

Questions and Answers

Executive

Thursday, 19th November, 2020

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

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Item (a)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Bill Bagnell/Jenny Graham/Jon Winstanley

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development/Environment by Miriam Lee:

“How do West Berkshire Council intend to develop the London Road Estate such that the local area can meet its Zero Carbon by 2030 target?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development/Environment provided the following written answer:

The Council has set a very ambitious target of carbon neutrality by 2030 across the whole of the Council's portfolio, not just in relation to the London Road Industrial Estate. In accordance with our Environment Strategy, all Council activities will be undertaken in appreciation of the need to achieve this aim.

The development brief for the LRIE has been consulted upon and it is our intention that a developer partner will be appointed who will be aligned with the Council's strategies and objectives.

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Item (b)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley/Stuart Clark/Jenny Graham

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by John Gotelee:

“Could the executive outline what measures have been taken to protect the aquatic environment of the northcroft stream from well known toxic pollutants such as copper zinc cadmium and Polycyclic Hydrocarbon Aromatics?”

Full info in submission: Given that the Executive has finally admitted that there is negligible attenuation of runoff water at the A339 junction with the LRIE could the executive outline what measures have been taken to protect the aquatic environment of the northcroft stream from well known toxic pollutants such as copper zinc cadmium and Polycyclic Hydrocarbon Aromatics?

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Dear Mr Gotelee, thank you for your question.

So the pollutants to which you refer to here, so Copper, zinc cadmium and Polycyclic Hydrocarbon Aromatics, they come from the internal combustion engine, they come from cars and vehicles and lorries on the roads, they end up getting washed into water courses; and there is an obvious knock on effect on biodiversity and health from those. So really what the Council is doing to do that, now of course this is a national issue and not just a West Berkshire issue, but it's really about encouraging the use of alternative transport and trying to nudge people into using polluting vehicles that bit less. So I guess a key to our environment strategy is our ultra-low emission strategy is to have as many ultra-low emission and sustainable vehicle on our fleet as possible, and I am pleased to say that the council has almost 30% of its vehicle fleet being fully electric and there are plans to increase that over the coming years as well as we are in the process of producing a new local cycling and walking infrastructure plan and we are investing significantly in active travel as 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?”*

John Gotelee asked the following supplementary question:

Is there any monitoring for the level of these pollutants, specifically in the Northcroft stream, since most of it seems most it seems to have died along with the wildlife?

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The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

I'm not aware of whether there is or is not monitoring of that stream in particular. I would point out that the water that goes into that stream doesn't just come from the A339, there are about 70 hectares worth of Newbury town centre that is the catchment for that stream and that is about 100 football pitches. In terms of specific pollutant monitoring I can't answer that at this stage.

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Item (e)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Bill Bagnell

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

“The Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission report from 28 July 2020 stated that the total cost of the (LRIE) project and litigation which followed was £946,000. Can you please provide a full breakdown of what is included in this £946,000 figure and when this money was spent?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

That breakdown of £946K that is already in the public domain and was between legal, reimbursements to the developer and consultancy fees and that was spent between 2011 and 2019.

Expenditure Paid to Individual Organisations Involved with the LRIE

Organisation	Total Cost related to LRIE	Breakdown/Detail
Ressance Ltd and Faraday Developments Ltd	£82,500	N/A From the capital project code – reimbursement of legal fees
Strutt and Parker	£155,676	Property consultants - Broken down on separate table.
Womble Bond Dickinson	£473,576.24	£58,010.94 costs charged against LRIE capital project code £37,933.72 costs charged for highways works £377,631.58 for legal advice re Procurement Challenge
St Modwen Development Ltd	£175,962.00	One payment – Development Agreement Refund (ie repayment of costs already incurred by the developer on the project as the point it was stopped) – paid from capital budget for project
Deloitte LLP	£53,319.90	Instructed as part of defending case at High Court - expert advice regarding property valuations.

