

# Questions and Answers

## Council

Thursday, 2nd December, 2021

West Berkshire Council is committed to equality of opportunity. We will treat everyone with respect, regardless of race, disability, gender, age, religion or sexual orientation.

If you require this information in a different format or translation, please contact Vicki Yull on telephone (01635) 503929.



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## Public Questions to the Council

2 December 2021

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

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<b>Item (a)</b>	Council Meeting on 2 December 2021
<b>Submitted to:</b>	<b>Janet Weekes</b>

**(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Strategic Partnerships and Transformation by Graham Storey:**

*“What progress has been made in considering a Council Housing Company for which £65,000 was set aside in this years budget?”*

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

Following a formal procurement process; a feasibility study to determine whether the creation of a Council owned Housing Company is a viable option has been undertaken.

This is currently being assessed in keeping with the Council's governance process. No final decision has been taken on whether the Council will proceed with establishing the Housing Company.

**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?”*

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

*At Executive you ruled out any social housing being built by the Council or direct investment in such. Could you clarify if the housing company is relooking at that question or is it aimed at a different sector of the housing market?*

**The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste answered:**

The housing company, if established, would provide a mix of housing in order to fund the whole operation. A mix would enable us to provide social housing as part of the housing company.

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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>	Council Meeting on 2 December 2021
<b>Submitted to:</b>	<b>Kofi Adu Gyamfi</b>

***(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste by Vaughan Miller:***

*“Could the council provide details of their roadmap for increasing the types of plastics (from just bottles) for roadside collection?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste answered:**

Dear Mr Miller

Thank you for your question.

The Council recycles high quality plastics that we know there is a market for in the UK. There are limited reprocessing plants in the UK for lower quality plastics such as pots, tubs and trays. This means that many authorities who collect these materials often have to export them overseas, sometimes to countries who do not have suitable infrastructure or regulatory standards to manage these materials in a sustainable way. This is something we are keen to avoid at all cost.

However, we will continue to keep the situation under review and will look to expand our kerbside offering as UK reprocessing opportunities arise.

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

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<b>Item (c)</b>	Council Meeting on 2 December 2021
<b>Submitted to:</b>	<b>Sarah Clarke / Joseph Holmes</b>

**(c) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Alison May:**

*“West Berkshire continues to haemorrhage women councillors resulting in the regression and stagnation of progressive policies. The reasons are NOT associated with their inability to do the job or a result of them having to prioritise other commitments. West Berkshire Council has the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment in support of progressing a truly democratic system resulting in an increased participation in the political sphere by women, minority and other under represented groups. What positive steps will West Berkshire Council take in support of a modern progressive governance structure?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

Thank you for your question. I'm unsure why you think West Berkshire Council continues to “haemorrhage women”. Since the 2019 election no female councillor has resigned from the council, and if you're comparing 2015 to 2019 we only saw a 5% reduction in terms of female members, so not quite haemorrhaging. However, I can assure you that we are fully supportive of a truly democratic system and we have introduced positive measures to support this. Some of those were outlined in my response to your question to the last Executive Meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> November, and other examples include the introduction of a parental leave policy for elected members. That policy was approved following a motion I proposed in September 2019 and received cross party support. The move to livestreaming meetings, and our steps to continue to enhance this, has seen a major increase in the visibility of Councils activities and a greater ability for our residents to engage in what we do and increase participation in local democracy.

The Council has also adopted a Code of Conduct for councillors which sets out the standards of conduct required of all members. This supports the promotion of respect and equality, and prohibits discriminatory conduct.

The Council has already taken steps to positively support diversity amongst its members, and will continue to keep this under review for further opportunities, it is crucial to us as a Council as a whole that we strive to increase participation in the political sphere with representation reflecting all of our community.

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

**Alison May asked the following supplementary question:**

*This is also extended to parish councils and a significant number of female councillors have been lost there.*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

I cannot go into details beyond what is related to the original question.

