

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday, 29th April, 2021

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Item (a)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Gary Lugg

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Paul Morgan:

“Could Councillor Hilary Cole provide the details, rationale, objectives and timescales behind her statement (made at the last Executive meeting) that West Berkshire Council will be “developing our own housing company”?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

We are in the process of investigating the feasibility for a housing company and will, if the case is proven, step up a housing by the end of the year. The housing company proposal is a key objective in the Council's new Housing Strategy and its supporting delivery plan. The initial objective is to provide much needed affordable rented housing for residents of West Berkshire.

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:

Yes thank you for that response Councillor Cole. You already have a joint venture with Sovereign Housing I believe, so the reason for the question is we could get a situation whereby a Council owned Housing Company seeks planning permission on a Council owned piece of land; so how does the Council avoid any conflict of interest in that situation? For example, you are the Chair of Western Area Planning, how will you resolve the conflict of interest if that does go ahead.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Mr Morgan there are very clear rules and guidelines where the Council and Local Planning operates and there has to be a clear distinction between the two so that there are no conflicts of interest and that is taken into account. Thank you.

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Item (b)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Bill Bagnell/Jon Winstanley

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

“The West Berkshire Water Cycle Study Phase 1 Study highlights the need for considerable infrastructure spending on the LRIE. Without any costings was the Avison Young viability study an expensive exercise in manipulation rather than viability?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Thanks Leader and thanks Mr Gotelee, I hope you are well. The answer to your question is no, it isn't.

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:

Thank you Mr Mackinnon, I trust you are well. The bit that worries me, and I might be being a bit on the thick side here but the Avison Young Viability Study has not costings as a viability study is as much use as a cat flap in a submarine. So I wonder if you could explain the real purpose of wasting that money was.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Economic Development answered:

Thanks Mr Gotelee, notwithstanding a slight disagreement over your characterisation of the cat flap, the submarine and the wasting of the money. Let me go into a bit more detail. There is no manipulation. The Council as a local planning authority is pursuing a robust local plan and you know. And the water cycle study forms a part of that. On the other hand, the Council as landowner is entitled to look at what is commercially possible in potentially redeveloping the LRIE. So that approach demonstrates a clear separation between the Council as landowner and LPA. One study doesn't and it shouldn't dictate the outcomes of the other. So, the Council has followed a logical sequence of events here; first, we look at the review market forces in relation to the assets we own on the LRIE and what redevelopment could be commercially delivered - and once that is down, once commercial viability is confirmed, then we look at the environmental constraints that may affect that viability; the flood mitigation, ground remediation, changes to the highway and so on. Now I have explained on several occasions in exec and council meetings and given answers very similar to this one that it would not have been logical to spend money, possibly in excess of the cost of the development brief itself, looking at site constraints and consider mitigation costs

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only to learn later that commercial constraints render redevelopment impractical regardless of the cost of possible mitigation works. So let me put your mind at rest, the environmental impact study the Council is about to commission should be largely complete by the end of the year and where that will further inform viability and what the Council can achieve in redeveloping the estate. Thanks very much.



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Item (d)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey/Matt Pearce

(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture by Lee McDougall:

“What are the forecasted key milestone dates for the new football ground proposals, including the planning submission and decision date, the tender process start and finish dates and the construction start and completion dates that will enable this new facility to be operational by March 2022?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

Thank you, Mr. McDougall.

Assuming that the proposal is approved by Executive this evening, the planning application will be submitted late next month or very early June. Concurrent with using delegated authority to start the process of appointing a contractor using the UK Framework Leisure Access Agreement. This approach has been approved by the Procurement Board. We expect to award the contract by the end of July allowing construction to commence by the end of August or early September and the site to be operational for football use by the end of March.

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 thank you for that. Just in regards to the end of the planning timescale and the start of the construction and if I missed anything? Target date, if you have an end date you must have dates in the middle.

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

It is on schedule and in its due course and I have already said what I think the construction start date will be. I think I said early September so assuming a two month planning process.

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Item (e)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey/Matt Pearce

(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture by Vaughan Miller:

“Is the 40 year lease (joint land deal) with the Rugby club the only contract that the Council are requesting to be approved by the Executive at this meeting?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

Thank you for your question Councillor Miller.