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Broadway Malyan	£5,415	Work undertaken as part of the Feasibility Study (worked with Strutt and Parker as part of their tender for the work).
Montagu Evans	£7,500 – included in fees paid to Strutt and Parker, as they engaged Montagu Evans	Commissioned to undertake a Retail Study assessment after the Feasibility Report from Strutt and Parker was queried by Planning Officers because of the suggestions for a greater level of retail outlets/food stores
Total	£946, 449.14	

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?”*

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

I can't see the breakdown and if you look at the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission report it doesn't breakdown £946k.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

It may not be in that particular report. I am assured that the information has been released. I can tell you that £555k was on legal fees, £160k was on property consultancy fees, £175k reimbursement to the developer for costs they already incurred before the contract was set aside by the court and £53k to an accountancy firm for advice on property values.

Mr Morgan said that that is different from the figures in the OSMC report. Can you provide me with those figures Councillor Mackinnon?

Councillor Mackinnon stated that I think I just did answer your supplementary.

Councillor Lynne Doherty confirmed that all of the responses to the questions would be available on the Council's website.

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Item (g)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Bill Bagnell

(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Jack Harkness:

“Can the Council explain how they can re-provision the football ground without purchasing land as the requirements for re-provisioning of sports grounds are that there must not be a net reduction in overall sporting facilities?”

***Full info in submission:** At the "LRIE Public Engagement" zoom meeting held on 4th November Bill Bagnell stated categorically that proposals for re-provision of the football ground does not include purchasing of freehold land. This is a very fundamental point. Can the Council explain how they can re-provision the football ground without purchasing land as the requirements for re-provisioning of sports grounds are that there must not be a net reduction in overall sporting facilities?*

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Securing replacement facilities does not have to be by acquisition of freehold land. Now I know you asked a question very similar to this at the public zoom meeting and we did say that the negotiations that we are having with the various partners at the moment are still sensitive so I can't go into too much detail right now and we are hopeful to be able to announce further detail very very soon. But just as a hypothetical it is perfectly possible for the Council to re-provision land that it currently owns as a replacement football pitch so that would not require the outlay of lots of money on freehold land or in fact leasing land that is owned by someone else. So all of those are options.

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?”*

Jack Harkness asked the following supplementary question:

What happens if the current plan falls through? However, I think you have covered this in the initial question.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Yes I have covered this. We do have contingency plans.

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Item (j)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Gary Lugg/Janet Weekes/Sinead O Donoghue

(j) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Graham Storey:

“Will the council commit to building at least 1000 homes for social rent to help the 2,300 households identified in the draft housing strategy as in need of social housing?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you for your question Mr Storey.

Firstly, West Berkshire Council is not a general needs housing stock holder as this stock was transferred to Sovereign Housing Association in 1989. The Council therefore works in partnership with Sovereign and the other 18 Housing Associations who operate within the district to deliver and manage affordable social housing.

Secondly, the figure of 2,300 you quote is the number of households on the Common Housing Register. Of that number, 861 people currently qualify for social housing.

In 2015, the Conservative Manifesto targeted the building of 1,000 affordable homes in the period 2015-2020. To date permissions for 1,273 affordable homes have been granted across the district.

The Council is rightly proud of its affordable homes policy which we rigorously apply and defend. It requires developers to deliver 40% affordable housing on greenfield sites and 30% on brownfield sites. On development sites of less than 15 dwellings a sliding scale approach is used to calculate affordable housing provision and we are one of the very few local authorities in this country which seeks affordable housing contributions of developments between 5 and 9 dwellings and we are very successful in achieving this.

This underpins the Council's Strategy of 'a housing mix with something for everyone' as well as the requirement to deliver 10,500 homes during the 20 year period of the Local Plan which will include social housing, and the emerging Housing Strategy that sets out the plans that will achieve this.

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?”*

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Graham Storey asked the following supplementary question:

Are you saying that effectively because you outsource the provision of much social housing to independent providers that West Berkshire Council are not taking responsibility for meeting the needs of poorer families through homes for social rent?

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

I thought I had explained that our general housing stock which is homes for social rent were passed over to Sovereign Housing in 1989. We are not the general stock holder; however, I also explained that we have a 40% and 30% requirement for affordable housing to be delivered on all new sites, greenfield and brownfield. So yes we are responsible and our housing team work with Sovereign closely to ensure that those qualifying households are allocated social housing. Currently, 861 families qualify for social housing.

