

# Questions and Answers

**Executive**  
**Thursday 17 December 2020**

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

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<b>Item (b)</b>	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Graham Storey:**

*“Would the council consider converting some of West Berks unsold "affordable houses for sale" to "homes for social rent" as described in this article? :*

*<https://neweconomics.org/2020/11/how-to-create-6-500-social-homes-overnight>”*

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

Thank you for your question Mr Storey and for sending me the link to the article. There are currently no unsold affordable housing in West Berkshire. However, there is a mechanism within planning policy that would enable any unsold affordable houses for sale to be considered for conversion to homes for social rent.

**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?”*

**Graham Storey asked the following supplementary question:**

*“Thank you for that and I’m pleased that you will consider this as a route forward. I looked today and there were quite a number of affordable homes for sale being advertised through Sovereign’s website and through Rightmove, and I know a number are coming onto the market, seeing the publicity that Sovereign have been putting out, particularly for Thatcham. It’s quite likely that demand for affordable housing to buy will drop post-Covid because of the economic situation. Can you give me an assurance that you will actively look at this because it seems better to have houses move to homes for social rent than leave them empty as unsold affordable houses given that we have such a high demand for homes for social rent and clearly a very limited supply?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:**

I can assure you Mr Storey that we will look at it should the houses that have been advertised for sale not be sold, but of course we can’t predict that at the moment. However, if we had to do it then each case would be considered and progressed on its merit with the registered provider, Homes England and Development and Planning, so we would look at it. Thank you.

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

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Item (c)	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by John Gotelee:**

*“Please could the executive explain how the surface water run off at the A339 junction can flow into the Thames water sewer and subsequently into the northcroft stream at a rate of up to 80 litres a second yet the council requires run off from the new Lidl development to be attenuated to 2 litres/second and run into the same watercourse?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

Thanks Mr Gotelee for your question. I hope you're well.

The two flow rate values that you have quoted cannot actually be compared directly. The new Lidl development is being designed to local planning constraints using the Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) criteria adopted in December 2018. That two litres per second that you mentioned in the question that was only a value proposed by planners for this site as it is located alongside the River Kennet.

Now, the A339 junction improvements extended the existing carriageway surface water drainage system and used existing connections to the Thames Water surface water sewer. The planning conditions governing that were approved in February 2015 using planning criteria at the time (and also in consultation with Thames Water who own the sewer). The discharge rates of flow from the drainage system, they are comparable with the flow rate from the system before the junction improvements. The 80 litres per second value represents a full flow storm discharge obtained from summing together flows from more than one connection point into the Thames Water sewer. I hope that is helpful.

**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:**

*“Yes, surely when the junction was changed and put in there, that would constitute a new development as that junction was deliberately put there to enhance the regeneration of the London Road Industrial Estate. So, it should have been all one planning application in effect, so shouldn't there have been an environmental impact assessment done then?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

No Mr. Gotelee, I don't accept that there should.

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

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Item (d)	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(d) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by William Wood:**

*“Post the Pandemic will the Council continue to broadcast public meetings thereby making democracy more accessible to many residents including younger voters?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

Thank you for your question Mr Wood.

The Council moved to holding remote council meetings in April this year following the introduction of emergency legislation which allowed local authorities to hold public meetings remotely. This has resulted in a significant improvement in the level of engagement by the public with the democratic process at West Berkshire Council, and to date, those meetings have been viewed more than 11,000 times. The Council is fully committed to supporting that level of engagement with the democratic process on an ongoing basis, and officers are therefore reviewing options as to how this can be achieved.

It should be noted that the legislation which permits ‘remote council meetings’ to take place is time limited, and therefore, without further legislation change, it will not be possible after May 2021 to continue with the current meeting format which has been so successful. However, as I have indicated, we are already in the process of seeking technical solutions that we hope will enable us to effectively live stream our council meetings, even if they must take place at a physical location.

**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?”*

**William Wood stated:**

*“No, great answer, thank you very much.”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

Thank you Mr. Wood.