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

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<b>Item (d)</b>	Council Meeting on 2 December 2021
<b>Submitted to:</b>	<b>Paul Martindill / Matt Pearce</b>

### **(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance Leisure and Culture by Paul Morgan:**

*“As the Football Association/Football Foundation (FA/FF) have stated that “they do not accept that the proposal (Monks Lane, Sports Hub ) would represent a satisfactory replacement for Faraday Road Stadium” will the Council please confirm that they will now take the sensible decision to look urgently at other more suitable and more cost effective options?”*

#### **The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance Leisure and Culture answered:**

Thank you for your question Mr Morgan. The Football Association and Foundation are not Statutory Consultees in the planning process but their comments are taken into account by Sport England who are. In a roundabout way you are correct , in that Sport England require a further new grass pitch to replace the existing grass pitch at the Rugby Club which is being used to create the Sports Hub to fully replace the old Faraday Road ground . WBC has identified two possible pitches in the District , both owned by this Council and feasibility studies are being worked up on both with a view to submitting a planning application by the Spring , well within Sport England's 18 month timeframe .

As I said Sport England is the statutory consultee and have clearly stated “there is a strategic need for a fit for purpose AGP in this location.”. They will not be objecting to the Sports Hub application but will object to any application to redevelop the former pitch until the new Grass Pitch is operational. WBC officers will continue to work with the Football Association and Football Foundation to develop the football programme at the Monks Lane sports hub over the coming months.

This administration considers that it has found the ideal solution for the provision of league football in West Berkshire but we also continue to seek out other opportunities for both Artificial and Grass pitches and several preliminary discussions are underway with Officers in order to meet our commitments to the 10 year Playing Pitch Strategy approved last year.

**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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**Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:**

*My concern is that the members of this Council and the public aren't aware of the full nature and costs associated with this scheme. If it didn't meet the requirement for a replacement of Faraday Road that would be ok, but the full cost is huge - £12m. I would urge Council to look under the bonnet before a decision is made. Will the Council agree to have a complete review of the costs and mission statement of this scheme before any decision is made?*

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

I don't recognise the figure of £12m. We are producing a sports hub with major effects and improvement on what was previously Faraday Road for football in the Berkshire area. The support of Newbury Football Club says a lot about the need and desire for it.

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

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<b>Item (e)</b>	Council Meeting on 2 December 2021
<b>Submitted to:</b>	<b>Paul Martindill / Matt Pearce</b>

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

*“With the shortage of eight 3G pitches in the district, does the council believe that spending upwards of £12M on just 1 new AGP at Monks Lane Sports Hub, is value for our council tax payers money?”*

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

Thank you for your question, Councillor Miller. If this was for a simple Artificial Grass Pitch or AGP, I would wholeheartedly agree with you, but it is not. In any event, whilst the total 40-year cost is still unknown due to retendering of the Leisure Management Contract the figure that you put into your question is one that is wildly inaccurate.

The Sports Hub development that we are proposing is not for one simple AGP but to create a new ground that achieves the FA Step 4 Ground Grading requirements.

In addition to an AGP that meets world-class standards, the development includes a pavilion with 4 team-changing rooms, officials changing rooms, a medical room, a kitchen with servery, social area, club meeting room and public toilets. It also encompasses two covered spectator stands, state of the art directional floodlighting, 52 car parking spaces, new electrical vehicle charging points and significant ecological improvements in the adjacent areas. It will provide capacity for up to 38 teams to train and play matches for 80 hours a week compared with a grass pitch capability of only 6 times a week. I would also add that the building is designed to be carbon neutral using a small amount of carbon offset and to meet BREEAM Excellent rating for provision of energy.

This quality and environmental commitment comes at a cost but we as a council need to lead by example if we are to expect developers to follow in the planning process so we can meet our Climate Emergency Promises.

This is a facility for which Newbury and West Berkshire will be proud of and for which most clubs would give their eye teeth. Hence the support from both Newbury FC and the Hellenic League in which they currently play at a Step 7 level.

This is part of our Playing Pitch Strategy approved by this administration in February last year which is in the process of annual review with Sport England. This review was slightly delayed this year because of the impact of Covid. As you know Sport England

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are making no objection to the Sports Hub planning application and we continue to have an excellent ongoing dialogue with clear benefits to sport and playing pitch provision in West Berkshire.