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Item (c)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley/Stuart Clark/Bill Bagnell

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by John Gotelee:

“Taking into account any retro attenuation of the thames water sewer and the need for SUDs as mentioned in the Avison Young brief on the LRIE, how many acres does the executive envisage being taken up by SUDs / Attenuation ponds?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

I am not able to answer your question right now. The extent of drainage measures that are going to be required on this site will depend very much on the decision the Council makes in terms of what gets developed and when. It is far too early to give an indication of that right now.

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?”*

John Gotelee asked the following supplementary question:

Have you any idea what plots you would earmark for Attenuation ponds because obviously they have got to be done at the start of the business?

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Again it is just too early to say at this stage – watch this space and you will get those decisions in due course.

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Item (f)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Bill Bagnell

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

“The Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission report from 28 July 2020 stated that the total cost of the (LRIE) project and litigation which followed was £946,000. Can you please provide a full breakdown of what additional spend (actual, committed and proposed) has been made on this project on top of this £946,000?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

The additional spend on top of the £946k have been widely talked about this evening. The A339 link road into the estate was built – that was part of the original proposal and it remains essential to the future proposal as well actually. The total cost of that A339 link road was £5.2m. Now by no means did that all come from West Berkshire Council – approximately £2m came from the LEP. The Department for Transport supplied £1.8m, £1.1m was provided by Council borrowing and £0.3m from Section 106 funding. The widening of the A339 has drastically improved the flow of traffic which has provided environmental benefits as well as there being a clear public benefit to the new link road without which future regeneration and development of the estate would not be 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?”*

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

What I was trying to ascertain on that question was for example – the Avison Young report how much has been spent on that, the SSL consultancy how much on that, how much are you going to spend on the Avison Young Mark 2 report, how much on the brief. That’s what my question was about so you have answered a question that I didn’t really ask but maybe that wasn’t clear. That’s the information I was after really. I guess you haven’t got that information to hand now have you?

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

The money that we were going to spend for the conversion of the public open space that is just over £200,000. But no decision has been made on what happens next so again we are jumping the gun a bit on what happens in the future. The original Avison

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Young report was around about £18k. But the £5.2m for the A339 link road – that is by far the biggest chunk so I think we have got close to the ball park.

Mr Morgan said that you have already spent £946k on the estate already, leaving on one side the road, you have already spent nearly £1m. I am estimating you have probably got £1m or £1.5m to go on some of the stuff we talked about.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon stated that he believed he had answered Mr Morgan's supplementary question already.

Mr Morgan said that his supplementary question is whether all of this spend is that feeding into the Avison Young report regarding the commercial viability of the estate.

Councillor Mackinnon confirmed that he had already answered the question and the supplementary question which had been put before him.

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Item (d)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley/Stuart Clark/Bill Bagnell

(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by John Gotelee:

“How will the space being taken up by SUDs / Attenuation ponds on the LRIE impact on the viability of the project?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

You probably won't be surprised to hear what I am about to tell you given my answer to your previous question about not being able to tell you how much space will be taken up by SUDs I am not able to answer this one either because it is dependent on the previous answer but I will give you the opportunity for a supplementary.

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?”*

John Gotelee asked the following supplementary question:

So in that case if you can't answer these things, was it right to instruct Avison Young's viability brief before you did an environmental impact study which would have told you whether you could do these things or not?

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Yes it was right to do so, I think we have covered this in previous consultation but we will do it again for the public. The Avison Young assignment to produce the development brief was really the overall high level viability which would answer the question as to whether a regeneration project was viable. The cost and the time taken and the level of detail that would be required to answer the very relevant questions, but the very technical and detailed questions, that you are asking have to come later than that. We have got a paper coming up later which talks of the next steps following the publication of the development brief and those questions will now begin to be answered but I think I do not think it would be a good use of taxpayers money to have spent all of that cash and time getting answers to those questions where the development wasn't viable in the first place.

