

Questions and Answers

Executive

Thursday, 15th December, 2022

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.

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Agenda Item 15.

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

Item (A)	Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022
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(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Ivan Scott:

“Will the budget for making Streatley footpath STRE/21/1 accessible to the public be carried over to the 2023/24 financial year if the physical works are not completed before the end of March 2023?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

Mr Scott, thank you for your question. The short answer is ‘Yes’. I understand Officers are discussing the necessary consents for the work with the Environment Agency and if the work is not completed by the end of the year the funding will be available next financial year.

The Portfolio Holder 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?”*

Mrs Margaret Pawson, as proxy for Mr Ivan Scott, asked the following supplementary question:

“Why has it taken nineteen years since it was legally created, for West Berkshire Council to finally make this near half a mile of public footpath available for use by the public?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

I must admit that I don't have history that goes back nineteen years. At the moment conversations are taking place with the Environment Agency and that would indicate that there needs to be a level of third party engagement with it. I will ask Officers to get some clarity on issues that may have occurred over that period of time and we will get that back as a written update for you.

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

Item (B)

Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022

(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by John Gotelee:

"The Faraday rd football pitch has been erroneously defined as a Brownfields site. Given the following definition of what constitutes Brownfields sites it is clear that the undeveloped pitch area does not fit the definition "Land which has previously been developed. The term may cover vacant or derelict land, land occupied by redundant or unused buildings and developed land within the settlement boundary where further intensification of use is considered acceptable." when can we expect this error to be rectified?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

Thank you for your question.

Updates to any categorisations will be made in 2023.

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

Item (C)

Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022

(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Gareth Beard:

“Would the council give an update on the use of the EV chargepoints it has installed across the area. How many sessions and the amount of power drawn from the units.”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

Mr Beard, thank you for your question.

We have on street charge points which have been in place for a few years and charge points in our public car parks that were installed at the beginning of this calendar year.

For our on street charge points, in 2021 we had a total of 705 charge events drawing 11,100 Kilowatt hours of energy. In 2022 to the end of October, we have had 1,146 charge events drawing 17,471 Kilowatt hours of energy.

In our public car parks, since the beginning of the year, we have had a total of 1806 charge events which has drawn 31,420 Kilowatt hours of energy.

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

Item (D)

Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022

(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture by Stuart Gourley:

“Can the Executive please tell me the wasted costs of:

- *Wasted officer hours spent organising/and analysing the public consultation for the proposed Manor Park Playing Pitch;*
- *Wasted cost of the Feasibility Study for the Manor Park Pitch Proposal back in December 2021?”*

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

There have been no wasted officer time or costs in relation to assessing the technical feasibility of creating a sports pitch at Manor Park.

Officers' time in any event is not calculated by each individual project.

In this case I can tell you that the total costs of both Manor Park and Linear Park (Calcot), was £12,675.

The Portfolio Holder 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?”*

Stuart Gourley asked the following supplementary question:

“What are the next steps, the timeframes and any blockers to moving any proposal forward?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

You will know that the public consultation has been completed and it has proved very interesting in what it brought out. It should be appreciated that several football clubs are supportive of this development and that also a feasibility study and public consultation work should be contextualised in the understanding that there is a significant deficit in the provision of the sports pitches in relation to demand, and therefore opportunities to create new sports pitches must be explored.

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

Item (E)

Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022

(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture by Vaughan Miller:

“Has the council identified sites for the shortfall of eight 3G football pitches in West Berks?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

The short answer to this is “No” due to the lack of available space for Artificial Grass Pitches and the associated facilities that are required to maximise their capacity, which includes sports lights, car parking and changing rooms.

However working in partnership with schools, clubs, the FA and Sport England, significant progress has been made. This has seen a new 3G pitch completed at Denefield school and a new 3G pitch will be completed in 2023 at John O’ Gaunt school in Hungerford, supported by more than £500k funding from the Football Foundation and funding (£75k) from WBC’s Playing Pitch Strategy budget allocation.

Further subject to the outcome of the judicial review the sports hub will be completed in 2023, adding a world class 3G pitch to the portfolio with West Berkshire.

Work is also progressing with Newbury College where land has been identified for a 3G Pitch and a new masterplanning exercise will be progressed at Henwick Worthy to determine its potential for increasing site capacity.

I will also mention that the Playing Pitch Strategy was approved in 2020 and has a life of ten years and so we do have a further eight years to go to create the pitches.

The Portfolio Holder 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 didn’t quite get the number of sports pitches. Where you have school pitches that have been identified, are these at the standard required to be useable for football pitches or matches and are they available for football clubs to use at weekends, or are they only available for training midweek?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

The pitches are available for standard matches.

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

Item (F)

Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022

(F) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships by John Gotelee:

"In 2012 a report showed that amongst the council workforce stress, depression or anxiety was the top illness and had climbed to 26.6 per cent from 18.4 per cent in 2009/10. How do those figures compare to today."

