

Members Questions to the Executive

14 October 2021

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Item (a)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Eric Owens/Jon Winstanley/ Jenny Graham

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste by Councillor Jeff Beck:

“Can the Portfolio Holder for Environment please advise me what the Zero Carbon Tour hoped to achieve, when they recently called into Newbury College on their way to COP26?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste answered:

Thank you Cllr Beck for your question which gives me a very good opportunity to highlight not only the United Nation's conference of the parties COP26, the role of our Reading MP Alok Sharma being president of this and also what West Berkshire Council and our partner organisations in the area are doing on the back of this major event.

The Planetmark Zero Carbon Tour with their fully electric bus was initiated and funded by the department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The bus is being used to spread the message of the challenge of being net zero and motivate action throughout the Country in tackling climate change. Berkshire was not originally on the list of stops for the tour so securing the date at Newbury College, which enabled this important message to be brought to our area, was very welcome.

The Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership coordinated the event which enabled the Newbury College Renewables Centre to be promoted and for attendees to have an early preview ahead of their official opening next week. The other focus of the afternoon was the launch of the Berkshire Net Zero Carbon report from Bioregional which will help to bring together action across Berkshire and enhance the already excellent work that is happening. I was able to present, along with officers, the highlights of the work that we are doing in West Berkshire and case studies from our neighbouring Berkshire local authorities. This was very well received and provided excellent input both for ourselves and for our partner organisations.

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So, in summary, the event achieved West Berkshire being part of the Zero Carbon Tour and the raising of awareness of this issue ahead of COP26. It kick-started a greater awareness and engagement from businesses and residents across the county and enabled the College to showcase their Renewables Centre which is a facility that we are very fortunate to have here in West Berkshire and will help the region to support the delivery and maintenance of these greener systems for heat and energy.

The Portfolio Holder 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 Jeff Beck asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you very much for initiating this event which clearly would be of great value to local people”.



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Item (b)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Andy Sharp/ Paul Coe

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Councillor Claire Rowles:

“Can the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care tell me what impact the recently announced Health & Social Care Levy will have on the service?”

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care answered:

Thank you for your question Cllr Rowles.

‘Build Back Better’, the Government’s plan for Health and Social Care, sets out a number of initiatives with the aim to reform and improve the social care system and our Adult Social Care services here in West Berkshire, we are very positive about elements relating to greater integration with Health as well as additional support for the social care workforce, which is really needed.

At this moment in time we have limited detail on what the reforms will deliver so we’re working on potential outcomes and identifying possible risks, based on existing practices, and using the knowledge of the experienced team we have in place in our Adult Social Care team. This is in preparation for the White Paper which is expected by the end of the year and will provide further detail.

I can go on and describe some of the potential risks officers have identified but I think there is one in particular that is interesting and demonstrates where their thinking lies at the moment and certainly where my thinking is heading.

For example, the introduction of the cap on care costs at £86k a year, from October 2023 which will be to cover costs relating to personal care, is one of those areas which is likely to need further resources from the local authority.

At the present time, only c.6% of people in the community who approach ASC are provided with a long-term service and funded by WBC.

Under the new proposals as described so far, from October 2023 when this comes in, anyone paying for care will want to receive an ‘independent personal budget’ assessment from ASC in order to identify eligible costs which will go towards the cap. And that’s really important.



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This could mean that a large number of people who currently do not need to contact ASC at all will now want our input, and a large number of people who currently have minimal input (i.e. they just require some advice and information) will now need more detailed assessment.

ASC is also concerned that, because the cap is only applied to those people who start receiving care after October 2023, this may cause an artificial 'bubble' of demand by delaying the start of care until that point.

What I can say is that officers and members are committed to sharing more detail as it emerges and will be continuing to plan as we await the white paper.

The Portfolio Holder 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 Claire Rowles asked the following supplementary question:

“no, and thank you for such a comprehensive answer”.



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Item (c)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Susan Halliwell

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Leader by Councillor Dennis Benneyworth:

“Could the Leader give any further information regarding initial discussions on the 6 Unitary Authorities in Berkshire speaking to Government about a potential County Deal?”