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Item (h)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Bill Bagnell/Nick Carter

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

“Is it the Council’s policy and intention to sell the freehold of the Faraday Road football ground to a property developer?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

At this stage of the project we are at now, it is too early to say what is going to happen to the project. It is great that you and Mr. Gotelee and others are interested in it – that is magic. But at this stage it is not our intention or policy to sell the freehold to a property developer. Decisions along those lines have yet to be made.

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?”*

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

If you have no idea whether you are going to sell the ground or not, how come the Avison Young report confirms that it is commercially viable without knowing that information?

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Well I think the two things can be true at once here. Selling it to a property developer, let’s say we don’t do that that, it doesn’t mean that it won’t be developed, that doesn’t mean that it is not going to be built out. We don’t have to sell the freehold of the ground in order to do that. So I think the two options you have suggested are not actually mutually exclusive. I think that was your supplementary wasn’t it.

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Item (i)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Bill Bagnell/Nick Carter

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

“If it is the Council’s policy and intention to sell the freehold of the Faraday Road football ground to a property developer, what price do they anticipate receiving from this sale?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

It is not our intention to do that certainly at this stage – even if it were I don’t think I would be able to give you an answer to that question – at what price do we anticipate receiving from the sale. That would not be looking after Council Taxpayers money very well at all. I think the analogy I would draw was that if you wanted to sell your house and you expected to get £250k for it you wouldn’t say that to a potential buyer who might be willing to pay £300k it just wouldn’t be the way to go about maximising value.

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?”*

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

I am a bit confused if you don’t sell it what alternative have you got for the football ground.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Well again the decisions on what exactly goes on Faraday Road but those decisions just have not been made at this stage. I guess to answer this question as accurately as possible it is perfectly feasible that we could build out on Faraday Road, the football ground, without selling the freeholds.

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Item (a)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Janet Weekes/Gary Lugg

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

“Is there any requirement for additional hostel provision during the winter in West Berkshire to accommodate the homeless?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

There is no need for any additional hostel provision this winter.

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 Beck asked the following supplementary question:

“The provision which is being provided and is likely to be provided - will this be substantially provided within West Berkshire?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Yes it will.

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Item (b)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Gary Lugg/Bryan Lyttle

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

“Can the Portfolio Holder for Environment please explain why properties in Conservation Areas seeking to install solar panels need to apply for Certificates of Lawfulness given the Council's stated strategic priority to maintain a green district?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

I am answering this question because it is a Planning issue. Conservation areas exist to manage and protect the special architectural and historic interest of a place - in other words, the features that make it unique. And within conservation areas certain permitted development rights have been removed. In these cases planning permission is required.

A Certificate of Lawfulness is essentially a means of obtaining a decision from the planning authority that a proposed use or works do not require planning permission.

An application for a Certificate of Lawfulness can be made to establish conclusively that a proposed use of land, or some operational development (such as the installation of solar panels) is lawful and will not run the risk of future enforcement action by the planning authority.

It is not compulsory to apply for a Certificate of Lawfulness, but it does give an applicant reassurance that the works they wish to carry out are lawful for planning control purposes.

So in asking residents within conservation areas to apply for a Certificate of Lawfulness the planning authority is suggesting that before residents spend thousands of pounds on installing solar panels that might be refused planning permission and have to be removed, they check first. We also ask the same of residents who reside in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (who also have restricted permitted development rights).

I would like to take this opportunity to direct you to Historic England who have produced some excellent technical advice and guidance notes such as Energy Efficiency and Traditional Homes, Carbon in the Historic Environment and Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings, which may be of interest to you.

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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 Adrian Abbs asked the following supplementary question:

There are examples across Berkshire where effectively the resident has been asked to get a Certificate of Lawfulness and because they are at in fact the appeal stage but right next door, I mean I think three houses away, on exactly the same estate and in exactly the same area, there is already another building with effectively the same type of solar on it and this leads me to a bit of a problem with connectivity and the messaging we are giving out by our Officers etc. not really recognising what else has already gone in the area. Just taking Market Street for the moment as an example where we replaced solar, if we look at Highwood Copse where it failed to deliver solar when it was meant to and then we have the overall perception that is being given out to the public is that after 18 months we are not really that serious about the Climate Strategy and the emergency that we declared. So I am really hopeful that, If nothing else, if you cannot answer the question as to why it happened and why the Officers are saying what they are saying then at least you can use your position as Portfolio Holder to push further and get the departments connected together so we have a single deliverable perception that yes we are serious about climate change and yes we are going to allow things like solar on bog standard developments.