The Executive is approving the land deal. As stated in my previous answer, the Construction Contract will be awarded in accordance with the Constitution and delegated powers contained therein using the Framework Agreement. Given that the Capital Expenditure has previously been approved within the 2021/22 Capital Budget.

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:

Yes so you agreed a land deal, is there an agreement on the Capital fund, the Sink fund and other costs?

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

I am afraid Councillor Miller that is contained in Part II.

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Item (g)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey/Matt Pearce

(g) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture by Alan Pearce:

“Please can the Council confirm the Executive is aware the present draft forward plan contains all the necessary financial approval requirements to commission the construction of a Football Ground at Monks Lane to move it from Faraday Road?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

Thank you for your question Mr Pearce.

The reports before Members this evening detail all of the relevant information to allow them to make an informed decision on the proposed Sports Ground at Monk's Lane. To clarify, the Forward Plan is a summary to indicate the topics for discussion and the decision 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?”*

Alan Pearce asked the following supplementary question:

Yes I do, can I clarify first please, are you making a decision then that this is the replacement for Faraday Road is it? Can you clarify that because that is the bit I am not sure about?

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

Well it is not relevant to the discussion. This is a new Sports Ground in Monk's Lane.

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Item (h)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey/Matt Pearce

(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture by Gary Norman:

“Can the executive confirm when the total development and ongoing costs to the council tax payer of the new football ground development at Newbury Rugby Club will be available for scrutiny in the public domain?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

Thank you for your question Mr. Norman.

As I have stated in answer to a previous question, we will seek and receive quotes from specialist contractors using the Framework Agreement. Once this is completed, the Council will know the definitive cost of the project and financial reporting will be carried out through the normal channels. That is to say, quarterly updates to the Executive on Capital Expenditure against Budget.

The constructions costs which we have are all estimates. There are no agreements underpinning them and as such until the agreements are in place they would be considered as commercially sensitive from bidders. We have used estimated costs to inform our capital budget, but they are much wider than just for the construction element.

Once the deal is done on both the lease and the construction elements then those figures will be publicly 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?”*

Gary Norman asked the following supplementary question:

Yes, well I did have a supplementary but as you have clarified that you are not associating the ground as a replacement for Faraday Road and if you are confirming that, and thank you for confirming that, then I will withdraw my supplementary question. Thank you for your answer.

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

N/A

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Item (j)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey/Matt Pearce

(j) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture by Nigel Foot:

“Could the Council please confirm exactly what additional details and documentation will be made available to the public with respect to the Newbury Rugby Club proposal prior to any legally binding documents are signed?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

Thank you for your question Mr Foot. Some minor bits of detailed design are still being worked up, but I can confirm that full details of the proposals will be provided into the public domain with the planning application. The Agreement to Lease and associated agreements will be signed assuming Executive approval tonight but that is not legally binding as it is dependent on achieving planning consent.

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?”*

Nigel Foot asked the following supplementary question:

I do please, yes. What I would like to say is, that in view of this Council's poor track record on procurement of property, would the Executive not agree that it would be a good idea to make as much of the proposals at Newbury Rugby Club public so that proper scrutiny can be made of these proposals and hopefully save another £943,000 being wasted. As was the case with the St Modem fiasco at London Road Industrial Estate.

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

I think this is a very different circumstance from the one you are describing. This is a pretty straightforward construction project. So I am afraid that I disagree with you.

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Item (c)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey/Matt Pearce

(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture by Paul Morgan:

“Why are items, which are not related to negotiations with the Rugby Club, such as the estimated budget for upfront capital costs, ongoing running costs, sinking funds etc being covered in part 2 rather than being made available to the press and public as they should be?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

Thank you Mr Morgan.

We've excluded running costs from the Part I report on the basis that this is confidential, commercially sensitive information and the deal has not been finalised. The running costs are part of the on-going discussions within the joint use agreement which seeks amongst other things, to find costs savings through shared services such as ground staff. Construction costs which have been made a part of the Part II papers are all estimates. There are no agreements underpinning them and as such until the agreements are in place they are considered as commercially sensitive from the tenderers. Once it is done under both the land and construction agreements those figures will become publically 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?”*

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

Yes I do. Thank you for that response. So just to pick out a couple of points, you say it's an estimate for the capital costs for that and I think you have been quoted as saying around £2m. So why is that in Part II?