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

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Item (e)	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Vaughan Miller:**

*“Will the council reconsider its decision to keep the football ground in Faraday Road closed for organised football and work collaboratively with the Newbury football community and other stakeholders like Newbury Town Council to explore all options to make the current ground available for next 3 years for men's, youth and ladies organised football?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

Hello Councillor Miller, I hope you're well. This is an almost identical question to the one that you asked me at the full Council meeting two weeks ago and also your supplementary question too at that time. So I refer you to the answer I gave you at that meeting which is available on the Council's website.

**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?”*

**Vaughan Miller asked the following supplementary question:**

*“I'm a councillor for Newbury Town Council and we've had some constructive meetings with the West Berkshire Officer and we are very willing to engage constructively with the Council to get the best outcome for the town and for the football community. Also the community football group, a community interest company, is also willing and able to engage constructively. Therefore, would this Council now reconsider its current approach of doing to the town by continuing with its current plans and instead take the decision to engage with the stakeholders on both its current plans and for the replacement ground it's proposing?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

Thanks Councillor Miller. I think when we got to the question there, it did sound like you were asking the same question again, so I can only give the answer I've already given.

We are always happy to engage with stakeholders, but the ground will not be opened for organised football purposes, for men's, women's and youth teams as you suggest, for no other good reason other than that it would absolutely churn up the ground. The ground is going to be made available for recreational open space and I think your question has been answered now several times but thanks Councillor Miller, thanks very much.

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

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Item (f)	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Paul Morgan:**

*“Can the Council please provided a line by line breakdown of all of the anticipated costs associated with the replacement football ground (of equivalent or better quality, and of equivalent or greater quantity) and how it believes these costs will be funded and by whom?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

Thanks and good evening Mr. Morgan. I am afraid I can't give that information, that information is not available and it will not be available until such a time as when football re-provisioning works are tendered and awarded. So, in terms of funding proposals, which is the second part of your question, they're designed to be cost neutral to the Council.

**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 for whatever reason the current option you're looking at pursuing at the moment, which you are about to make an announcement on in the new year, if for whatever reason that option is not either achievable or it's going to take a long time to do it, what plan B do you have in terms of a football facility in Newbury?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

We do have contingency plans, but again for the reasons that you and I have discussed a few times in the past, for commercial sensitivity and other reasons, it's not appropriate to discuss them at this stage.

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

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Item (g)	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(g) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Karen Swaffield:**

*"Please would The Executive answer why the comments on the YouTube video of the full council meeting dated 3rd December removed?"*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

Thank you for your question Mrs Swaffield. West Berkshire Council started streaming virtual public meetings on its YouTube channel earlier in the year. These meetings have been watched more than 11,000 times, as I have just said, with people able to follow the meetings live or to watch them afterwards at a time convenient to them. With questions still able to be put to the Council, we've worked hard to ensure that public meetings remain open and accessible despite the move to virtual meetings required as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

When we set up meetings we disable comments because we do not have the resource to moderate them and we do sometimes receive inappropriate comments on our public channels which we have to remove. As comments are allowed by default, we have to turn them off manually each time. At this particular meeting, comments had not been disabled in advance of the broadcast and were disabled retrospectively.

**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?"*

**Karen Swaffield asked the following supplementary question:**

*Sound issues meant it was not possible to hear Mrs Swaffield's supplementary question at the meeting. She did however provide her supplementary question in writing:*

*"In the interests of transparency and in the true spirit of democracy, would it not be of value to reinstate this public record, whatever people say (and so not policed as people do understand this) and show the ruling party to be open to real engagement (even inappropriate comment) with the electorate?"*

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

Thank you Mrs Swaffield. I refer you back to the answer I gave at the Executive meeting and repeat that the Council does not have the resource to moderate the comments that come through.

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

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<b>Item (h)</b>	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Lee McDougall:**

*“Who's legal advice (internal and external) did the Council act on to make the decision to change the football pitch at Faraday Road to a recreational open space?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

Hello Mr McDougall, good evening, I hope you're well and thanks for your question.

