

Questions and Answers

Executive

Thursday, 3rd September, 2020

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Executive Meeting

3 September 2020

Questions and Answers



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

Item 4

- (a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Mr Ian Hall:

Question:

"In any future redevelopment of the London Road Industrial Estate what measures will be taken to ensure that any case-officer reports are accurate and protect the rights of property owners (be it freeholders or leaseholders) and that councillors have access to full and unfiltered information?"

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

Planning reports will be overseen and checked for accuracy, in all respects and with regard to all relevant interests, as far as is necessary and appropriate to Planning. Councillors will have access to all the information that Planning Officers use to consider any applications.

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- (b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Mr Ian Hall:

Question:

"In any future redevelopment of the London Road Industrial Estate will all case officer reports be double checked and if so by whom?"

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

It is always the case that reports written by the Planning Case Officers are overseen by their managers, and are checked by their managers when they are complete. Who does the checking will depend, because of line management arrangements, on who the case officer is.

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Mr Ian Hall:

Question:

“In any future redevelopment of the London Road Industrial Estate what measures are being taken to protect any property owners’ rights in the event of the Council envisaging or considering Compulsory Purchase Orders?”

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

The Council cannot arbitrarily use its powers of compulsory purchase should it wish to acquire leasehold interests to deliver any planning consent it may have achieved. An order to exercise powers of compulsory purchase would have to demonstrate development proposals provide economic, environmental and social benefits and where all efforts to reach a negotiated settlement have been exhausted and with clear evidence of those negotiations. Buying out leasehold interests via compulsory purchase would incur significant cost in addition to a market value payment including fees, loss and disturbance payments. The market value payment would be determined by the CPO process and not the Council. Acquisition of leasehold interests by compulsory purchase would be the option of last resort.

(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Mr Ian Hall:

Question:

“In any future redevelopment of the London Road Industrial Estate what measures are the Council taking to ensure that businesses who may lose their premises have access to replacement premises?”

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

During redevelopment a number of options are available including temporary relocation within the Estate before a long term site can be found, either within or outside the Estate, or a straight move to a new long term location, again either within or outside the Estate. The management of this process will be long, challenging and may have viability implications for redevelopment of the Estate. None the less the Council will pursue all options wherever possible and practical.



(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Mr John Gotelee:

Question:

“What past experience or qualifications in planning and housing does the executive portfolio holder for planning and housing have?”

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

Executive Members are not required to hold any professional qualification in the area of their Portfolio responsibility.

The role of a Portfolio Holder is political and strategic and it is their responsibility to ensure that the Council’s strategy is exercised conscientiously to achieve its aims. All Portfolio Holders understand the function of the service to which they are assigned, and importantly recognise the separation between politics and proper administration.

It is the role of the professional officers to conduct the day to day business of the Council. These officers have certain delegated decision making powers where it comes to applying the regulations and policy.

However, all Members undergo mandatory training on all aspects of Council services and business, with members of Planning Committees undertaking mandatory training on an annual basis. This training covers the regulations and national and local planning policy.

(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Mr Peter Gower:

Question:

“With the Council’s Homelessness Prevention strategy on page 9 recognising a problem with funding challenges and workloads before the Covid pandemic, what steps (beyond the strategy) are the Council taking to prevent people becoming homeless?”

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

The principle purpose of the ‘Reducing Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy’ is to prevent and reduce homelessness. The implementation of the extensive delivery plan that sets how we achieve this continues to be successful in preventing homelessness in our district.

With regards to beyond the strategy, since the pandemic and the emphasis of 'Not going back' to the streets by The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) we have set up a Rough Sleeping Taskforce with our partners, applied for funding to expedite move on opportunities and with our intensive outreach work have enabled individuals to be prevented from long term homelessness and also enabled some to access employment that will ensure that they sustain tenancies.

(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Mr Simon Pike:

Question:

“What steps will the Council take to bring the Mandatory Cycle Lane that is currently being implemented through Thatcham into compliance with the Government’s recently published minimum standards and guidance?”

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

Through the rapid conversion of the existing advisory cycle lanes to the mandatory cycle lanes, and the publication of the new LTN1/20 standards brought out midway through the implementation of the scheme, it would appear that there are some minor inconsistencies due to a variation in requirements. Following your meeting on 27/08/20 with an Officer from the Environment Department the signage requirements have been reviewed and our contractor has since been instructed to reposition the “With Flow Mandatory Cycle Lane Ahead” signs so that they are in advance of the taper amongst other changes to meet the statutory requirements. The speed limit for sections of the A4 in Thatcham is under review and an investigation is being undertaken by colleagues in the traffic and road safety team. The scheme is due for a Stage 3 Road Safety Audit and I have asked the independent auditor to assess the new light segregation and mandatory lanes in accordance with the speed and volume data now that their installation is complete. The scheme is a trial as part of the Emergency Active Travel Funded improvements and will be monitored for its impact and amended as deemed necessary.

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

Item 12

- (a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Councillor Carolyn Culver:

Question:

“Does the Council or any of its pension funds invest in fossil fuels or the animal agriculture industry?”