The Leader of the Council asked the following question:

Councillor Abbs is your question why the two different houses were treated differently. Councillor Abbs confirmed that that is part of the question.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

To be honest, unless and if Councillor Abbs would like to give me the details outside of this meeting I can certainly investigate that but I don't know what the cases are and I can't give you an answer at the moment. But what I would like to assure Councillor Abbs is that in the emerging Local Plan Review we have got a new policy which is entitled 'Responding to Climate Change' so we are mindful of the Environment Strategy and it is referenced in our new Local Plan and all will be made clear when the Local Plan goes out for consultation.

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Item (c)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Joseph Holmes

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

“Could the executive outline what amounts of financial assistance (Budgeted and additional) were allocated to the local foodbank and Citizens Advice Bureau from March 2020 until now?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

In 2020-21 to date, the Council has paid £75,860 to the Citizen’s Advice Bureau as part of the core Service Level Agreement.

In respect of the Emergency Food and Essential Supplies Grant of £103k, £83k has been allocated specifically for the collaboration with CAB and have reserved £20k on top as a contingency for emergency food linked to Covid Alert Levels and Clinically Extremely Vulnerable residents.

We have not provided direct funding to a local foodbank during this period.

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 Steve Masters asked the following supplementary question:

What is the time line for applications for assistance through the CAB for vulnerable families who are in crisis? Is it one hour, five hours a day?

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

I am not sure what the operational capacity of a CAB advisor is but those families who are in need of direct assistance I would urge them to contact the Community Support Hub in the first instance so that they can be assessed and matched with the help they need given their specific circumstances, whether that is going to the CAB or foodbank or anywhere else.

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Item (f)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Bryan Lyttle/Gabrielle Mancini

(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Councillor Jeff Brooks:

“53 days (at the time of writing) before the United Kingdom leaves the European Union transition period, potentially with no Trade agreement, what is the Council doing and what has it done to help local businesses prepare for this eventuality?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

The majority of the work to assist businesses with their preparations for the end of the transition period is being done by national Government through DIT, BEIS, the Treasury and HMRC. That said, we are supporting those efforts at a local level as you would expect.

So Officers in our Economic Development and Public Protection Partnership Teams actually have been working with various partners including the Department for International Trade, Thames Valley Berkshire LEP, the other Berkshire local authorities, Berkshire Growth Hub and Newbury West Berkshire Economic Development Company and more really to ensure that businesses have the information they need to make preparations for the end of the transition period. That includes advice on licensing and changes to import and export legislation directly to affected industries and we have been signposting businesses to Government documents, events and webinars where relevant.

We do fund various outside bodies and through that we have contributed to the development of regional initiatives relating to increasing preparedness levels among local firms. For instance the week before last, the Newbury West Berkshire Economic Development Company hosted a Brexit event that brought together the Growth Hub, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Chamber of Commerce. Our Economic Development Manager and our Chief Executive were instrumental in putting together that event's agenda and promoting it to local business networks. It was actually very successful, with a number of businesses providing really good feedback on its value.

Aside from that, the Emergency Planning Team they are very active in the regional Resilience Forum and our internal steering group meets fortnightly to share intelligence and to track any work that might be necessary at local authority level and I know the Leader is involved in that. So we want to ensure as far as possible as well that our own services can continue to operate without disruption in the run up to the transition and thereafter.

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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 asked the following supplementary question:

A lot of it seems to be signposting and I get that because there is a national dynamic here and imperative on national government told to do but would you think that our website is robust enough to provide that signposting to provide basic information and should there not be some sort of paperwork, brochure ware, something that goes out to local businesses saying if in need come to our Economic Development Team. Are we responding surely to inbound, and I know we are not because you said we are not, but are we in danger of responding to inbound enquiries or can we push out from our website and through a media and communication programme a bit more than we are?