The change from a football pitch to recreational open space is not a legal process, it's governed by planning procedure so no legal advice was required.

**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?”*

**Lee McDougall asked the following supplementary question:**

*“Yes, surely there must be legal advice required if you're impacting an asset of community value and a change of use from what's within the Council's policy as protected green space. Why would you not take legal advice internally on that?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

Well, the Council is fully cognisant Mr McDougall of the Asset of Community Value status. As I'm sure you're aware it allows the registrant, upon disposal of the asset in question (in this case the land at Faraday Road) to make a bid to purchase the asset at market value. There has been no such disposal, there may not be such disposal in the future, and in any case the Council would be in no way obligated to accept any bid it did receive in this context.

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

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Item (j)	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(j) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Darren King:**

*“Does the Leader of the Council consider the full council meeting of the 3rd December to have encouraged members of the public from diverse backgrounds to get involved in local politics?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

Thank you for your question Mr King.

I am encouraged to know that the broadcasting of this Council's public meetings is reaching new residents in ways which we would not have done when in the physical Council Chamber. We have seen that with the increased level of visibility of the work of the Council, and its elected representatives, more people are encouraged to get involved in different degrees in local politics. Indeed here you are asking your question of the Executive following watching the broadcast - others choose to write to the local paper or use the myriad of social media channels to express their views.

The substantive item on the agenda on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, was to discuss the Independent Pay Review Panel's report on Member Allowances. This is just one of the enablers this Council has addressed in recent months to support and encourage diversity. In September 2019 we brought forward a Parental Leave Policy for Members to enable those with families to enjoy the same rights as Council employees.

As the debate showed there were strong feelings on the suitable level of remuneration and indeed, as also expressed, whether there should be any at all. The technicalities on the night of what, when and who should receive allowances detracts from the fundamental issue that it is generally accepted, as was demonstrated by the majority voting to accept the recommendations of the report, that a fair level of remuneration for Councillors is just one of the enablers allowing candidates to consider standing for election.

Several Councillors who spoke to the paper shared the reality that there is a substantial time commitment. Time is possibly one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome for getting involved in local politics, but we should be open about this to enable those considering to take a realistic view.

What the Member Allowance scheme seeks to acknowledge is that in order to undertake such a time commitment it is entirely reasonable that remuneration should be forthcoming, whether that is to supplement reduced income from employment, or to pay for locum cover as our previous Leader did, to cover child care costs or fund alternative care arrangements. The remuneration helps takes away one of those

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difficulties by supporting the elected representative financially. It is my hope that the meeting of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December removed this barrier for those who were unaware of this support.

Of course there is always more that can be done. However the actual selection of candidates is very much in the control of political parties and the capability of those putting themselves forward. Within my own party I have actively been involved in events to encourage more women to stand and have spoken of my own experiences to assist those considering it to make a decision.

The Council actively supports the Local Government Association's 'Be a Councillor' campaign and I have already agreed with our local paper their support to run a campaign here locally at some point next year.

So in summary to your question, I very much hope that the meeting of the 3<sup>rd</sup> December will encourage others to think about getting involved, equipped with the knowledge that they will be fairly recompensed for their efforts.

**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?”*

**Darren King asked the following supplementary question:**

*“So you talked about the pay rise. I was more interested in the behaviour and the tone of the meeting and I would really be keen to understand what measures have been put in place to ensure that there is no negative impact on encouraging people from diverse backgrounds to actually move into local politics?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

Thank you for your supplementary question and it's an interesting one Mr King. I think what is demonstrated in the chamber and online is that where we have a Council meeting there is debate. Not everybody will agree with one another and everybody has the right to put forward their thoughts and opinions.

The thing that we have to govern that is called the Code of Conduct which every Councillor that is on West Berkshire Council signs up to. I'm quite comfortable that everybody adheres to that and that there will be robust political debate where people disagree with one another. I think that is very much part and parcel of the role of being a Councillor to be able to stand up and voice your views so we have to have a level of realism here that it is part and parcel of the role of a Councillor to be able to express your views even if they differ to somebody else's.