Answer:

The Council has no investments in either of these industries. As we saw in the Treasury Management report earlier the Council does not invest in shares or bonds of any individual companies nor do we invest in collective investment schemes which sometimes are the focus on particular sectors such as fossil fuel or animal agriculture as is laid out in the question. Instead the Council makes cash deposits with UK banks and building societies and invests in triple A rated money market funds and other local authorities. I mention this purely for completeness because I think it is a poor argument but I have seen suggested elsewhere that part of our commercial property portfolio, our commercial real estate, the filling station in Tipton, represents an investment in fossil fuels. That is not the case it is an investment in commercial real estate. It of course sells petrol and diesel amongst other things but it is a real estate investment. We are no more invested in fossil fuel than baked beans because we also own a building operated by Sainsbury's. So the answer to the Council side of that is no.

For the Pension Funds the investments held by the Royal County of Berkshire Pension Fund, they are complex and extensive. We asked the question when we saw this question from Councillor Culver, the investment managers are developing internal analysis of investment by a number of categories including sector and industry type but that has not been finalised and in any event it would be at a level which would include commercially sensitive information which it would not be possible to share publicly. So the short answer to the Pension Fund is they may well do, hold investments in fossil fuels or animal agriculture.

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 Carolyn Culver asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you Councillor Mackinnon, bearing in mind what you said about Tipton and the garage and the fact that we have got a policy to go carbon neutral by 2030. Do you think that that is appropriate that we should be investing in real estate that sells petrol?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Yes, I think it is. As I said the analogy that I drew was that we own a Sainsbury's building and we are not invested in baked beans or leeks or vegetables. As fossil fuels become less widely used I would imagine that filling station will switch to LPG maybe hydrogen or perhaps it won't be a filling station for the time that we hold the freehold, perhaps it will turn into flats or offices. But, I get the importance of the question but no to take on a commercial property investment and to somehow suggest we are propping up the fossil fuel industry I think is slightly mistaken.

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment by Councillor Carolyne Culver:

Question:

“Will the Portfolio Holder for the Environment consider creating a working group of local environmental experts and campaigners – for example Friends of the Earth, Climate Action Network and Green Exchange – to help deliver the environment strategy delivery plan?”

Answer:

Thank you for your question Councillor Culver. In summary, I am happy with the government's arrangement and delivery arrangements we have to build on Environment Strategy and in particular, as you will be aware, we have a new in-house delivery team focused in the Environment Directorate on doing exactly what you described, delivering projects which the Environment Strategy has called for. Having said that, and again by implication that I don't see immediate value in building another governance group consisting of outsiders to help us do this job. Even though I do not think that is a good move, what I do think is an essential move is for us to work in partnership with organisations in the green space to again do exactly as you say, to deliver work. A very good example of this has actually recently happened in that Friends of the Earth have developed and have launched a small but interesting project called the 'Lockdown Wood project' – you may well be aware of this - which is in a nutshell to encourage town and parish councils and community groups to plant tree saplings and to find suitable land for those to be planted as a collection of memorials to those who have suffered, and perhaps passed away, during the lockdown crisis we have been working through. Again this is a campaign which Friends of the Earth have come up with. We the Council are very happy to support this and gave it a small bit of help through the communications from our community hub to the parish councils and I do hope that similar initiatives will take place from a wide range of community groups which work in loose partnership with us the Council. It is quite right that we the Council have our own part to play. We have a leadership role and a communications role and we are as you know actually delivering real projects, as you are aware for example, the solar energy work which is just starting. But I do see a broad loose coalition of groups assisting each other and encouraging residents to move in the right direction to help us hit our Environmental Strategy and again in particular carbon neutrality by 2030.

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 Carolyne Culver asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you very much Councillor Ardagh-Walter – yes I am aware of the Lockdown Wood. I have been collecting saplings and also talking to the group about the possibility of planting in my ward. Just to let you know the leader of Friends of the Earth locally has been working hard and I was just wondering whether you would be working with BBOWT under the auspices of the forthcoming Environment Act to work on Nature Recovery Networks – that is going to be an obligation for local authorities to work with other local people to make sure we have those networks so will you be working with BBOWT on that”.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:

I am aware of Nature Recovery Network Councillor Culver and we do reference it, albeit briefly, in the Strategy. So I cannot confirm definitively that we will, I think it is highly likely that we will be working with BBOWT if only because they are our delivery partner for the management of several of really important pieces of our natural woodland and indeed are helping us to deliver wild flower verges. So highly likely but I cannot say definitively.

(c) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Carolyne Culver:

Question:

“Following the announcement by the Leader at Executive on 16 July that the way meetings are being run (via Zoom rather than in the Council Chamber) will be reviewed, is there an update about when meetings can return to the Council Chamber or be run on a hybrid basis?”

Answer:

We are regularly reviewing the way meetings are being run via Zoom to ensure that we continue to improve them. In fact you will see we are trying a new format this evening. We are certainly looking at arrangements for running hybrid meetings, but we have to ensure that these would take place in line with Government guidelines on social distancing. As soon as there is a practical solution to move to hybrid meetings we will bring this to the Council. We are also talking with other Councils about their meeting arrangements and are actively engaging with Zoom themselves to make sure the platform offers us the best service. Any meeting (whether it is hybrid or not) in the Chamber or in a meeting room would have to comply with health & safety risk assessments and Covid secure arrangements and guidance.