The Portfolio Holder for Leader answered:

Thank you for your question Councillor Benneyworth. I can confirm that all six of the Berkshire Leaders have agreed in principle to discuss the opportunities that a County Deal may present for the Berkshire Councils. Our agreement is not about changing the governance or Council structures for the Berkshire councils, quite the opposite. It is about using the uniqueness of the 6 councils to secure greater investment into our places on things like jobs, skills and infrastructure so we continue to deliver the best for our residents and businesses.

We have yet to have any detailed conversations with Government who are yet to publish their consultation on County Deals, however, I'm keen we remain open to the opportunities this presents.

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Item (d)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley / Paul Hendry

(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste by Councillor Carolyne Culver:

“Will the council ban the use of glyphosate by its staff and contractors, as many other local authorities have done?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste answered:

The Council's contractors for our Countryside and Waste services currently use glyphosphate-based solutions for weed control in selected parts of the district. Glyphosphate-based solutions are commonly-used in the UK for large scale weed control operations. The contractors are required to implement safe systems of work to minimise exposure to non-target plants and usually go out of their way to avoid spraying in close proximity to humans and animals. We will continue to engage with our contractors to see if a more eco-friendly option can be found. At this time, we haven't identified an alternative solution that can be used on a cost-effective basis across a large geographical area. We are aware that some councils have stopped spraying weeds and are allowing them to grow without any significant interventions. We do not think that is an option for us at this stage. This is because, if uncontrolled, weed growth could lead to considerable problems including damage to pavements and road surfaces. We will keep this situation under active review and do recognise that we would like to move to a more ecologically suitable solution.

The Portfolio Holder 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 Carolyne Culver asked the following supplementary question:

“no”.



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Item (e)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Anna Smy/Sean Murphy

(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Strategic Partnerships and Transformation by Councillor Alan Macro:

“What proportion of roads in West Berkshire exceed the new WHO air pollution guidelines for PM2.5 particulates and nitrogen dioxide?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Strategic Partnerships and Transformation answered:

Currently we don't monitor for PM2.5 but have modelled information from DEFRA, which we are happy to share with members. This modelled data we cannot provide an answer regarding the proportion on specific roads.

However, the Public Protection Service has applied for and has been awarded a grant by DEFRA, which will be used to monitor the levels of PM2.5, across all of the Partnership areas.

It is also important to be mindful that it is estimated that traffic only makes up 0.81% of PM2.5 sources. In addition to vehicles other contributors include railways, open fires, log burners, bonfires, industry, farming, heating, pollen, aerosols, smoking etc. Also there is the matter that is blown over our borders from other regions and countries.

With respect to Nitrogen Dioxide, overall the concentrations have shown a decreasing trend of NO2 since 2016 on all monitored sites.

The Portfolio Holder 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 the following supplementary question:

“Very pleased to hear that we will be monitoring PM2.5, however, according to reports in the Times, UK limits for both PM2.5 and NO2 are four times greater than the new WHO recommendations and that 96% of roads nationally exceed NO2 limits and so I think while we do ok on the UK limits we're not on the WHO recommendations. Could

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I ask that we double our efforts to monitor NO2 please because it's far more damaging than had previously been thought".

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Strategic Partnerships and Transformation:

Thanks for your supplementary Cllr Macro. I can say that yes, under the air quality objectives of the current legislation for England we don't exceed any statutory levels but as you rightly say, with regard to the new WHO guidelines we do. Please be assured that we are striving to meet those new WHO guidelines.



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Item (f)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley/ Peter Walker

(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport by Councillor Erik Pattenden:

This question was withdrawn by Councillor Pattenden

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Item (g)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Ian Pearson

(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education by Councillor David Marsh:

“What impact has the opening of Highwood Copse had on the number of pupils enrolling for Reception classes at the four nearby primary schools (Falkland, John Rankin, St John’s, The Willows)?”

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

Thank you for your question Councillor Marsh, that I am very pleased you asked because not only is Highwood Copse our newest primary school, it is also one of our greenest.

In terms of impact on the four schools you asked about, this would relate to Highwood pupils who had put one of these schools as their second choice, in other words, if Highwood had not opened, this is where they would have gone.