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Item (k)	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(k) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Jason Braidwood:**

*“What is the forecasted public use of the proposed recreational space at Faraday Road in terms of numbers, ages, gender and sport types?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

Good evening Mr Braidwood, I hope all is well and thanks for your question.

It is not proposed that specific user groups are identified here and given preference over other users on this temporary facility. It is the intention of the Council that all users, of all ages, will be able to use the area for recreational sport and general outdoor activities as desired.

**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?”*

**Jason Braidwood asked the following supplementary question:**

*“Yes, so no forecast has been done. So something you mentioned earlier on a previous question, would that green space then that was going to the public, would that not get churned up as much as using a football pitch?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

No, I don't believe it would, the suggestions that have been put forward, not just at this meeting but on several Council and Executive meetings before is that the ground is used for several men's, ladies, youth football teams and so on. If you think about the constant usage of that, of all those teams, all the training that would go on as well as the organised matches, that grass pitch, and this is the advice we have had from Sport England as it happens, would just be churned up into a mud bath very very quickly.

The level of activity that we envisage for the site here is a lot less intense. There can be some groups of people going to play an impromptu football match, there'll be dog walkers, joggers, and so on but the level of intensive usage that would destroy the ground like I described I wouldn't expect that to happen.

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

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<b>Item (i)</b>	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Lee McDougall:**

*“Could the Portfolio Holder please set out what that legal advice to change the football pitch at Faraday Road to a recreational open space was?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

I think I answered your question about the legal advice before but I suspect you have another 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?”*

**Lee McDougall asked the following supplementary question:**

*“I would just challenge the point that you haven't had legal advice. You've made comments about Sport England which were blatantly untrue because we've spoken to the Head of Planning of Sport England and they've denied the advice they gave was to not play football on a football pitch. So I wonder if the fact you've had legal advice is either correct or actually competent?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

Thank you Mr McDougall. Of course, I would take issue with the fact that you're saying that I'm not telling the truth, I honestly am. Sport England have given us that informal advice and I think we have to leave it there.

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

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Item (I)	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Jason Braidwood:**

*“What was the source of the supporting data to reach the public use forecasts for Faraday Road recreational space?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

No such analysis was necessary or indeed carried out. I think it is fairly self-evident from the location of the space and the intention that we have for it, that it is fairly likely to be well used.

**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?”*

**Jason Braidwood did not ask a supplementary question.**

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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 17 December 2020

**(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Ian Hall:**

*“What measures do WBC take to monitor the cleanliness of streams such as the Northbrook and ponds such as the one by the London Road Tesco?”*

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

If the Council receives reports of pollution in an ordinary watercourse such as the Northbrook it will be investigated.

The Council does not carry out routine testing of ordinary watercourses. Given the significant number of ordinary watercourses in the District it would not be feasible or practical to do so.

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

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<b>Item (m)</b>	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(m) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by John Stewart:**

*“With respect to the replacement football ground in Newbury, please can the Council advise what contingency plan it has in place if the alternative option it is currently pursuing does not, for whatever reason, come to fruition and/or if it fails to satisfy Sport England’s policies and guidelines?”*

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

Another option is available. As referenced in the report being considered at the Executive on 14 January 2021, an alternative option is to locate a new sports ground at ‘The Diamond’ at Pigeons Farm in Newbury.

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

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<b>Item (a)</b>	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance by Councillor Carolyne Culver:**

*“Please can the Executive member for internal governance outline how the council will encourage greater diversity among candidates in future elections?”*

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

Thank you Councillor Culver for your question. I'm aware that some of this subject has already been covered in the Leader's answer to Mr King earlier on so I will try not to repeat if possible unless it's absolutely essential.