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 Carolyne Culver asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you Leader. Do you agree that the new arrangements for Executive meetings are not appropriate. I don’t know whether members of the public are aware but Members of the Opposition parties are not able to see each other this evening and we are just being brought in and out when we have something to say?”

The Leader of the Council answered:

No I disagree actually Councillor Culver. As I said in my original answer we are looking at how we can operate the platform to enable everybody to participate. There are protocols around meeting arrangements which are currently with our legal team that will be circulated in due course which have been continuously looked at. This is a platform where we have come a long way since we started virtual meetings and we are exploring all the time. In fact Councillor Bridgman spent time with Zoom themselves looking at how we can best do this. I understand from Councillor Bridgman that there is actually a potential that this is a half-way house to what Zoom are potentially looking to do which will be to pin particular committees into one place so that others can join and be seen to be joining. So no my answer to your supplementary is I disagree.

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

Question:

“Will training/briefings be provided for all members about the council’s mission to become carbon neutral by 2030, so that all councillors can be effective ambassadors for the objectives of the Environment Strategy and Delivery Plan in their communities?”

Answer:

Thank you very much again for an excellent question. I am confident that briefings and webinars to all Members will be a key part of the Delivery Plan and as we have said several times and I think we are all hearing agreement that engagement in general with residents and groups and businesses through and with all Council Members will be integral to us achieving our objectives.

Again you are probably aware that our Environment Delivery Team are currently working on the Environment Delivery Team and aiming to present a draft to EAG at the September meeting. Following the adoption of the delivery plan we will definitely arrange briefings with all Councillors and again look forward to your ongoing support in articulating this important message to residents.

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 Carolyne Culver asked the following supplementary question:

“I was wondering would you encourage all Members of the Council to go out into their wards and promote things like the Bond. So for example the Green Party have delivered 3,500 of these in the past month supporting the Bond – would you encourage other members to do the same thing?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:

Very much so, and thank you and to your Members for doing so - so yes absolutely the more the merrier.

(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Carolyne Culver:

Question:

“Regarding the Joint Venture for Local Housing mentioned in response to questions at the Executive on the 16th July, how much funding is in place for investment in social housing, for how many homes?”

Answer:

The Joint Venture is intended to bring forward housing development projects for affordable homes in the district. Each development project will have its own business case reflecting an agreement for the Council to work on a 50/50 basis. Viable development projects brought forward by the JV will be presented to the Council for a decision to progress. Projects may require the Council to put in funding which will be agreed for each business case as it is presented for approval. A specific funding pot has not been allocated nor has a target number of homes to be developed been set, these will be identified and agreed on a site by site basis as the individual business cases come forward for approval.

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 Carolyne Culver asked the following supplementary question:

“I understand that the borrowing cap was lifted in 2018 so would you agree that the Council ought to be doing more to build more social housing?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

As well as the Joint Venture, Councillor Culver, we are looking at a Housing Company as another method of delivering housing. We are not a stock holding authority as you are aware. We gave our housing stock to Sovereign some years ago and we are not a great landowner for housing development. However, we are acutely aware that we need to work and look how we can deliver social housing - the Joint Venture being one option.

(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor David Marsh:

Question:

“As the 24-hour traffic-free zone in Bartholomew Street, Northbrook Street, Mansion House Street and the Market Place, Newbury, has made social distancing easier, improved air quality and road safety, and is popular with shoppers, should it not, therefore, be extended beyond September?”

Answer:

The Administration and Officers have always been very clear that the town centre 24 hour pedestrianisation was introduced as a temporary measure taken during very difficult times to help with the reopening of the town centre, the proposal being to return traffic timings to normal after the summer period to coincide with the schools returning. This has always been made abundantly clear to all stakeholders.

Your comments about air quality and road safety I feel are unfounded as keeping the town centre closed to traffic 24/7 will inevitably cause congestion elsewhere, with associated air quality and road safety issues, on the alternative routes. We should remember that the A339 is subject to an air quality management area.

You say that the pedestrianisation is popular with shoppers, however I am yet to see any evidence to back this up. Indeed surveys undertaken by Newbury BID and Newbury Today have failed to give a strong consensus. Therefore there is no justification for the Council to deviate from the original decision, which was to revert to normal timings to coincide with the schools returning.

For this to be a long term measure full consultation will be required. I think it is also worth mentioning the Active Travel actions which have been taken. The Council will continue to work hard to encourage walking and cycling and have developed a full programme of active travel measures. As an authority we have closely followed Government guidance with the provision of both temporary and permanent measures to encourage active travel and assist with the safe reopening of town centres. With the schools returning, now is the right time to return the pedestrianisation to normal time and to ensure there is no detrimental impact to the wider traffic network and further impact on the economy.