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

I don't think I have ever said that it will cost £2m. The reason it is in Part II is because it is confidential information.

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Item (f)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey/Matt Pearce

(f) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture by Vaughan Miller:

"It is welcome that the plans have been upgraded from a Step 6 to a Step 4 facility from the start. However Hungerford and Thatcham (populations 10k & 25k) have grounds which enable them to currently play at the higher levels of Steps 2 and 3 respectively. The Faraday Road Ground has the capability to be upgraded to Step 2. It looks like the footprint of the proposed ground at the rugby club is too small to be upgraded any further. Therefore how can this be a like for like replacement?"

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

Thank you Councillor Miller.

The Playing Pitch Strategy, approved by the Council in Feb 2020, clearly stated that the replacement for Faraday Road needed to be by Step 6 with the ability to progress to Step 5. This strategy was supported and approved by Sport England and the Football Association. The Council has made it clear that the project is designed to meet the requirements to the Playing Pitch Strategy and it has enhanced the offer by proposing a 3G surface, enabling far greater community opportunity to play and enjoy sport and achieving a Step 4 Facility.

The initial view of the Council's consultants is that it may be possible to raise this to a Step 2 facility in the future but that this would require considerable additional expenditure which is certainly not justified at the present time.

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:

Yes I do. It's been basically five years since Newbury Football Club played at Step 5, they were relegated down to Step 4. Purely down, to be frank, actions of this Council, they couldn't get security of tenor and not for football reasons. Who's to say they wouldn't be playing at Step 3 or Step 2 like Thatcham and Hungerford, much smaller towns. Would we have capacity to go to Step 2.

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The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

I have already answered the question to be honest. Our consultants say it may be possible to get to Step 2, but it is so premature that it would clearly involve massive additional expenditure which is not viable at the moment.

Item (i)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey/Matt Pearce

(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture by Lee McDougall:

“Could the Council please confirm that once full details and supporting documentation are available with respect to the Rugby club proposal it will undertake a public consultation that complies with the Government’s Consultation Code (specifically the seven consultation criteria as detailed on the Local Government Association (LGA) website?”

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

Thank you for your further question Mr McDougall.

The Council have operated in accordance with its consultation policy, which is compliant with the Local Government Association code. There have been multiple opportunities for the general public and interested parties to engage with officers. This process, which has been going on for several months, has resulted in some specific changes to improve the offer and ensure that it serves the community well into the future.

Not only did we undergo a full public consultation, but I personally took part in a publicly open Webinar and as I have stated the Capital Budget was approved by Executive in an open forum to more than comply with all consultation requirements.

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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Lee McDougall asked the following supplementary question:

I do yes. It is just that the consultation that you did was for a very high level scheme that was dated November 2020 and I think it has now changed and there were no costs. So it is difficult to see how the public could be consulted on a scheme that doesn't have any detail and that is out of date and doesn't have any costs. That's why we were keen to make sure when you undertook some future consultation when the proper details were available. Are you saying that you won't consult anymore when those details are available?

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

It will be a planning application that people will be able to see in the current process.

Item (k)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Paul Anstey/Matt Pearce

(k) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture by Alan Pearce:

"Is it the Council's intention to make a decision (in Part II) at this meeting with respect to item 8 and 11 on the Executive Agenda "Newbury Sports Ground – Joint Land Deal (EX4010)" that will commit it to enter into various land agreements with the Rugby Club without putting this on the forward plan first?"

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

Thank you for your question Mr Pearce. I think your question has already been answered in correspondence with the Leader.

We consider the Item to be correctly listed as an update. As you are aware Newbury Sports Ground has been through the Executive previously and had been on the Forward Plan. The 14th January 2021 report was very clear that there will be a further report to the Executive with the final documents. The Executive on 29th April 2021 will have before them the final documents and will make a decision on whether the documents, which represent the deal, are approved or not. The Executive will have all the relevant information and as such will have the full implications before them.