As both newly elected Members in 2019, no doubt the time commitment that being a local elected representative necessitates came into sharp focus for both of us. As the Leader reiterated in her earlier response, we aim through our Member Allowance scheme to not only fairly recompense for that time commitment but try to eliminate the main reason that a candidate doesn't stand purely on financial terms. I myself have needed to reduce my hours at work to accommodate the responsibility that comes with a role on the Executive and I would have found that extremely difficult to do financially if the allowance wasn't available to cover part of my income shortfall.

Also from a very personal point of view, the unusual circumstances we have found ourselves in this year has actually allowed me to attend more meetings than I might have been able to in the past. As a full time employee, as many of our Members are, it is a very real balancing act between work and Council commitments. The fact that we have been able to attend meetings such as this one using technology and not been required to travel has been a real positive in that respect for me. I am very aware of the potential opportunities this could open up in future which I know the Leader and Executive are continuing to explore with officers and which I hope may help to address some of the concerns a potential candidate may have about time management.

I think it is fair to say that a Councillor needs to be someone that residents relate to – someone like them, someone who will represent their community fairly, someone that will seek to uphold their values, and by the very nature of diversity, an individual has the freedom to be who they want to be and express themselves how they choose. Whilst this Council works hard on inclusivity and has a robust Equalities and Diversity policy in place for employees, of course it goes beyond the remit of the Council to directly influence political or independent candidates for election. But as the Leader said earlier this Council does support the Local Government Association 'Be a Councillor' campaign and will be undertaking general communications in the run-up to the next election.

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

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All political parties will no doubt be encouraging a wider representation as they start their selection processes for the 2023 local elections and of course it is essential they consider what they can do to attract an interesting spectrum of candidates. As you know, I am very keen to look at any ways that we as current Members can communicate with those who may be thinking about standing and I know that you have also been doing that Councillor Culver. Personally, I would be very happy to talk directly to anyone who might be considering standing as a candidate to let them know what my experience has been, warts and all, and give them a feel for what they can expect from the role of a Member if they are elected.

**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 CaroIyne Culver asked the following supplementary question:**

*“Thank you Councillor Stewart and I welcome the fact that we’ve exchanged some very positive emails in the last week or two about this very issue and look forward to our meeting in the New Year. We’ve talked directly, particularly about the issue of gender, and I was wondering if you have any views on how we can encourage a more ethnically diverse range of candidates and also people from the LGBTQ community as well?”*

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

One of the things that I am really pleased that we were able to do, and I don’t think we made a big song and dance about it last week, was on Human Rights Day, we actually flew our rainbow flag for the first time and I think those are the sorts of opportunities that I really want, within my own portfolio, to make sure we look for and that we do make sure that we communicate to our residents about those opportunities that are coming up.

In terms of encouraging, I think there’s actually quite a bit for me around encouraging young people as well as gender and I know that it can be perhaps a daunting prospect of stepping into a political sort of role and certainly, as you know, my background originally was not political and I didn’t come to this through that particular route. I came in through wanting to work in my community and that was through various school governing bodies and then as a parish councillor. So, I think we have opportunities to talk to our parish councils and our town councils and I believe that Councillor Martha Vickers has got some ideas about that which we’ll be sharing at our meeting in January. So, I think there is probably a lot that we can do. I can’t actually tell you at the moment that there is one particular strand that I am going to follow, I think it is definitely a work in progress.

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<b>Item (b)</b>	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Councillor Steve Masters:**

*“Could the Executive member for Finance please confirm that the £660 Billion figure he quoted during the debate on Universal Basic Income at the last full council meeting was a gross figure or a net figure?”*

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

The £660bn figure would be the cost to the Treasury to provide a UBI of £11,500 to all adults in the UK, and £4,500 in respect of each child, which would be the approximate amount required to ensure that those on the lowest incomes would not suffer cuts in income when means tested benefits are replaced by UBI, as was explicitly proposed in your motion.

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<b>Item (d)</b>	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(d) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Lee Dillon:**

*“Following the removal of an opposition member from the LRIE project board, how will the Council ensure that opposition members are now kept up to date on LRIE?”*

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

Cllr Dillon – thank you for your question. The inclusion in a Project Board is a privilege in the gift of the Administration. There is no onus on the board to provide information of any nature ahead of publication in the Executive Agenda. Opposition Members are entitled to speak to Officers but if the information they are seeking is Part 2 then it will be denied them and should be escalated to the Portfolio Holder.