I can tell you that the impact school by school is as follows:

Falkland - none, the school is full in Year R

St John’s - none

The Willows – two pupils might have gone there if Highwood Copse didn’t exist.

John Rankin – six

The Portfolio Holder 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 David Marsh asked the following supplementary question:

“What support is the council giving to these schools given that the decision to open Highwood Copse in fact, despite what you’ve just said, has created such over-capacity in the area that these other schools are between them short of a total of 49 reception pupils including an entire class at one of them. So what support are you giving them in view of that?”

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

You asked a specific question about four schools; Falkland and St John's, where there is no impact at all and the Willows and John Rankin, which are large schools so the two pupils that the Willows would have received will have a negligible cost impact on their budget and as far as John Rankin is concerned I anticipate that they will absorb those costs through normal balancing of budgets. It's a small amount of money relatively speaking.



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Item (h)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Richard Turner

(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Councillor Steve Masters:

“Since it was initiated, what is the return on investment for the property investment fund after all costs in real and percentage terms?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

The Commercial Property Investment portfolio was initiated in financial year 2017/18 with first properties coming in 2018/19. Using financial years 2018/19 to 2020/21 as full financial years (estimated outturn for 2021/22 will be included in treasury management mid year report) the portfolio produced a net return (net of costs, interest payments and MRP) of £3,640,363 against the purchase price of the portfolio properties of £58,583,720. This offers an average yield across the three years of 2.07%.

The Portfolio Holder 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 Steve Masters asked the following supplementary question:

“no, Thank you very much”.

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Item (i)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Pete Campbell/ Ian Pearson

(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education by Councillor Claire Rowles:

“Hungerford Primary in my ward took part in the successful Easter trial of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme, please can the Executive Member give me an update on how this was rolled out over summer?”

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

The summer programme was delivered through 16 sites across West Berkshire, including Hungerford Primary school. The programme was delivered by schools and childcare providers. Several sites implemented a hub model so that children from small schools could access the HAF programme at a larger school.

For the summer HAF, Berkshire Youth and Community Youth Project ran successful programmes for young people aged 12 plus.

The final figures are being collated but the estimate is that 892 children and young people (age 5 to 16) took part in the HAF programme. They attended 5422 sessions, where they were able to eat a nutritious meal at every session and took part in a wide range of enrichment activities.

The whole programme was a great success and a video was filmed of the programme at Hungerford Primary: <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/HAF21>

The Portfolio Holder 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 Claire Rowles asked the following supplementary question:

“Could you tell me if we have any plans for similar programmes in the future?”

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

We have plans for Christmas, four days over Christmas we have funding to run a similar programme from the 20th to the 23rd December and I anticipate that if the

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government comes forward with funding, we will be able to run similar programmes throughout the year in the longer holidays.



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Item (j)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Ian Pearson

(j) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education by Councillor David Marsh:

“What impact has Highwood Copse had on the budgets of the four nearby primary schools?”

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

Thank you; I've answered this question in my supplementary to you, but I'm happy to take another supplementary.

The Portfolio Holder 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 David Marsh asked the following supplementary question:

“I don't know where you get your figures from; I get mine from visiting the schools in my ward and adjacent to my ward and what I want to ask is, and you may not be able to answer because your figures don't match mine, but I would like to ask if the council is offering financial assistance to the schools given the serious budgetary implications of being so short of reception pupils through no fault of their own. One school has lost £100,000 or more from its budget, staff have lost their jobs as a result of this kick in the teeth just as they were recovering from the effects of the pandemic and your figures do not seem to bear any relation to those facts on the ground if you talk to the schools. That's what they say and I'm not trying to create trouble, I feel very sorry for these schools and I'm disappointed that you don't seem to recognise the problem. So my question is are you going to give them any help, including financial?”

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

Thank you Councillor Marsh for an impassioned supplementary. I simply do not recognise the picture that you're painting. Happy to discuss this with you offline, perhaps with officers so that we can bottom out the impact of this fantastic new school which, after all, is only taking a single reception class of a relatively small number of children and the figures I gave to you before relating to the four primary schools nearby I am absolutely confident in.