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

I think in that supplementary there you touched on it. I mentioned in my first answer that we are working with various other partner organisations who are absolutely doing that, they are pushing that information out whether it comes from a WBC Council e-mail or not. I seem to recall we got a bit of criticism for putting some Brexit awareness up on e-mails last year and so yes I do think the website is robust I would expect. There is an email bulletin going out directly to businesses who have signed up for it. So thanks for being on top of it but yes I have got every faith that we are on top of it.

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Item (h)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley/Bill Bagnell

(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development/Transport and Countryside by Councillor Andy Moore:

“What plans does this Council have to consult the Ward Members for Newbury Central and Newbury Town Council on the ongoing WBC initiatives such as the possibility of extending the hours of pedestrianisation in the town, and the Newbury Town Centre design and consultation, with potential impact on Newbury Town Centre?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development/Transport and Countryside answered:

Cllr Moore, Thank you for your question.

The Communications and Engagement Strategy for the Newbury Town Centre Study is currently being finalised yet; however, it will absolutely include engagement with Ward Members and the town council and other key stakeholders. We have mentioned the LEP already and the Economic Development Company as well and I am sure that you and your fellow Ward Members and the Town Council will be able to feed in to what I am sure will be an excellent piece of work. I am really excited about this piece of work as 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 Andy Moore asked the following supplementary question:

The Newbury town council has formed a town centre working group; will the Executive ensure that all the relevant officers support the working of that group as a high priority?

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development/Transport and Countryside answered:

I don't feel it is appropriate for me to respond on behalf of the Executive this is the very first time I have heard of this working group Councillor Moore. If I have more details I will be able to answer the question at another time.

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

Item (i)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Susan Powell/Andy Sharp

(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing by Councillor Alan Macro:

“How many people have been referred by this council to the West Berkshire Foodbank since the first Covid-19 lock-down started in March?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

The Council refers residents to the West Berkshire Foodbank through some of its front line services such as Housing, Adult Social Care and Children & Family Services but these referrals, which constitute information and advice are not always recorded within our systems. A further route of access and referral to the Foodbank since March is through the Community Hub, but again this will be one option provided to the resident rather than the only option. It is difficult to provide an accurate figure in respect of referrals to the West Berkshire Foodbank, however; the following data which we do hold should provide an insight into the current position.

- The number of food requests recorded within the Community Hub as ‘signposted’ between the 8th April and the 31st October stands at 139, however, this could be a referral to a community group or to the foodbank
- Over the course of the last three months the Housing Service have signposted or referred 23 residents to the foodbank (previous referrals unfortunately were not recorded)
- During the current financial year Children’s Services have made 109 referrals to the foodbank
- During the current financial year Adult Social Care have made 43 referrals.

Many of the foodbanks including Lambourn Junction in my ward pride themselves on a no questions asked basis to those in need so comprehensive statistics are just not available.

The Chairman asked: *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

Councillor Alan Macro asked the following supplementary question:

I can understand that perhaps you don’t have the comprehensive statistics but it does seem that there have been quite a lot of referrals. In the previous answer we were told that the Council has not made any financial contributions to the foodbank; can I ask

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you to review that especially since Government Ministers have repeatedly said that the Government grant was given partly to help make sure that people did not go hungry.

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

I have visited the food bank in Greenham Business Park a few weeks ago and I was seriously impressed by their organisation. Whilst I was there, Tesco was there arranging a further food drop and as I understand all the supermarkets are making the same contribution. Greenham Common Trust was providing the accommodation free and to my mind this is a voluntary sector, supported by private sector and working with public sector absolutely at its best. I can but commend every person and organisation.

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

Item (d)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Susan Powell/Nick Carter

(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing by Councillor Steve Masters:

“How many families in receipt of free school meals received additional direct support from the council during half term?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

- 11 families received direct support through the Community Support Hub during half term.
- 28 families contacted Customer Services and were referred directly to the Council's partners for support.
- 4 families made contact with the Council's family hubs.