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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Alan Pearce asked the following supplementary question:

Yes I do. To be honest with you, I am struggling to understand what's being done here. My supplementary question is – do you believe the Executive think they are voting on approving a replacement for Faraday road?

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance/Leisure and Culture answered:

No we are voting on the Monk's Lane Sports Ground.

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Item (a)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley

(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Steve Masters:

“Can you confirm that there will be no overall cuts to community transport services across West Berkshire in terms of both financial and service levels?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Thank you Leader and thank you Cllr Masters for your question.

The revenue funding for community transport in West Berkshire has remained constant since 2019, and there are no plans to reduce it further. In addition, since 2020, we have made additional capital funds available to support schemes (£50,000 last year and the same for the next two years).

With regards to services, we don't control the services provided by community transport operators and the groups are different in the services that they provide. Community transport is a community-led response to local unmet transport needs and it is therefore a matter for operators to decide on the level of service that they are able to provide. Our key stipulation when awarding the funding is that “the Charity (is what they tend to be) shall only use the Grant for the purpose of delivering Community Transport Services that benefit residents of West Berkshire”. And certainly my requirement of any contractual agreement is there then follows an ability to review that service provision jointly with the provider. As for particular services, this could include: dial-a-ride services; minibus, volunteer car services, demand responsive local bus services. Many trips are made for the purpose of shopping; attendance at clubs, or societies and support groups; health and medical appointments.

We actively publicise the various community transport groups serving West Berkshire to help residents with individual journey requirements and/or we invite residents to contact us directly if they are unable to secure appropriate support so that we can identify any local unmet needs.

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:

Not at this time Councillor Somner. Thank you.

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The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

N/A

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Item (b)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Jenny Graham

(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

“By what date does the administration anticipate reaching net carbon zero across West Berkshire as a whole?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:

Thank you for your question Councillor Abbs. As you and we are all very well aware, as part of our declaration of a climate emergency in July 2019, we agreed the target of achievement of Carbon Neutrality by 2030. That target was and is not only for this Council's own activities but for the District as a whole. As regards to the Council's own Carbon Neutrality, I am very confident that we will hit that date.

I would be optimistic we could significantly improve upon it. Regarding the District overall Carbon Neutrality, this still remains a risky, a challenging, but still achievable target. One key aspect here is that we, West Berkshire Council, are in full control of the activities that and what we need to do to put our own house in order. We have a duty, an obligation and a plan to influence and encourage and set an example to residents and businesses across the District to follow along this past too. But ultimately the question of when the District overall will hit Carbon Neutrality will come down to disciplines of said people and businesses and groups. So for example, decisions on when to transition from a petrol fuelled car to an electric car; how to reduce their car travel; increase Active Travel; dietary change and etc. etc. So we can still achieve 2030, if we the entire District, meet those in a timely way.

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 thank you Councillor Ardagh-Walter, the reason I asked the question the way I did which is a Carbon Zero wide across the whole District is obviously we have a draft Delivery Plan which really focuses on and has taken two years to get to this stage and I just wanted to test your appetite. So are you really confident given the draft Delivery Plan of where we are, the messaging we have been giving out to the public so on and so forth that we are actually on track to reach that target? I have to say I am doubtful myself. I really would like to see you put a stake in the ground and say yes we are going to do this rather than detailing all the risks of why we might not be.

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The Portfolio Holder for Environment answered:

Yes so thank you again Councillor Abbs. So the best point to bear in mind here, is that what we have and are consulting on now is a draft Initial Delivery Plan. The Delivery Plan is not going to be carved in a tablet of stone and left and we admire it for ten years. We are going to be regularly updating that, setting more specific goals as time evolves, as we understand more actions as the wider environment set by government, technology and people changes. So it will evolve and so to judge the current draft as the final word from us is absolutely wrong. So no, I am very confident we will indeed and I look forward to us all in this virtual chamber, all parties spreading the word to residents and businesses an encouragement of how they can help in this path to Carbon Neutrality. Thank you.

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Item (c)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley

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

“By how much has West Berkshire Council reduced the funding of Readibus services since 2015 including the schedule of cuts year by year?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Thank you Leader and thank you Councillor Brooks for your question.

In all honesty I've got something which will probably be easier for you to receive in a written response for ease, in that it is a table with a lot of numbers in it. However, what I can say in answer to that is that overall funding for community transport was reduced by 73% in 2019.