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships answered:

The figures for sickness absence (long term and short term) due to "stress, depression or mental health-related" for 2021/22 are 36.4%.

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

John Gotelee asked the following supplementary question:

"So that's actually getting worse. Do you have any ideas or reasons why mental health is getting worse rather than better?"

The Portfolio Holder for Internal Governance and Strategic Partnerships answered:

The figure is actually down almost 4% from last year. It is likely that it reflects both the impact of the pandemic on mental health in the workforce and the general population and also the decline in absence for other reasons. The national picture shows that it is not a problem that is unique to West Berkshire. It is one that most employers are having to tackle but we are providing support through our universal and targeted services for employees including;

- Employee Assistance Programme;
- Occupational Health service;
- Counselling service;
- Mental Health First Aid;
- Wellness Action Plans;
- Wellbeing focused one to one's;
- Physical Activity Champions;
- Training, learning and education; and
- Resources and support through our Wellbeing at Work programme

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

Item (G)	Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022
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(G) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by Gareth Beard:

“What plans are there to increase the number of chargepoints throughout the area especially in the villages. Is any consideration max to support larger vehicles such as vans and minibuses?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

Mr Beard, thank you for your question.

The Council's priority for the provision of EV Charge points remains on street charging in locations where there is limited off street parking and in Council owned public car parks. We are happy to work with Parish Councils and residents to identify need and also work with private suppliers to advance commercial opportunities.

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

Item (H)

Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022

(H) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture by Vaughan Miller:

“When does the council plan to complete a review of the Playing Pitch Strategy?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

Working in partnership with Sport England and four National Governing Bodies of Sport WBC has successfully completed a Stage E review of the Playing Pitch Strategy and this will be formally reported in 2023.

The Portfolio Holder 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:

“So it’s been around for three years and you are planning a review in the next year, is that correct. I couldn’t find anything on the website or any updates to the Playing Pitch Strategy?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

The planning review has been completed and will be reported on next year. It has been delayed due to Covid. I know it is blamed for a lot of things but in this case it is genuine.

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

Item (I)

Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022

(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside by John Gotelee:

"In the LRIE webinar Katherine Makant stated that drainage was an iterative process. If that is so what has been learnt from the failure of the SUDs in the car park of the new London Rd Lidl?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

We are aware of some ponding in the Lidl car park during heavy rainfall. We are not concerned that this constitutes a flood risk to surrounding areas, or is a failure of this SUDs system.

The Portfolio Holder 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:

"There is a failure in the SUDs system as the void underneath Lidl is completely dry and should be filling up. I'm rather concerned that this is just one of four places that I know of where SUDs conditions have not been met before starting work. I do hope that this isn't going to happen on the London Road Industrial Estate because otherwise there will be a number of Judicial Review cases on it. Do you have in mind that conditions need to be met before work starts?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport and Countryside answered:

Yes I understand what you are saying.

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

Item (A)	Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022
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(A) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Alan Macro:

"How many refugees are being accommodated in hotels in West Berkshire?"

The Leader of the Council answered:

The data relating to number of refugees being accommodated in hotels commissioned by the Home Office in West Berkshire is a matter for the Home Office. This is not Council data, and so I am unable to give you an answer here Councillor Macro.

Should you wish to have a conversation with me offline then I am more than happy to do so.

The Leader 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 am very disappointed that the Home Office is not sharing that information with local councils."

The Leader of the Council answered:

I didn't say that they were not sharing it, I said that we were unable to provide it to you but I am more than happy to have a conversation offline with you, as there are specific reasons behind that.

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

Item (B)

Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022

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

"Despite the Government's recent increase in school's funding, inflation and the cost of living crisis mean schools face real term cuts – what recommendations is the Council giving to schools to ensure these funding cuts don't damage children's education and affect teacher's pay?"

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

I am a little surprised that you are persisting with your claim that schools in West Berkshire are facing real term cuts. The question went public on the day after the Chancellor's Autumn Statement where an additional £4.6bn of funding over two years was announced. This should cover the future cost of the current pay award for teachers and non-teaching staff, as well as helping with other inflationary costs. Since that announcement the Government has also announced it is investing £500m to help state schools and colleges with energy efficiency upgrades, to better manage energy consumption and save on bills. Schools and colleges will continue to benefit from the Government's Energy Bill Relief scheme over the winter months, reducing how much they need to spend on their energy and giving them greater certainty over their budgets. I am sure that you will be as pleased as I am to hear that the Institute of Fiscal Studies has confirmed that all of this additional funding added to the £7m increased funding since 2019 has reversed the spending trends that we have seen since then. Our schools are not facing real term cuts.

The Portfolio Holder 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:

"You are regularly giving out big national numbers and they really don't mean very much to individual children and families in West Berkshire. From what I can see for 2023 and 2024 the increase in per pupil funding in primary schools is 5% and secondary is 4%. With inflation at over 10% what is the effective real term cut for schools in West Berkshire that you say doesn't exist?"