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 David Marsh asked the following supplementary question:

“Just for information you have not referred to the survey undertaken by Newbury Town Council which is a shame as it was exhaustive and backed up more so than the two mentioned. It backed up the argument made in the question. But my supplementary is this, have you not considered at least amending the hours to for example ‘9 to 6’ instead of ‘10 to 5’ so that socially distanced shoppers would not have to run the gauntlet of queues of vehicles with engines running along Northbrook Street and Bartholomew Street until 10am and from 5pm. Do you not think that is a missed opportunity?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

I don't look at anything that we have done as being a missed opportunity in all honesty. I understand what you are saying and I think that for me that is something that we will continue to keep a watchful eye on. I note your comment with regard to the other survey which I didn't mention. I know that conversations that have gone on have been very equally divided from the information that I have seen. I don't think I have seen any detail with regards to the Newbury Town Council survey so I can't really add any comments to that. Certainly this is something which I think we need to keep a watchful eye on. As I said earlier, we follow guidance and we have to be seen to be doing that and we have to be seen to be careful both with the businesses and shoppers alike and businesses doesn't just include the shops of course. You mentioned earlier in the evening about the taxi services and I have seen a comment from them about how unfavourable they have found it. So we need to be careful, we need to be cautious about what we are trying to put forward and whilst I don't necessarily consider anything to be completely off the table but we do need to be mindful that full consultation will be required if we try to put permanent measures in place.

(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor David Marsh:

Question:

“With regard to Sandford Park, can you confirm that it remains West Berkshire Council policy to consider any proposed development for the site as a whole, and not as separate applications for different parts?”

Answer:

Thank you for your question Councillor Marsh. Yes, that current planning policy is contained within the Core Strategy and the Supplementary Planning Document for the site and it hasn't changed.

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 David Marsh asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes I do, thank you for that I am glad to hear it. Doesn’t this mean that the latest in a line of applications from Bloor Homes, the latest one being 01238, falls at the first hurdle since it doesn’t conform to this in any way and therefore why doesn’t the Council just reject it out of hand for that reason?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

We have no choice Councillor Marsh. The local planning authority must consider any valid application that is put in front of it and the two developers have chosen to submit one each, despite the clear indication in the Policy documents. I have to say that an enormous amount of time has gone into trying to make the delivery of a single comprehensive development result from two separate submissions and I think I have to give credit to the Development Control Officers who have been working very hard with both sets of developers to try and get one cohesive submission but as the local planning authority as opposed to a Planning Policy team we have no choice but to accept applications that come forward.

(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance by Councillor Steve Masters:

Question:

“In relation to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Task Group report following its review of the London Road Industrial Estate, the report states “where that [Faraday Development Limited’s (FDL’s)] submission went beyond the terms of reference of this review, comments have been disregarded.” Please list, by using the enumeration adopted by FDL, which of FDL’s twelve questions fell outside the Terms of Reference and why?”

Answer:

Thank you Councillor Masters for your question. The report from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission task group has been passed to the Executive for a response. This will be presented at the Executive in November where we will outline our response to the recommendations raised. It should be noted that this question posed today should be addressed to OSMC as the responsible body rather than the Executive. It is OSMC that appoints Task Groups to review in depth, investigate and report on a particular topic with such terms of reference and duration and scope as it considers appropriate to that topic.



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

Question:

“What have the impacts of the ‘A’ level/GCSE/Btech exam fiasco been on schools and colleges in West Berkshire?”

Answer:

Thank you for your question Councillor Pattenden, which is a very good question albeit phrased in somewhat lurid terms. There is no doubt that this has been a very difficult time for all involved in education and once a decision was made, largely on public health grounds, not to run the exams in the usual timeframe, then schools and students were always going to be facing uncertainty whatever decisions were subsequently made.

The short term impact has been one of stress/worry for students and teachers and additional workload for them all and especially for the Head teachers.

Individual stories about ‘A’ level students who did not get the grades they were expecting have been well documented in the media. Schools and colleges will have been supporting students for whom this has been the case before ‘A’ level grades were re-awarded using teacher assessment. That said, ‘A’ level students have received the highest grade they were able to get in the absence of actually sitting the exam.

The award of GCSE results on the day rather than retrospectively has meant slightly less worry for students. However, the additional workload to prepare for the day with such a late change to the system will have impacted on schools and colleges. I understand that all the Btech results were finalised by last Friday, 28 August, and it will take some time for those centres to issue results to students which is their priority at the moment so I don’t yet have a view on the overall picture as far as Btech is concerned.

The longer term impacts on Higher Education entry is not yet known to us.

We continue to track the participation status of all school and college leavers, offering advice and guidance to those young people who need it. As with previous years, we will be making an Annual Activity Survey return to the Department for Education in October, which will provide us with a comprehensive picture of local education, employment and training participation, and those young people who may have had their plans changed due to the unprecedented circumstances.

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 Erik Pattenden asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you for your comprehensive answer Councillor Boeck. Given the range of impacts you have described are so extensive and currently unknown, would you agree with me that the huge level of stress and uncertainty caused to schools, pupils and parents this summer from this exam fiasco presided over by Gavin Wilkinson should mean that Gavin Wilkinson should do the honourable thing and resign or be sacked?”