Your question specifically runs from 205/2016 and there were changes in the funding that was provided over that time and it's not just about one organisation but as a formulaic approach, certainly the community transport element didn't change is 15/16, in 16/17 and in 17/18. It actually went up in 18/19 to £58,000 from £45,000. 2019/2020 was when the change came in and at that point went down to £14,500. Now what I am talking to you there is those numbers to say they are community based transport numbers that is only part of the equation of the activity that has been provided. So there is also a contracted school transport service and concessionary fares element to that as well. So it is quite complex to go through all that and to as I said to everybody I am more than happy to provide that table to you if that would help. And I am sure that would give you the answers that you are looking for. But I think in essence the community transport is what you are focussing on and not the whole amount. And as I say 15/16,16/17,17/18 there was no change. In18/19 there was an increase and then the budget change came in, that's when the value started to come in for them as we looked for a specifically equal way of funding across community providers. I hope that provides enough of a response for you for now but happy to take 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?”*

Councillor Jeff Brooks asked the following supplementary question:

Well I will be pleased to see the table and my supplementary is financial so before the Leader tells me I am going off in a different direction; is it simply a matter of the terms and conditions of Readibus that is causing the issue, Councillor Somner or is it

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funding? However, whatever formula you use within the Community Transport Budget, for Readibus, what can you tell the people who use the service, the wrangling that is going on?

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

There isn't a straightforward answer Councillor Brooks in all honesty and that is where the complexity of it comes in because of changes in the way the contracted schools provision was addressed. As I said that has changed funding for the organisation. Concessionary fares stopped in 2017/18 so that no longer became part of the equation at all. The change in funding that you are talking about that was discussed in 2018/19 came in effect in the 19/20 budget, that is when the new formula came in and that is when the finances were presented in a more equal fashion which those figures I can provide.

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Item (d)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley

(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Lee Dillon:

“What provision has been made by WBC for alternative services for disabled residents to cover the loss of the 25,000 journeys previously provided by Readibus?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Written answer provided as Cllr Dillon not in attendance

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 Lee Dillon asked the following supplementary question:

N/A

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

N/A

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Item (e)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley

(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Alan Macro:

“Why were the drastic cuts in West Berkshire Council funding of Readibus since 2015 not consulted on?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Councillor Macro thank you for your question. I would like to point out first that the only reductions to community transport funding took place in 2019 and I have just alluded to that in the previous response. And that was following a difficult decision to reduce discretionary services. At the time, the Council consulted with the community transport operators as it was felt that they were in a better position to contact their clients to gauge the impact of the funding reductions. Clearly the Council does not hold details of community transport users so it increases the complexity again of that consultation.

However, given that I am reviewing this with a fresh pair of eyes as the Portfolio Holder that has come into it since these decisions, consultations and changes took place, I do, perhaps we should have consulted more thoroughly. It would have been difficult as I said there was a caveat on that as I said earlier, we haven't got the database of any service user details. The Council has come a long way since 2019, in terms of consultation, and that is in reflection to feedback we've received. We now have a new Communications and Engagement Strategy which builds closer links between residents and the services they use. And I do feel that we will be looking at similar changes in service now, we would have been more engaged in line with this strategy and its principals.

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:

Thank you. Do you think that this lack of direct consultation with the users, in fact is because lots of them or most of them are vulnerable in terms of Readibus users, either disabled or elderly and therefore come under the equality act and that the Council may have acted illegally?

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

I don't think so. Again I go back to saying what I just said we don't have those end user details; those details are held by the service operators. And certainly

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conversations that I have had, I tried to establish what those details might be in order that we can either jointly or independently go forward to those users. And I think it is worth also noting that it's not just the end users, it may be the carers and the parents we need to contact. And again, that's an important note to take. When you don't have the end users details the only other option we would have had at that point, or could have taken at that point would have been to go District wide. And then everybody, clearly has opportunity to make comment. My understanding, as what was done, as I said it was the service operators that were engaging in consultation in order that they could come up with a solution that was the best fit for everybody with the funding that was available at that time.