To answer your question directly Councillor Miller, given this background , yes, I do consider this facility to be good value for the Council Taxpayer both in terms of sporting facilities and community health and wellbeing.

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# **Members Questions to the Council**

**2 December 2021**

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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>	Council Meeting on 2 December 2021
<b>Submitted to:</b>	<b>Sarah Clarke / Sean Murphy</b>

**(a) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Strategic Partnerships and Transformation by Tony Vickers:**

*“How can we councillors justify to our constituents why planning ‘decisions’ by us are made entirely in public, but licensing ‘decisions’ by us are debated and framed behind closed doors?”*

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

All planning decisions could, if the Council decided, be taken by officers in every instance. However, certain licensing decisions **must** be taken by a licensing sub-committee in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003.

Taking planning first, the Council has established area planning committees under the constitution to consider planning applications in specified circumstances established by the constitution (not statute) - for example on a Members’ call-in. However, when a planning committee considers a planning application, there is a considered officer’s recommendation whether to grant or refuse permission, accompanied - in the case of a recommendation to approve - by a suite of suggested conditions. The Members on the committee are thus guided, as a matter of planning law and policy, as to what officers think the decision should (or might) be.

Licensing is different (and, by way of background and to remind you, local licensing authorities such as this Council have only been dealing with these decision for less than 20 years - prior to that decisions were taken in the Magistrates Court). It is not the constitution that determines what matters are to be considered by a licensing sub-committee, but rather the Licensing Act. The Licensing Sub Committee meeting that considers licensing applications and reviews is very similar to a court hearing - it is quasi-judicial and more constrained than a planning committee meeting. In particular, any licensing decision must be determined in relation to the four licencing objectives\*, and there is no debate - the hearing is concerned with evidence only

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It is thus necessary for the Members, once they have heard the evidence, to retire and decide what their decision should be, on what licensing grounds, and (if they are granting or continuing a licence) what the conditions should be. This is similar to Magistrates retiring to consider a verdict.

The decision then needs to be drafted by officers and agreed by the members - this takes time and consideration, hence the statute giving five working days for the decision to be published.

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

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<b>Item (b)</b>	Council Meeting on 2 December 2021
<b>Submitted to:</b>	<b>Andy Sharp / Ian Pearson</b>

**(b) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education by Martha Vickers:**

*“Could this Council consider expanding the service it provides through its Family Hubs to ensure that those families most affected by the pandemic, particularly those in our areas of deprivation, have easy access to the support they so vitally need?”*

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

The focus of the Family Hub work is on supporting whole families through robust and consistent support of parents. This takes a variety of forms with a universal offer to all families providing key information, running groups and by one to one conversations. The groups provide parenting advice, healthy eating courses and wider public health messages. Alongside this universal offer there are also targeted sessions with specific advice to strengthen parenting, build self-esteem, and develop parents understanding of how they can influence school readiness. In addition to this families are referred for support and these families received one to one family support work which is captured in a “my family plan”. This plan is coproduced tackling the issues and concerns a family are facing in a structured way using the strengths and skills of the family.

Throughout the pandemic the family hubs have continued to be open and to deliver their full range of services. They have proactively remained in touch with all referred families even during the lockdowns when social media and regular telephone and text played a significant role. In additions to business as usual the family hubs were often called upon to support individuals who came to light via the Community Hub. These cases were often families not currently engaged with the hubs who were struggling with particular issues. The hubs supported access to the baby bank, foodbanks and in many instances family support workers personally delivered much needed resources during difficult times. The family hubs also provided activity packs for families at the most stressful points during the pandemic. Parents either collected from the hub itself or if unable to come out and about the family support workers delivered much needed resources and ideas to keep the children happy and engaged.