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

Well that is a very political question Councillor Pattenden and I am Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education and whatever my personal views are on this matter I am not going to share them.

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

Question:

“Now WBC have received £375k from a youth charity for the community asset of the Waterside Centre, how are you going to use that money for the benefit of local youth services?”

Answer:

Thank you for your question Councillor Pattenden. You will recall from our Council meeting on 3 March 2020 that our current Capital Strategy and Programme sets out plans to invest £9.4m in ensuring vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes – one of our key priorities - and £14.5m in supporting everyone to reach their full potential – another one of our key priorities. The capital receipt that you refer to that we have received from Berkshire Youth for the transfer of the Waterside Centre will go some way to underwrite these important investments. We have long been in partnership with Berkshire Youth to deliver services to the young people of West Berkshire and the agreement we have reached with them over the Waterside Centre is a great step forward. They have exciting plans for the centre that will offer young people somewhere to go that is safe, inspirational and relevant and it will tie in with the youth services that the Council delivers directly. The activities that Berkshire Youth will offer includes fitness, climbing, canoeing, darts and social activities and once their youth programme has been established they plan to open the centre to the wider community to generate income and to bring people together.

The Council took a strategic decision some time ago to move from providing a universal youth service to targeted based on children’s social care service thresholds and one effect of this was to transfer most of the youth centres to community or parish ownership across the district the majority of which continue to run youth and other services delivered by the community for the community. The Waterside Centre is the latest of these buildings to be transferred and I wish Berkshire Youth well.

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 Erik Pattenden asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes I do thank you. One of the other consequences of switching to targeted services was a 97% reduction in funding for youth services since 2010. As far as the Waterside goes having been left crumbling by West Berkshire Council for 10 years Berkshire Youth are having to spend an extra £200k to refurbish the building in order to make it suitable for youth services. I wonder whether therefore West Berkshire Council might like to consider reimbursing that £375k that they have received as an unplanned capital receipt from Berkshire Youth as the £375k is a drop in the ocean compared to the money that you have mentioned in this year’s budget?”

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

Thank you for your supplementary Councillor Pattenden. In this supplementary you have chosen not to squander the chance to ask a question that might have been to the direct benefit of our students and young people rather than making a purely political point – this one is political in nature.

As I have said to you the Council has a Capital Investment Strategy and Programme. I know that you chose not to support it, that you abstained from supporting the comprehensive programme that we put forward in March. That £375k will be used for the benefit to the support those two key priorities that I have mentioned both of which will support the young people of West Berkshire.

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

Question:

“How many households in West Berkshire are at risk of losing their homes if the Government ban on evictions by private landlords is not extended?”

Answer:

Thank you Councillor Vickers. Currently there are 120 households at the moment and this number continues to change as each landlord and agent whom we are working with responds to us. You will be aware Councillor Vickers that the Government has extended the ban on landlords evicting tenants in England and Wales to the 20 September 2020. Our Housing support Team is working very closely with individuals and families to prevent evictions and we do have a hardship fund in place as well as a number of other financial packages to support these households.

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 Tony Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes I do, of course the extension is only until 20 September so it is not a very long extension and it is good to know that there is also a six month notice period for any new notices of eviction but nevertheless the trend is going to inevitably be upwards and carry on going upwards for some while so my supplementary is are there further measures that are being considered to deal with this problem which may end up in a worst case scenario with more street homeless and homeless families”?

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Well as you know we are committed certainly to having no rough sleepers in West Berkshire and a lot of work has been done certainly during the Covid crisis to accommodate rough sleepers particularly and we are ensuring that each household has access to a dedicated Housing Support Officer or a Homelessness Prevention and Relief Officer who can support them with advice and signpost them to other support that they need and is identified but as I have said it is a fluid number, the number changes and we are working very closely with agents and landlords to ensure that households do remain in accommodation.

(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing/Finance and Economic Development by Councillor Tony Vickers:

Question:

“Why has the Council been treating the master planning of LRIE different to the way it treated Market Street & Parkway, where Master Plans were prepared by us as Local Planning Authority, not by the Executive?”

Answer:

Yes thanks Councillor Vickers. Given it is London Road Industrial Estate I will be responding to this question if you don't mind.

I would say that Councillor Vickers is mistaken in his premise. All three master plans have been prepared by consultants, not the Local Planning Authority. All three master plans have gone to the Executive for approval because the Council has landowning interests to resolve.

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 Tony Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

“London Road Industrial Estate is considerably larger than both the other two and unlike the other two is not going to be subject to a single planning application or is unlikely to be. It needs a Supplementary Planning Document in our view similar to the one that was done for Sandford because there are overarching planning policy issues that we believe should have been addressed. My question is really I do not believe that, just as Councillor Mackinnon said my premise is wrong, I don’t believe he has answered. Well it is rather difficult when he hasn’t answered the first question he has just accused me of making a wrong premise. There are differences between the two areas in that one is much larger than the other two and this one represents larger than a single planning application.”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

I don’t accept the fact that I have not answered the question. The question is ‘why has the Council been treating the master planning of LRIE different to the way it treated Market Street & Parkway, where Master Plans were prepared by us as Local Planning Authority, not by the Executive’. The answer to that is we haven’t treated it differently – the master plans were prepared by consultants in all three cases. I have absolutely answered the question, I am sorry that the answer is not to his liking.