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 Steve Masters asked the following supplementary question:

The feedback I have been getting on the ground is that the referral process through Citizen's Advice Bureau, and this is from professionals across the district and volunteer groups, is that the process is too slow and not reactive and many of the people who are in dire need go directly to other voluntary services such as the Baby Bank, the foodbank through just referrals for assistance via the CAB is going to take far too long when a family is in crisis and can the council address that?

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

What I can tell you is that we have absolutely no evidence of there not being sufficient food available for children and families in West Berkshire, therefore; I not sure how I can address that question Councillor Masters. We think we are doing the absolute best we can.

Councillor Steve Masters answered:

Well, you know, I helped set up a school meals facility at the Riverside with a couple of local chefs and they fed over 40 families each day and for through their goodwill.

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Surely we should be addressing that head on and not having to depend on the voluntary sector.

The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Community Wellbeing answered:

I think that is a secondary question Councillor Masters but I will answer it. I think this is a classic example of just how well the voluntary sector works and we have all been so impressed of just how well the voluntary sector have risen to the occasion.

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

Item (g)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Gary Lugg/Jon Winstanley

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

“What is the average time taken (since late March) to process and determine a change of use application by a local retailer – particularly in the hospitality sector – so that they can rapidly adjust their business - with pavement seating, for instance - in order to respond to Covid restrictions?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Councillor Brooks, thank you for your question. In the period from March there have been five applications for Change of Use. Three of the applications were approved within 8 weeks, two were subject to an agreed extension of time and approved within an additional 6 weeks and an additional 10. It should be stressed that these extensions were agreed with the applicants and none of these Change of Use requests were in relation to the placing of tables or chairs.

In anticipation of that and for completeness I will add that tables and chairs licences on the public highway are subject to a separate application process which has been brought in specifically to fast-track applications following the initial lockdown period. On receipt of an application the Council has 10 working days to consult on and assess the request and respond to the applicant, otherwise the application is deemed to be approved. Therefore I can assure you that any application that we have received has been determined one way or another within 10 working days. I would add that officers have been very proactive in contacting businesses to help and advise with the application process, to ensure as many as possible provide the correct information first time. Some of the information that we have received has varied somewhat in quality and it is not surprising there is a vast range of business that are applying and inexperienced in doing that sort of thing. But I think the officers have done a sterling job in turning around the applications that they have had and improve the situation for as many of those businesses 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 Jeff Brooks asked the following supplementary question:

I'm not sure that you will know how many have asked for that rapid, not change of use, you use the term better than me. But you know, the pavement seating and the rapid

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adaptation. I don't know if you know how many had applied for that. But again, I will ask you, similarly to Councillor Mackinnon do you think the website is very clear to people who wish to get back to extension into using seats and tables outside. You think that's clear and helpful to them so that they don't experience the sort of delays, you've just described where they get an application incorrect and suddenly the 10 days is extended, could you help me with that.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing/Transport and Countryside answered:

I can't answer the first part of that question on volumes I am afraid I don't have that in front of me but I'm happy to get that looked up and confirm it to you. What I can say with regards to the second part of your question is that there was a lot of exchange of information between me, between officers, to make sure that we had what we considered to be a comprehensive FAQ, in essence, which was available on the website. And that is something that was also put out in general comms, in press releases, so it was there for a for a link for people to be able to go to directly to help them in doing that. We did make some updates to it so I am aware of some things where we felt it could be slightly better and that was addressed very, very quickly. I'm not aware of any long term issues that were not covered within those FAQs. So I am comfortable that we put out a good set of information for people to be able to do exactly what you said.

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

Item (e)	Executive Meeting on 19 November 2020
Submitted to:	Kevin Griffin

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

“What were the average waiting times for callers during half term when telephoning the council helpline?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance answered:

During Half Term week the Contact Centre took 5,155 calls with an average wait time of 32 seconds.

For the sake of completeness, I believe we actually contacted you to clarify your question and actually your question was more about the calls made to the Community Hub number, so that I think is what you're referencing in terms of helpline. So, for the sake of completeness the community hub number took 39 calls and there was an average wait time of 3.9 minutes.

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 Steve Masters asked the following supplementary question:

No, thank you very much Councillor Stewart for your very detailed and concise answer.

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