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Item (f)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley

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

“Can I urge the Executive member for Highways and the Environment to visit the road and establish whether a footpath can be extended alongside Stroud Green into the new Racecourse development before any serious injury occurs to walkers?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Thank you Leader. Thank you Councillor Barnett for your question. I am making an assumption first and foremost that you are referring to the final part of Racecourse Road beyond its junction with New Road, which unfortunately does not have a pedestrian footway alongside. When the Racecourse development went through the Planning system it was the intention to provide pedestrian facilities along this stretch but because the road passes through Common Land it could not be achieved at that time. It was not possible to widen the highway beyond the space that the road previously took up, so purely technical reasons. Alternative safe walking routes are available around the edge of Stroud Green but I appreciate that they are not as direct as a path alongside Racecourse Road would be.

It is notoriously difficult to expand highways into Common Land due to the legal protections that Common Land has and the procedures involved are time consuming and somewhat arduous. I would not, therefore, wish to raise expectations that a footway can be provided in the short term but what I will do is ask Officers to investigate what is required and whether there is a realistic prospect of constructing a walking route as part of a future programme.

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 Phil Barnett asked the following supplementary question:

Thank you Councillor Somner it was helpful that you have actually investigated, there was a preamble to the question which would have given you history as well which didn't come up on the question. So I very much value you investigating it and clearly there is an issue, you rightly say is problem is the common land issue. The unofficial footpath which is nearby which you might identify as an alternative unfortunately is an official track across the other side of the ground access to houses, that I was going to suggest could be instated as a proper footpath but perhaps that is something you might like to investigate. But clearly I have some concerns and rightly you have obviously investigated the issue regarding people that have to access the highway

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when there probably not in a safe position. So I look forward to your investigations Councillor Somner and let's hope we come to a sensible conclusion on that.

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Be glad to provide you with an update as soon as we can offer one.

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Item (g)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley

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

“Does the executive feel that the termination of the Readibus contract was handled well?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Thank you again Leader and again thank you Cllr Masters for your question.

What I should say at the onset for clarity is that the Council has not terminated any contract with Readibus. In fact this particular agreement that has been in the press was never reached. I believe you may be confusing our contracts with Readibus for specific services with the grant funding that the Council gives for Community Transport. I can assure you there has been no contract termination where Readibus is concerned on that basis. Readibus have served a notice of intent to reduce their community transport services in West Berkshire but we will continue to work with them and their residual services and of course we will work with alternative providers for our District.

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:

Whether or not it is the termination of the Readibus services or not, are you happy and you haven't answered whether or not it was handled well. Do you think there has been any reputational damage to West Berkshire Council as a result of this whole situation? Or has West Berkshire Council's reputation been enhanced?

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

I think this is an unfortunate situation. We have had to react to a notice that has been given to us. Had we been able to engage in conversation, had we been able to provide a joined up combined release of information to people that might have been viewed in a completely different way than it is currently being viewed in the press and social media. I don't feel that any termination that has ended up with the sort of press that it is currently getting could be reviewed as positive. That doesn't necessarily put fault on one side or the other. This I said, there is relationship work that needs to go on. Whenever you have an outsourced service and that's what this is one of those occasions where we look to work with our community operators. There is no easy way

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to say this. There isn't a positive or negative at this. This is an unfortunate situation which we are doing our very best to alleviate any concerns with the end users and that is the key to this, it is the end users that need to be remembered.



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Item (h)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley

(h) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

“Given my previous question to Executive regarding the cancellation of bus services, why did the Executive not reveal the situation with Readibus, as the council must already have been aware of this?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Thank you Leader and thank you Councillor Abbs.

For the benefit of other Councillors and the public, your question to the Executive on 25th March this year was: around Carbon footprint impact of cancelled bus services proposed in West Berkshire.

As we have established the Council has not cancelled any bus services and are confident that Readibus' withdrawal will be covered by other service providers, I stand by the response that was previously given, that as far as we are concerned at the minute, there will be no carbon footprint impact.

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 thank you very much Councillor Somner. Obviously there are semantics here in the word cancelled which most people would determine as the stopping of something happening. Reality is that is what has happened with Readibus, whether the contract negotiation reveals. I would like to understand Councillor Somner's answer to scenario where buses are no longer running and why given that you must have known about this Readibus situation why you weren't able to answer.