(m) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture by Councillor Martha Vickers:

Question:

“What will the impact of dismantling Public Health England be on West Berkshire, given that we are still in the middle of a pandemic?”

Answer:

The Health Secretary Matt Hancock announced on 17th August that Public Health England (PHE) will be replaced by a new organisation called the National Institute for Health Protection (NIHP). The NIHP will see the health and protection role of PHE combined with Test and Trace and the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC), and will focus on tackling coronavirus.

The non-health protection functions that were nationally led by Public Health England such as obesity, smoking, sexual health and health inequalities, will be subject to a national public consultation over the coming weeks. We are awaiting more information concerning the proposed changes but we do not anticipate that there will be any immediate impact to our local public health team based within the Council.

We continue to work closely with PHE’s Thames Valley Health Protection Team to support our local response to COVID-19 pandemic and keep our residents as safe as possible.

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 Martha Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you very much I think you have partially covered my supplementary in your answer but I just wanted reassurance that the work that the Public Health Team on obesity, mental health and stopping smoking will continue and that there won’t be any reduction in their funds because this is important in general health and fighting Covid as we know?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing, Leisure and Culture answered:

You are obviously part of the Health and Wellbeing Board and I assure you that we will be doing our level best to ensure that.

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

Question:

“How many people in West Berkshire will be impacted by the end of the furloughing scheme and resulting loss of income?”

Answer:

Thanks Councillor Vickers. As of 30th June 2020 – which is the most recently available data publication date from HMRC- the number of employees using the furlough scheme in West Berkshire was 21,200. Now when that furlough scheme ends that does not necessarily follow that all of those employees will suffer a loss of income because some of those employees, and I hope it is a high number, will go back to their jobs and they will go from 80% of income which they get from the furlough scheme back up to 100% so some of that number will see a rise in income. But of course those who sadly, and there will be some sadly, lose their jobs when the furlough scheme ends, they will suffer a loss. It is impossible for me to say how many of that 21,200 will remain in employment, I hope it is the vast majority, but yes I think that is the answer to your question.

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 Tony Vickers asked the following supplementary question:

“I understand that you have indicated that it is impossible to calculate but you must be able to make an educated guess and I am asking how you are forecasting this particular unknown number?”.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Councillor Vickers, the decision on whether to retain employees after the ending of the furlough scheme is a matter for individual employers and would be based on their own financial situation so I think to offer a guess, educated or otherwise, I think would not be appropriate at this point. We hope that the vast majority of the 21,200 do retain their jobs but we will have to wait and see in due course what happens.

(o) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Jeff Brooks:

Question:

“What parking incentives does the council intend to introduce to assist the retail and hospitality sector in West Berkshire?”

Answer:

Councillor Brooks, thank you for your question. As you are aware the Council has been involved in a number of local and national measures to help the retail and hospitality sector in this difficult time.

At a national level, central government have made a number of interventions to mitigate the effects of the virus including the launch of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, the establishment of a number of grant schemes targeted at the most impacted industries and the introduction of Business Interruption Loans through the British Business Bank. Alongside this, initiatives such as the ‘Re-Opening High Streets Safely Fund’, the ‘Eat Out To Help Out Scheme’ and ‘Shop Local Week’ have sought to increase consumer confidence during the return to the high street. In West Berkshire, this meant that over 20,000 local people were receiving income through the furlough scheme and that 2,200 local businesses received a grant.

At a local level, as well as administering these central government schemes, we have also intervened to minimise the impact on our local businesses by temporarily deferring business rates to every local business, implementing temporary measures in our towns to support social distancing, offering free advice to affected firms and by streamlining our own regulatory functions - such as planning and licencing - to ensure that the re-opening of local businesses occurred smoothly.

Between March and June parking charges were stopped in our car parks to help make life easier for our key and essential workers. Car parking, is as you quite rightly noted in a previous paper, a vital source of revenue for the Council which helps support essential services. As a Council we are not immune to the financial difficulties Covid-19 has created and our first priority is to safeguard the critical services that our residents rely on. However, I am, and have been for a little while now, in conversation with Officers to see if there are any further concessions that we could offer to town centre businesses without impacting on the Council’s finances.

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 Jeff Brooks confirmed that he did not have a supplementary question as such but asked that this issue be kept under review. Would you look at this again towards the end of the year when we see what retail pattern is emerging as hopefully the pandemic reduces.

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Yes, absolutely, as I said it is something that I am effectively in mid conversation with Officers with at the moment so by default it is currently under review and as we move towards the Christmas period, which regrettably does not seem that far away at the moment, that will become even more important for the local businesses and residents across the district, so happy to keep under review.

