be part funded by development. These include:

- Measures to encourage through traffic onto the A34 via the B4640;
- A new junction from the A339 (to the north of the HWRC access) to the new Highwood Copse School and for the potential use of the Sandleford housing site;
- Widening of the A339 between this new access and the Pinchington Lane junction to provide 2 lanes in each direction;
- Potential signalisation and capacity improvements at the A339/Pinchington Lane junction;
- Capacity improvements at the A339/St Johns (Burger King) Roundabout.

I can confirm that any legal agreements associated with the above have yet to be finalised.

I hope that this provides the required detail to the question, however if you would like further detail on any of the above improvements please contact my colleagues in the Council's Network Management Team on [trafficandroadsafety@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:trafficandroadsafety@westberks.gov.uk) ."

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**(s) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment by Dr Susan Millington:**

*"When will the delivery plan for the Environmental Strategy be published?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Environment provided the following written response:**

"Thank you for your questions Dr Millington.

A draft Environment Delivery Plan will be presented to the Environment Advisory Group later this month and it I am confident we will be in a position to publish an initial plan in October."

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**(t) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment by Dr Susan Millington:**

*"As part of your Environmental Strategy commitment to carbon sequestration and improving biodiversity through large scale tree planting, will West Berkshire District Council be purchasing and leasing land for woodland creation?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Environment provided the following written response:**

"Following the adoption of our Environment Strategy in July we are now in the process of finalising the delivery plan which will inform how we achieve carbon neutrality by 2030.

Clearly we must exhaust all opportunities to reduce our carbon footprint. This could include the use of our own existing land, partnership working with private landowners and potentially acquiring land for sequestration purposes. I therefore cannot rule anything in or out at this stage. I am sure you appreciate the benefits must be assessed against other options to ensure the Council is investing its resources in the best possible outcomes."

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**(u) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Mr Paul Morgan:**

*“Can the Council please explain why it has been able to make available to the public and members a copy of the Avison Young report regarding the LRIE Development Brief but despite many requests, is still refusing to publish and make available a copy of the Surfacing Standard Limited (SSL) report looking at possible alternative sites for the football ground?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development provided the following written response:**

“As the SSL report has now been reviewed internally by the Council, it will be published shortly.”

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

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The responses to the questions asked at the meeting are currently being transcribed but you can view the responses given at <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/fullcouncillive>

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**(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing by Councillor Martha Vickers:**

*“Can the Council explain how the work begun by Councillor Rick Jones in to the effect of inequality on the health and life chances of its residents is progressing?”*

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**(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Wellbeing by Councillor Martha Vickers:**

*“In the light of the reported rise of Domestic Abuse cases across the Country and concern about the shortage of Refuge places for those women and families most at risk is this Council planning to increase the number of Refuge places it provides?”*

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**(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education by Councillor Peter Argyle:**

*“What is Council doing to help our children and young people as they resume their studies after the summer break?”*

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**(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Wellbeing by Councillor Jeff Cant:**

*“Can the Council give any further information about the long term sustainable solution for the Lido which was unable to reopen viably this year?”*

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**The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care provided the following written response:**

The Council's ambition is to make the Lido a 6 month a year venue from March to September, but this needs careful planning. The Lido is a valued part of the local heritage and a venue that both local people enjoy, and many others travel some distance to experience.

It has some unique features that make operating the site challenging and it can be hard to establish where all the services and pipework are. So, we commissioned a detailed survey to

understand all the opportunities and risks before making any big decisions. This report is expected to be completed in the next few weeks.

'The survey has been conducted with a great deal of care and is looking to map the site taking into consideration that there was an original open water swimming area there in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the work on the current structure dates from as early as the 1920's. This is in addition to the complex relationship the site has with the local water table. Being in a flood plain the lido cannot be emptied (as would happen with traditional pools) to assess any necessary repair works and the contractors required to conduct this work are specialists in their field.

We need to be sure that the ground, the lido structure itself, the water supply and the relationship with the leisure centre immediately next door can all be managed in a way that is financially sustainable. We are hopeful that the survey will show us a positive way forward and to provide us with confidence that any new structure, or refurbishment, can be in keeping with our vision and improve accessibility, participation and engagement. We want as many people as possible to enjoy the Lido for years to come.

The opening date for the Lido has always been dependent on the natural ground water levels so that the structure does not break its back and this year the levels have been far above the normal preventing any work prior to opening until early July. The contractor had furloughed a large part of their workforce and the earliest that they could promise to attend site was early August. The cost of opening the lido was estimated at £30,000 and given social distancing requirements I very reluctantly recommended that this was not a good use of public money. As it turned out August and so far, this month has had poor weather.

To reconfirm we remain committed to reopening the lido either as a refurbished and underpinned structure or in a new form. We wish to make it independent from the Northcroft Leisure Centre with its own entrance, changing areas and other amenities so that it is something that Newbury and West Berkshire can be proud of."

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**(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance by Councillor Tom Marino:**

*"Can the portfolio holder tell us what proportion of Council employees are working from home and how does the Council anticipate how this will change in both the short and medium-term?"*

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**(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Carlyne Culver:**

*"Will WBC support the Wildlife Trusts, TVERC and others in the creation of a Nature Recovery Network, which is a requirement of the Environment Bill?"*

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**(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Carlyne Culver:**

*"Does WBC agree that a good way for the council to support the Environment Bill's objective to protect urban street trees would be to make the pedestrianisation of Northbrook Street permanent, and plant trees along it, thereby providing an attractive, shady and pollution free space?"*

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**(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Tony Vickers:**

*“Why did the Council not consult Newbury Town Council before making major changes to the town centre traffic flow?”*

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**(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Tony Vickers:**

*“How is the Council planning to involve Newbury Town Council in the master-planning of Newbury town centre?”*

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**(j) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance by Councillor Lee Dillon:**

*“Why is it taking the Council 14 months to respond to my motion on constitutional changes?”.*

**The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance answered:**

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**(k) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Councillor Lee Dillon:**

*“Has the council received any communication from the government about preparing for dealing with the end of the transition period without any trade deals in place?”*

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**(l) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Erik Pattenden:**

*“We note that it has been six months since our motion on safer school was referred to TAG, so will the council urgently review it to facilitate children returning to school safely?”.*

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**(m) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Martha Vickers:**

*“Would the leader of council support the idea of having themed debates such as on Black Lives Matter and its impact on West Berkshire?”*

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**Urgent Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Lee Dillon:**

*“Given the latest guidance from the Government can the Council confirm what, if any, additional steps it is taking in response to this including provisions around the Community Hub?”*

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