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Item (k)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Janet Weekes

(k) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Strategic Partnerships and Transformation by Councillor Steve Masters:

“Has the council applied for funding (With appropriate partners) from the Department of Business, energy and industrial strategy (BEIS) Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Demonstrator in order to help local social housing providers insulate and heat their properties more efficiently and help our poorest residents save money on energy bills in these uncertain times?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Strategic Partnerships and Transformation answered:

The aim of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) is to raise the energy efficiency of those social homes below EPC Band C up to that level, in preparation for the widespread adoption of decarbonised heating systems.

West Berkshire Council has been working in partnership with BEIS and we are supporting our Registered Providers who provide social housing in the district to submit their bids for funding over the next two years to improve heating and energy efficiency in residents' homes.

The Portfolio Holder 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 Steve Masters asked the following supplementary question:

“Approximately how many homes fall under the level C energy efficiency standard? I know you may not be able to answer that right now but that would be quite helpful”.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Strategic Partnerships and Transformation answered:

You're absolutely correct Councillor Master's, I can't answer that at the moment. Don't forget, we don't have our social housing ourselves; we do our social housing through

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our partners and we will have to ask our partners for that information and get back to you, so it may take some time to provide you with that information.



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Item (I)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Ian Pearson

(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education by Councillor David Marsh:

“Do you still maintain that Highwood Copse was needed to provide capacity to meet current needs, rather than at some future date when Sandleford may (or may not) be developed?”

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

Yes, we do need Highwood Copse to provide for local Primary capacity in Newbury.

At times, families moving into South Newbury have had to be offered places in Thatcham, due to year groups being full and our aim is to ensure sufficient town places for town children. Numbers entering Reception classes in September 2020 exceeded Newbury primary school capacity.

Notwithstanding Sandleford, this school was aimed at providing for other additional development within the town, and developments that have planning permission. These combined will generate around 190 primary pupils and if we include the pupils generated by a recent planning application for 90 homes in the area, then that number will be bigger.

Highwood Copse will play an important part in ensuring sufficient capacity across Newbury in the future, including for those families moving into the town. It will also offer choice for parents and provide flexibility as numbers rise.

The worst thing possible is not to have enough school places for local children.

The Portfolio Holder 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 David Marsh asked the following supplementary question:

“Given the figures that I referred to earlier, and I accept you don't have the same figures. Isn't it the reality that this is a school that, however good it may be, is demonstrably, because we are way under capacity at adjacent schools, not currently needed? It is also serviced by an expensive dual carriageway that has caused months

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of traffic chaos and is completely out of scale with the surrounding area and is also not currently needed. Indeed, neither of them, the school or the road will be needed if the Sandleford Park development does not go ahead”.

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

I'm not going to answer the transport point but I am going to answer the point about capacity. The numbers I gave to your main question demonstrate that we're short of school places. That's why we need Highwood Copse.



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Item (m)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Janet Weekes / Shiraz Sheikh

(m) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Strategic Partnerships and Transformation by Councillor Steve Masters:

“What progress has been made in the Joint venture with Sovereign Housing and will decarbonisation be part of any future discussions and plans?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Strategic Partnerships and Transformation answered:

The Joint Venture – Homes for West Berks LLP, is continuing to progress with the delivery of housing in the district and the decarbonisation of housing will be reviewed as part of future plans.

The Portfolio Holder 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 Steve Masters asked the following supplementary question:

“Do you have any figures on the proposed numbers of social housing for the district within the joint venture? And when will further details of that joint venture be published to the public?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Strategic Partnerships and Transformation answered:

I'm at a bit of a loss to answer you as I'm unclear on what your question is. The joint venture is progressing; figures with regards to the proposed number of social houses depends on how the joint venture progresses over the years. So I can't give you an exact figure at the moment.

Councillor Masters: In that case can you tell me when you might get some of those figures? If you've not got those figures at the moment, when will the public...

Councillor Cole: I've already answered your question Councillor Masters, you're not allowed two supplementaries.