(p) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Rick Jones:

Question:

“Given that in my opinion there has been a great coming together of the community in response to Covid-19, as evidenced by local engagement with the council’s Community Support Hub, what does the Leader propose to do with the Hub going forward?”

Answer:

I certainly agree that we have seen a great coming together of the community and in fact the response across West Berkshire to the Pandemic has been incredible. Neighbours and neighbourhoods made new and dynamic connections and found creative ways to help each other, and importantly have helped to take care of those most vulnerable in our communities.

At the start of the response to Covid-19 we had approximately 90 separate community groups existed, many of which had ‘self-started’ over a single weekend in mid-March. These community groups harnessed the enthusiasm of local people who wanted to help and were made up of nearly 3,000 volunteers.

These volunteers and those who were NHS Volunteer Responders were, and continue to be, a vital asset within West Berkshire enabling the Council and other agencies to provide support to those who needed it and where they needed it in their local community.

The Community Support Hub continues to work very closely with Community Groups across the District and together with partner agencies the Council is exploring what positive legacy there can be from this incredible community response.

The Building Communities Together Partnership has, as you know Councillor Jones, been working 'with' communities over the last few years developing a new approach to community engagement. The work of the Community Support Hub during the response to the pandemic and importantly that of the Community Groups have demonstrated it is possible to expand further this work and hopefully create a very new way of working 'together' to build Community Resilience

The Community Support Hub is supporting 'Conversations' with Community Groups, key individuals and officers from partner agencies to explore how we harness the community energy and commitment created by Covid-19.

What happens next must and will be done 'with' our communities and to inform our next steps we are taking into consideration the results of the recent Residents' Survey and also information gleaned from the Community Groups themselves from the ongoing link they have with the Community Support Hub.

Importantly we are going to make sure that there is real 'pace' to this work. The pandemic has taught us that we can work at speed and that we can adapt to new ways of working promptly.

Most importantly the work of the Community Support Hub has shown us that there are potential significant mutual benefits for everyone if we can find ways to empower communities and develop ways of working together that harnesses the mutual aid that came to light in response to the pandemic.

There will be a paper detailing our approach to engaging and working alongside our local communities which is expected to come to this Committee in October.

(q) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Councillor Tom Marino:

Question:

"Has the Community Municipal Investment vehicle to raise money to fund environmental projects been a success?"

Answer:

Thanks Councillor Marino, the Community Municipal Investment (CMI) which was launched on the 16th July was the first of its kind to be issued in the UK. It aims to deliver £1m of funding at a rate that is better to the Council than the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB). I can see that at the morning of launch, the rate offered of 1.2% was 0.53% better than the PWLB certainty rate and that is going to save on this chunk of borrowing; this will save the taxpayer approximately £14,000 over the life of the 5 year bond. The bond is still open for investment and will remain so for the next few weeks.

So far there has been a lot of interest in the bond and as at today's date there has been £672k invested in the bond and we are very hopeful that the bond will reach its £1m limit before the final closure date of mid-October. I am also pleased to see that Warrington Council have also launched their own CMI just last week on the 25th August. I am very pleased that West Berkshire has helped to start an innovative way for Local Government to become financially self-sufficient whilst also contributing towards our environmental goals.

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

Question:

“As the Local Government Association recently launched “The legacy of COVID-19 - Seven principles for reform of adult social care and support” what is the view of the portfolio holder on whether those are the right principles on which to focus and if not, what other principles should in his view be considered?”

Answer:

I am going to start by apologising to Members for the length of this response but this is an unbelievably important issue. I would remind Members that we looked at the revenue budget earlier this evening. Adult Social Care, out of the total Council budget of about £130m, ASC spends over £50m of that which is roughly 39% of the budget so how we fund that, both as a Council for our Council taxpayers and nationally through the government, is going to be a major question going forward and I am sure we are all aware of that. The paper you refer to, the seven principles for reform, in fact doesn't just come from the Local Government Association. There were 33 different represented organisations signing up to this and they include some important players, ADSASS, Public Health, the Red Cross, CQC, CIPFA, Healthwatch, some of the NHS organisations – the list goes on.

The seven principles that the paper puts up are:

- Putting people first
- The importance of the local dimension
- Adequate and sustainable funding
- Supporting the care workforce
- How care is provided and commissioned
- Health and integration
- Care and support reform

We need to look at each of those and how the paper addresses them and then I have been asked what my response is in response of Officers to those seven principles. So, the first one is putting people first.

- Putting people first - government should work with all parts of social care, particularly those with lived experience including unpaid carers, on a way forward for the long-term future of social care that is informed by the lessons from the pandemic on the value of social care to all of us.

I think that it obviously makes some sense to use people who use the system when you are considering reforms – we know that is a basic principle of consultation.

- The importance of the local dimension - in its work on the future of care and support, the government should actively promote the ‘principle of subsidiarity’ as a necessary underpinning feature of effective health, care and wellbeing.

Yes – that is basically saying and I agree, that different areas are different, and given the interaction between ASC and other services (and this is both within the Council and externally) I agree that a local flavour to adult social care is essential. My personal view is that ASC should remain with local authorities, but I know that there is a thought out there that it ought to be part of, or aligned to, the NHS. I think that this is going to be a major part of the debate I my personal view and we need to see what the Government brings forward and how that particular discussion pans out.