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

I think what you are doing is making a statement where a service is being provided, that no service would be provided in the future. I have stated repeatedly that, that is not the case.

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Item (i)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Gary Lugg/Bryan Lyttle

(i) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Alan Macro:

"What is likely to be the effect on adoption of the new Minerals and Waste Local Plan by Oxfordshire County Council's consultation response that it is unsound because "...West Berkshire is unable to deliver sufficient mineral requirements over [the] Plan Period, both in terms of reserves and production capacity and also the lack of identification of waste management facilities for non-hazardous residual waste for the whole Plan Period..."?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you Leader and thank you for your question Councillor Macro.

Following a meeting between Officers of the respective Councils earlier in April, I can respond that the likely effect on the adoption of the new Minerals and Waste Local Plan because of the Oxfordshire County Council response to the Regulation 19 consultation is no significant effect. Officers of the two authorities have agreed that some minor reworking of words for policies together with the evidence base presented by the Council should overcome all the issues raised. These would be put to the examination as proposed Minor Modifications and agreed with Oxfordshire CC as part of the Statement of Common Ground between the authorities.

Of course it is possible that the Inspector might disagree.

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 think I had been informed on the Planning Advisory Group previously that Oxfordshire County Council had agreed on the issue of the minerals, if not the waste. So are you confident that they will maintain this latest agreement and not turn back on it like they have before?

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The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

I think I have just answered the question Councillor Macro because I have said that there are agreed some minor workings and there is going to be some common ground. So I am confident.

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Item (j)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley

(j) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Phil Barnett:

“Can the Executive member for highways and the Environment identify whether extra funds have been set aside for the influx of road repairs required in the forthcoming months?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Thank you Leader and thank you again Councillor Barnett.

The spring is always the busiest time for colleagues in the Highways Teams following the wet and cold winter months. And this year will clearly be no exception and the Council has made sufficient funding available to ensure our roads are kept safe. We've been further boosted by the communication from the DFT which has committed a fund value of in excess of £5m so very secure. I believe we be able to deal with the coming requirement.

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 Phil Barnett asked the following supplementary question:

Yes, thanks very much for that answer Councillor Somner. Many potholes or refills of holes do need considerable remediation and I have noted and I don't know whether you have noted Councillor some of the refills are not always of a permanent nature rather an easy short term fix and therefore sometimes they need to be refilled. Is there anyone in your highways team that is looking at some more permanent fixture that the pothole were not let to reoccur and therefore costly exercise to the Council and costly claims that should be subject to another pothole.

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

I think there are different levels of requirement on repair and I think that's important to note. More than happy to make sure we engage with Officers to ensure a technical response if that would be best for you. Certainly, of course we don't want to be preparing something that isn't going to last and find that we've been left with a bill for further repairs. And if that is the case then that is something we will take up with our contractor. As always with these things we are more than happy to receive information

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through on the report a problem page on the Council website and if people are aware that, that is part of the issue than they should make that comment, if they are aware we can certainly look into it from there. Thank you.

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Item (k)	Executive Meeting on 29 April 2021
Submitted to:	Jon Winstanley

(k) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

“Could WBC roll out QR codes on dog-waste bins to automatically notify the council for collection when full?”

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Thank you Leader and thank you Councillor Abbs.

QR codes on dog waste bins, actually that is something we have been having conversations on. At the moment we are looking at this as part of the Council's upgrade of the Council's 'Report a Problem' system which I have just referred to. As it stands we can see no reason why QR codes would not be compatible as a solution; however, we also intend to number all our dog-waste bins so that those less technically minded members of the public can report specific bins by more conventional means too. And I think it is worth noting that a QR code in itself isn't an answer. It may give a member of the public the ability to open up the appropriate app or to the appropriate location but there does need to be a level of tech savvy user at the end of that and I wouldn't see it therefore as a single hit solution.

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 thanks Councillor, I don't think the QR code itself, the way I was describing it, was ever meant as a single shot solution. It is an aid in the problem solved, so my supplementary would be consider at least as an interim step as it costs almost nothing and easy to implement.

The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Countryside answered:

Absolutely, as I say it is part of an on-going conversation so yes happy to commit to that.

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