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Item (n)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Richard Turner

(n) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Councillor David Marsh:

“In view of the council's Environment Strategy and carbon-reduction targets, why is the new roof at John Rankin School apparently not being fitted with solar panels?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Following survey of the roof at John Rankin to assess suitability for the installation of solar pv panels, the roof structure was found to be insufficient to support the load and thus unfortunately it was not viable. The condition of the roof has prompted capital maintenance works to carry out suitable repair/replacement. The council's Energy Management and Property Services Teams will continue to explore opportunities on the site with the school.

The Portfolio Holder 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 David Marsh asked the following supplementary question:

“You haven't put solar on Highwood Copse, a new school, you haven't put it on John Ranking, an old school, would you agree that this is disappointing given that school buildings owned by the council are such an ideal source of potentially generating renewable energy. Are you going to do it on any schools?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

I'll limit my answer to the John Rankin. I can do many things but I cannot make a roof structure, unsuitable for solar panels, suitable for solar panels; that is not within my power. So I'm afraid I'll just have to leave it there.

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Item (o)	Executive Meeting on 14 October 2021
Submitted to:	Matt Pearce

(o) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications by Councillor David Marsh:

“Why did the council not take advantage of World Car-Free Day (22 September) and Bike to School Week (27 September) as opportunities to encourage residents and schools to become more engaged with its Active Travel policies?”

The Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications answered:

Thank you councillor Marsh. I don't actually recognise it, in that you've asked why did the council not take advantage of World Car Free Day and Bike to School Week, but I feel that we did.

September proved to be a very busy month for us with World Car Free Day, Bike to School Week and the Great Big Green Week all falling within the same two weeks. We took advantage of this to promote active travel and our work promoting the environment more generally.

Internally, we encouraged staff to switch to alternative travel methods if they can. The Interim Chief Executive emailed all staff about this and there was an internal news article for staff and a banner displayed prominently on our intranet homepage. I know I myself chose to leave the car at school following that particular newsletter to us.

As far as residents were concerned, we shared content in advance and on the day itself, including a news article which featured it on the homepage of our website, posted about the day on Facebook and Twitter and also included it in our weekly email bulletin to 21,000 residents. World Car Free Day, Bike to School Week and the Great Big Green Week were also included in our weekly briefing for local media, with the relevant officers coming along to speak directly to the press.

Similarly we also promoted Bike To School Week – encouraging pupils and parents to walk to school or to ditch the car and walk instead. Activities in support of the week also included:

- Promoting Bikeability training and to increase confidence cycling
- The installation of cycle shelters at schools
- A pilot School Streets project in Calcot

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- Anti-idling messages to improve air quality and make walking and cycling to school more enjoyable

Content featured on social media and in our residents' newsletter.

In addition, some of these messages featured in a broader Back to School campaign running throughout September and looking at the work of the Council to support children reach their full potential. As well as investment into schools and our Health and Wellbeing in Schools Award Scheme, for example, this included the School Streets pilot and cycle shelter installation.

The Council is developing another campaign themed around the environment for November and which will coincide with the COP26 conference. This is likely to again feature promotion of active travel and use of public transport.

Whilst we note the importance of these campaigns, we recognise that these form just one of many interventions needed to bring about wider societal changes encouraging more sustainable forms of travel e.g. development of walking and cycling infrastructure, education in schools.

The Portfolio Holder 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 David Marsh asked the following supplementary question:

"Yes, there's a lot going on and that's kind of the point really. It seemed that those opportunities and the potential impact they could have had of boosting those policies was not followed. Trying to be positive and knowing that Councillor Somner, the portfolio holder and the officers are promoting active travel, I'm just wondering, whether perhaps in the future these special days, weeks and events could be discussed at the transport advisory group in advance so we've all got an idea of what is being talked about and we can all get out there and promote it because a press release, an email and a few tweets didn't seem to have the desired impact on these events in September. So can I ask if you'd consider that?"

The Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications answered:

I will certainly speak to Councillor Somner about it but I think all Councillors have a role to play within the promotion of this and actually sharing the content that was shared widely with everybody so we get to all ward members. So, I'm happy to talk to Councillor Somner but I feel we all have a role here.