I know the Portfolio Holder is happy to provide appropriate information to you or the Shadow Portfolio Holder at the relevant times and that an update on this project formed part of a Member's Development Session only last week and it is anticipated that there will be further briefings.

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

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Item (e)	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education by Councillor Erik Pattenden:**

*“How much additional support has been given to schools and nurseries in West Berkshire to protect teaching and support staff from coronavirus?”*

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

Thank you for your question Councillor Pattenden.

Several teams from across the Council are providing direct support to schools and early years setting leaders. These include Education, HR, Health and Safety and Public Health. The support they give includes the practical interpretation of guidance from the Department for Education, South East Employers, the Health and Safety Executive and Public Health England. Schools and settings have been supported to develop Covid-safe operational plans and appropriate risk assessments that take into account both the circumstances and vulnerabilities of individuals. Some schools have additional responsibilities as employers of their own staff, for example in Voluntary Aided and Academy schools. The Education Service has maintained an ongoing and positive dialogue with the relevant unions dealing with issues that have arisen along the way. They were also instrumental, particularly at the start of the pandemic, in ensuring that staff had appropriate supplies of PPE.

In addition, out of hours support has been given by Education to Heads to help them decide on appropriate courses of action when suspected or actual Covid cases arise. This has been widely appreciated.

Now, recognising the significant additional pressure throughout this year on Heads and school staff, our Educational Psychology Service set up mental health and wellbeing support for colleagues, including signposting materials and our own helpline. These channels of support are confidential and they have been very well received by schools in assisting school leaders to identify and address issues.

**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:**

*“I do, thank you. Private schools have had regular Covid testing of staff and pupils and a lot more complete protection provided to teaching and support staff than you’ve just described. So, would you agree with me that the same provisions should have been*

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

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*made available at all West Berkshire state schools and that by not providing them teaching staff, support staff and pupils at state schools have suffered?"*

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

Thank you for your supplementary Councillor Pattenden.

I am going to struggle a bit to compare what we provide, which I think has been exceptional and has been very well received by the Heads of our schools. It's difficult to compare what we have been providing with what others, the private schools you refer to, have received from various sources I presume.

What I am really pleased about, going to your point about testing, it's really encouraging that we're making, with government support and guidance, great progress on the introduction of comprehensive testing when schools return, after the Christmas break in January. Again, this comes back to the excellent work that our Education Service has been doing. They, in a matter of days, have put together comprehensive advice to the heads of our schools who are the organisations that are actually going to conduct that testing.

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

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Item (f)	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Councillor Alan Macro:**

*“How much Continuing Healthcare Funding is provided to West Berkshire Council by the Berkshire West CCG?”*

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

The answer could be said to be £Zero because the Council does not receive direct funding for Continuing Health Care (CHC). Instead, the costs of care provided to eligible people are met directly by the Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) rather than by WBC (or in some cases by the individual service user).

It is important to differentiate between the different things the NHS *might* pay for:

- CHC funding pays for all of an individual's care needs – and that funding may be fast tracked because of the individual's circumstances (for example if they are deteriorating or near end of life). So, we have fast track CHC and standard CHC.
- The NHS, via the CCG, may also pay for *part* of an individual's care needs, where health is part of the overall assessed need. So, for NHS-funded nursing care (FNC) the NHS will arrange and fund the nursing care provided by registered nurses employed by a care home where the individual is resident (but this isn't treated technically as CHC).

So, WBC doesn't receive direct funding in respect of CHC, but rather the CCG picks up the bill. The exception is where there is a delay between a decision being sought and a favourable decision being made, so we have been paying for care where the CCG subsequently agrees to pay – we might thus invoice the CCG for the interim period.