- Adequate and sustainable funding - the government must provide funding that is sufficient to meet the additional demands arising from COVID-19, plus, and this is the really important bit, the pre-existing pressures. We know how the ASC budget has risen over the past number of years and what the paper says is that the funding should be available with as few a set of conditions as possible and the government got to indicate how it is intended to protect and enhance social care for the benefit of people who use the services.

Well, Members will know I’ve been banging on about this for some considerable time! How we deliver ASC is the critical question and it is essential in my view that we have an adequate and sustainable long-term funding model. The huge question for all of us is how we as a society are going to pay for an aging demographic.

- Supporting the care workforce - the government should commit to a new deal for the care workforce, comprising action on pay, training and development, career progression and in particular recognition.

Our workforce and the care workforce is, an essential consideration when we talk about what to do in the future – adult social care relies on a skilled and committed workforce who have to be properly supported and developed. We know about the difficulties we have locally in the workforce market generally, and when we come out of Covid I don’t think many of these difficulties are going to go away, we need to ensure that our care staff are looked after and everyone sees care as a worthwhile profession.

- How care is provided and commissioned - the government should work with people with lived experience including unpaid carers, councils and providers to consider the incentives and barriers to creating person-centred services to help prevent, delay or reduce the need for formal services.

Now, here I can start to see links between some of these different principles and there is a direct link here between this aim and the first one where it talks about putting people first. But to the extent that this is asking for a diverse provider sector, I certainly don't disagree and as the Leader anticipated in her response to one of the questions earlier about the Hub, from our experience, particularly with Covid and the way local volunteer groups have stepped up, bringing out the need to involve those who have long term care needs at an early stage is going to be very important because I am sure we all agree prevention is better than cure.

- Health and integration - there should be a requirement for engagement with health and wellbeing boards as part of developing local plans to reshape and integrate health and care services that are genuinely locally agreed.

Now integration with health partners is undoubtedly very important, and as a Council we are committed to achieving that, but it must be an equal partnership – it is not just a question for the HWBB, but it is also a question for the Locality Integration Board and (at a more basic level) for the Clinical Commissioning Group, the CQC, in relation to Continuing Health Care. People who use the health and social care system expect services to be joined up but as I am sure Members will appreciate that is very difficult sometimes to deliver in practice and making that joined up thinking between health and social care part of the reform I think is going to be very important.

- Care and support reform - the government should work with all social care partners, including people with lived experience, and on a cross-party basis, to agree the scope of social care reform before it embarks on its own detailed work.

Yes, this does to a certain extent seem to be repeating the first point about putting people first but it is also making it clear that we need the scope of reforms to be clearly defined in advance. I don't have any issue with this on the proviso that reforms need to be ambitious to address the longstanding challenges that need to be addressed and there is going to be a tension between ambition on the one hand and the need for change on the other.

So, I was asked the question do I agree with these seven? Well basically, yes, although as I have said there does seem to be a little bit of overlap and blurring between some of them but I was also asked what else would I add?

Fundamentally, I think we need to build on the Covid experience to in pushing forward for an increased awareness by the public of care and I think there are two things I would say about the. The first is we have heard a lot about pushing forward with a social care brand, the care badge. My concern about that is that is more difficult than it is for the NHS because the NHS has one single body effectively to address whereas in ASC you are dealing with a whole load of players in the market, private as well as public, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to have a care brand and I am wholly in favour of pushing that care brand across. But the piece I really want to emphasise, and again this is something I have said before, is that what I want to do and I think we have to address this as part of the overall debate about social care, is to make people aware particular younger people, aware of the issues they might face in older age whilst they are young enough to do something about it. Now that in my view is akin to the emphasis that the government

has put on work place pensions – most people want more money in retirement than they are going to get from the state pension, so they save in a pension plan and (at least for the moment!) the government does something to incentivise them to save into a pension plan. We need people to similarly understand the additional costs of old age - too many people wait too long to think about their future and in my view a wider, better understanding of the system would provide a better outcome for all. So that is my view on this very, very important paper. I look forward to what the government brings forward.

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 Claire Rowles asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you Councillor Bridgman and can I thank you for the time you have taken to really consider this. Can I ask how you think we can raise people’s awareness of the issues they face in old age now? ”

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care answered:

I have thought about this, and to some extent this came out of one of the carer’s conferences very early on where there were people from the financial service industry talking to carers in particular about products that might be used by individuals to generally speaking pay for their elderly relative when they went into a care home. A classic example is an annuity. We can try to get that message across locally and within the district but I think this needs a national campaign. As I say, we need people to understand what the long term costs of care can be and what they can do about that. Annuities is just one example of financial product which assists people to make sure that their loved ones get the right care – we will always offer the right care under the Care Act – but the care they particularly want and we are not then going to have an argument as a local authority as to the amount of care we are providing as opposed to the amount of care that an individual might be expecting. So I think this is going to take a national campaign although I would like to see us do as much as we can locally to bring this to people’s minds.