As the pandemic has allowed the family hubs have returned to having a more open-door approach where families can come along to sessions on site or at an outreach locations. There is a cohesive approach with a great deal of important information being shared via social media, at sessions and during some of the bespoke courses. The family hub wouldn't turn anyone in need away and will always proactively try to



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provide or signpost support making links with the voluntary sector, health and other services to ensure that families or individuals can work through their challenges

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<b>Item (c)</b>	Council Meeting on 2 December 2021
<b>Submitted to:</b>	<b>Janet Weekes</b>

**(c) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Strategic Partnerships and Transformation by Jeff Beck:**

*“Will the Portfolio Holder please update us with regard to the number of Rough Sleepers currently in West Berkshire, the support being offered and the number declining this assistance. Your Report upon the progress West Berkshire Council is making to deal with this problem, in both the short and medium terms will be appreciated, thank you”*

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

The 2021 annual rough sleeper count carried out on 17/18 November confirmed that there was 1 verified rough sleeper in the district.

Support for rough sleepers is funded through awards which we have been successful in obtaining from the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

The support currently offered includes Outreach; specialist mental health provision; housing support; employment and training advice.

No rough sleepers are currently declining our support provision.

I would like to give you some examples of what has been achieved so far with this grant funded support in place:

- Our Housing First scheme currently has 14 clients living in their properties, with a further 6 clients who have been assessed and are in receipt of support from Two Saints in preparation for their new tenancies commencing.
- Since April, the new Education & Training Officer has successfully assisted 6 clients back into work through her intervention, while a further 6 clients have been successfully enrolled into employment related training courses
- We are focussing our work on prevention measures, and enabling clients to sustain their tenancies. With these ends in mind we are using the Rough Sleeper Initiative funds to extend the services we offer to include a specialist Dual Diagnosis worker and a Mental Health worker to target specific support to these clients.

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- We have also recently recruited a Rough Sleeper prevention officer whose role is to work to prevent people ending up on the streets following discharge from institutions.
- We have secured c£330K revenue & capital grant funding from Homes England & DLUHC to provide 15 units of accommodation ring fenced for the rough sleeper cohort. These properties will be active by Q1 2022/23

Officers are currently working with DLUHC officials to submit a bid for RSI funding for 2022-2025 based on the service priorities which addresses the medium term concerns you have expressed.

And finally, an update on actual numbers sleeping rough – we are back to 0 verified rough sleepers this week!

I want to thank and pay credit to the Rough Sleeping team who are working so hard to support rough sleepers within the District, and I think the results speak for themselves.

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

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<b>Item (d)</b>	Council Meeting on 2 December 2021
<b>Submitted to:</b>	<b>Jon Winstanley / Paul Hendry</b>

**(d) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste by Phil Barnett:**

*"In view of the promotion of planting trees in public places small saplings quickly become fully fledged mature trees.*

*Therefore can the Executive Member for highways and the Environment identify what maintenance and inspection regime is in place to reassure the public that quickly growing trees are safe and, where necessary, pollarding takes place at the appropriate time ?"*

**The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste answered:**

The trees which the Environment Department are planting are predominantly saplings or what are referred to as 'standard' trees and will not come to maturity for many decades. Officers are mindful of the potential future impact of trees in public areas and therefore ensure that firstly; the correct tree is chosen for a particular location, secondly that the tree is sourced from a reputable supplier and certified disease free; and lastly that the tree is planted correctly and maintained in the critical early years to give it the best chance of maturing without structural defects.

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

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<b>Item (e)</b>	Council Meeting on 2 December 2021
<b>Submitted to:</b>	<b>Eric Owens / Jon Winstanley / Jenny Graham</b>

**(e) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste by Martha Vickers:**

*“What can this Council do, in conjunction with its partners, to encourage local businesses to reduce their carbon footprint, particularly regarding the disposal of their rubbish?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Waste answered:**

Dear Cllr Vickers

Thank you for your question.

The Council currently does not have any powers to prescribe how local businesses lawfully manage their waste and recycling. Businesses have to comply with applicable national legislation such as the requirement for businesses to ensure they are using licensed waste collectors.

The Council is however keen to work with businesses and a key objective of our Environment Delivery Plan is to provide businesses with the information they need to make environmentally conscious choices, which is something officers are currently working on.

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