Because WBC doesn't receive direct funding in respect of CHC we don't have a figure which represents the CCGs contribution to West Berkshire clients. That said, the CCG has published information online which reports its total spend in 2019/20 on adults in Berkshire West who are fully CHC funded as just under £11.8m - part of this will have been spent in West Berkshire, but we don't have a figure.

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

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Item (h)	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing/Finance and Economic Development by Councillor Tony Vickers:**

*“When and how will the Council start the process of enabling the Local Plan to take account of its Master Plan for LRIE?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

I will answer the question, I recognise it was addressed to both myself and Councillor Cole, but I'll answer it in the first instance.

It is the Council's intention as land owner to appoint planning consultants to work with the Local Planning Authority on the preparation of a Supplementary Planning Document or other appropriate mechanism and also the required supporting evidence base. That documentation should be completed by autumn 2021.

**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:**

*“Well it really is addressed to Councillor Cole my question, because it's not so much London Road itself but the impact of potentially 500 or so homes upon the housing site allocation within the Local Plan and if there is no progress on the planning side of the London Road Industrial Estate by the time the Local Plan goes to inspection or maybe even by the time it's adopted in, it would appear, early 2023, then we could be allocating up to 500 homes worth of land for housing which aren't needed because your own master plan for LRIE says that number of houses can go in. So it's the impact of the progress or lack of progress on the planning side for LRIE and the impact that has on the Local Plan overall that I'm concerned about.”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:**

I think first of all, 500 houses is an erroneous assumption Councillor Vickers. London Road Industrial Estate is principally protected employment land and will always be such and therefore the number of homes that can be fitted onto that site would be nowhere near 500.

As you know, Councillor Vickers irrespective of a Local Plan being produced, there are always opportunities for applications to come forward during the Local Plan period which contribute towards housing. North Newbury is a good example of that, it wasn't in the Local Plan, it was put forward and the permission was granted at appeal, so I

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

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don't think the fact that: a) it's 500 houses and b) any number of houses that may or may not be included on London Road Industrial Estate will affect our housing number.

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

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<b>Item (i)</b>	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Martha Vickers:**

*“Will the administration join us in writing to the Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps MP, and the Home Office Minister responsible for safeguarding women and children, Victoria Atkins MP, to request that the Rail to Refuge scheme be made permanent?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:**

Thank you Councillor Vickers for your question. It is a very short answer in all honesty. I have also been in touch with the Managing Director and his team at Great Western Railway recently with regards to this. As it currently stands, they have no end date to this, it's an ongoing process that they were happy to bring in and noting that we are not solely reliant on Great Western, yes, I'm happy to write to the Secretary of State on behalf of the authority.

**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 stated:**

*“Thank you, I am very pleased to hear that. Thank you Councillor Somner. Can I just say were you aware that, to my knowledge, there was an end date of March? However, I'm pleased that you've agreed to write and thank you for your research into it as well. Thank you.”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:**

A pleasure.

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

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Item (j)	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(j) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance by Councillor Adrian Abbs:**

*“What steps will the council take to increase the number of candidates applying for senior officer roles?”*

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

Thank you Councillor Abbs. I believe that you have received this answer to your question, following the Personnel Committee that was held last week.

**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:**

*“Yes, I do, I didn't receive a full answer so I'd prefer you to actually read the response out so that I can ask my supplementary to that because I had a part answer, but not the full answer. However, the supplementary is going to be this:*

*Anytime that we hire to a senior position, whether we have rules to hire internally first or not, leads in the commercial world to a very small pool of people and therefore, the possibility, I am not saying it has happened, but the possibility of not getting the right talent or the best talent for the job. So, my supplementary question is very much aimed at are you going to start to look at how we recruit to these senior positions and avoid situations where we end up with one or two applicants to choose from in a senior post?”*

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

Firstly, can I say, I apologise if you didn't have the full response. I think officers felt that they had given you the full response and part of what I have in terms of that response is actually a table which is not easy to read out to you, so we'll definitely pass that on to you so that you have that in writing.

This response uses the definition of senior roles as the following: Chief Executive, Executive Directors and Service Directors, just so we're making sure that we're talking about the same sort of roles.

All senior posts are advertised both internally and externally and are Member appointments and that's for the Chief Executive, Executive Directors and Service Directors. The posts are usually advertised on Jobs Go Public as well as in appropriate

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

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online or hard copy publications such as the Municipal Journal. Where necessary, additional support is enlisted from an external head hunting or recruitment agency. This has only been necessary though in one case recently.

The only exception to this is that currently, the post of Service Director is ring-fenced to internal candidates, only for the initial phase, where there are existing Heads of Service in post as this in accordance with the Organisational Change and Redundancy Policy and the Senior Management Review.

I can tell you over the last three years we've recruited to a long list (which is the table that I won't read out to you) of senior officer posts (12).

It should be noted that quantity does not always equate with quality as you would know. To date, we have always had a good response to adverts and in all but one case we have recruited first time and all those appointed are still in post or have been promoted. The average number of applicants to externally advertised roles has been 15, with 5 shortlisted for interview over the past three years and we do keep under review steps needed to be taken to continue to attract the highest calibre of candidate as you suggest and in fact the recent Executive Director Place role attracted 46 applications and infers that the steps already taken are providing a strong number of applicants.

In terms of your supplementary, and I think that the table will help to reassure you, of those 12, only three of them were internal only processes. All of the rest were both internal and external, and I would agree with you, that looking at the dates, we had a lot lower numbers and responses, perhaps 2 or 3 years ago, but actually when you look at it from 2019 through into 2020, it certainly has escalated quite a lot. So from maybe 9 applications back in 2018 to 20 and above.

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

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<b>Item (c)</b>	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(c) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Steve Masters:**

*“Can the Strong Leader give examples of when the Green group have ‘Run straight to the press’?”*

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

Councillor Masters –

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of November we, West Berkshire Council, were contacted by a local reporter who asked us for a comment on a statement that Cllr Culver, Leader of the Green Party had sent to him. We were unable to make a comment as this information was confidential and not in the public domain.

I am sure you are aware Councillor Masters that the Code of Conduct, that all Members are required to sign up to when first elected, clearly states at 13.4.4:

### **Use of Exempt, Confidential and Private Information**

As a Councillor or a Committee or Sub-Committee Member, they necessarily acquire much information **that has not yet been made public and is still exempt or confidential**. It is a betrayal of trust to breach such confidences. They should never disclose or use exempt or confidential information for the personal advantage of themselves or of anyone known to them, or to the disadvantage or discredit of the Council or anyone else.

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

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<b>Item (g)</b>	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Councillor Alan Macro:**

*“Where does the level of Continuing Healthcare Funding place the Berkshire West CCG in the national rankings?”*

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

As referenced in question (f), there is Standard Continuing Health Care, Fast-Track Continuing Healthcare and NHS Funded Nursing Care.

For Standard CHC the Berkshire West CCG ranks 134<sup>th</sup> out of 135.

For Fast Track CHC it ranks 127<sup>th</sup>.

For FNC it ranks 35<sup>th</sup> out of 135.

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

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<b>Item (k)</b>	Executive Meeting on 17 December 2020
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**(k) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development by Councillor Adrian Abbs:**

*“Does the council have plans to move from the Market Street office within the next 10 years?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:**

The answer to your question is no. That said the Council is currently reviewing future staff working arrangements given the ongoing experience of the Pandemic. The project is entitled Timelord 2, which is likely to lead to an increase in homeworking and a rationalisation in Council corporate office space. It is hoped to bring a report to the Executive on this in April next year.

Once the Council's future office requirements have been clarified, it would then seem appropriate to review whether a new office might be considered. The Council's current office provision in Newbury is dated, it will become increasingly costly to maintain, and does not meet a high environmental standard. New offices have been considered in the past and have proven too costly, particularly in the context of having to find ongoing savings. It would however be appropriate to reconsider this position once our future space requirements are clear.

**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 stated:**

*Actually no thank you Councillor Mackinnon, I will wait, if and when we announce something.*