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

We don't know what the inflation rate will be but it is forecast to be falling. You are comparing 5% with inflation as it is at the moment.

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

Item (C)

Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022

(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

"How accountable are social landlords to West Berkshire Council and what can the Council do to intervene where there are problems?"

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

All Registered Providers (social landlords) are regulated by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH). The role for the RSH is to administer regulatory standards covering financial governance and consumer standards. They operate within a code of guidance as set out by Government.

Where there are issues with property conditions or housing management concerns then the Council can engage to attempt to resolve matters. However ultimate accountability for Registered Providers lies with the RSH. They are responsible for intervening where failure to meet those standards has caused or could cause serious harm to tenants.

The Portfolio Holder 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:

"I don't think anyone here is going to argue about the importance of mould and so on, we see it in the press enough. The question was very much aimed around what can we do to intervene, and you seem to be saying we can't do very much. Is there really nothing that we can do as a Council to address the problem and lobby on behalf of the people suffering within West Berkshire?"

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

I think I covered this in a question at full council. As soon as we heard of the sad case in Rotherham I immediately contacted Sovereign Housing Association and they provided a very full response on everything that they do which was very impressive. I also asked the Housing Team to write to every single registered provider asking for their response. To the best of my knowledge we are very much on top of it.

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

Item (D)

Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022

(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside by Councillor Geoff Mayes:

“When will WBC make the asset register information it holds in its GIS on flood risk public, to enable residents to adequately protect themselves from surface water flood risk in particular?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside answered:

Councillor Mayes, thank you for your question.

The Council does maintain a register of assets, including structures and other features that are considered to have an effect on flood risk within the district. This information is available to the general public on request.

We are currently looking into options of making this information more readily available, but unfortunately this has been delayed and will be progressed as a priority hopefully in the new-year once the current and unfortunate resource issues in the Drainage and Flood Risk Team has been resolved.

The Portfolio Holder 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 Geoff Mayes asked the following supplementary question:

“When the GIS is updated and when it's available to the public will it show the pluvial (rainfall), and fluvial (river flooding), and also depth below ground surface water levels from the water table? This would be for the benefit of developers and planners when they are assessing the needs for SuDS provision and for the water and construction needs. Is that likely to be available in the future?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transport & Countryside answered:

I don't know the level of details that they have available to them at the moment but what I would say is whatever we have we will provide. We certainly won't hold any level of information back as there would be no point in doing so. What we could do is hold an appropriate meeting and have that conversation with Officers and make sure that they know. I bow to the knowledge that you have in relation to this.

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

Item (E)

Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022

(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing by Councillor Lee Dillon:

“What is WBC doing to provide support for families in these difficult times, when we know there is likely to be an upswing in domestic abuse due to the cost of living crisis and the festive period?”

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing answered:

Thank you for the question.

As you know, we are doing a number of things generally in relation to the cost of living, in particular through the Cost of Living Support Hub, which provides advice and practical support for residents in financial hardship.

In relation to the question of domestic abuse we should first recognise – indeed as I think your question recognises – that the festive period *can* be a difficult time for family and relationships. It's not the only tense time during the year, but we know that there are additional stresses which can exacerbate abusive behaviour. This said, we shouldn't in any way be excusing domestic abuse however trying circumstances might become.

So, what is the Council doing?

First we want, to the extent we can, to reduce the financial tensions that might lead to issues, and there is a range of information, advice and support available through the Hub.

More specifically with regard to domestic abuse, A2Dominion provide the Council's Domestic Abuse Service, and we are ensuring that there continues to be a timely response to any calls to the DA helpline, with support and intervention being provided where necessary.

Supporting this, West Berkshire's Refuge currently has spaces available so would be able to accommodate those at a high risk looking to flee domestic abuse if required. Other accommodation options are also available and accessible through the Council's Housing department – this might be through temporary housing, priority need for the Housing Register, or the Safer Spaces Scheme.

The Domestic Abuse Board meets regularly and, along with the Council's social services and housing departments, has significant representation from a variety of bodies, including the police, A2Dominion, a host of voluntary and charitable organisations, and the NHS, alongside survivors of domestic abuse who are able to help our professionals understand the impact of abuse, and support the Council with where we may need to direct any outreach activities. The cost of living question is high on the agenda for the Domestic Abuse Board.

So, first we signpost advice and assistance to support those facing financial issues to reduce tension, and then we seek to prevent and protect any victims of abuse – there

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

is a range of information relating to all of this available through the council's website if you simply search 'cost of living'.

The Portfolio Holder 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:

"Thank you for the comprehensive answer. I tabled this question as a public information question because we are coming up to a pressured time of the year and I was hoping that maybe your answer will be expanded upon in the Local Press, so that residents can read what is available as we approach a time when there will be limited out of hours service. "

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing answered:

Thank you for enabling to say that and I do hope the Press picks it up as we obviously want to achieve two things. Firstly we want to ensure everyone is aware that that the information and assistance is there, but also if there are issues we want victims of domestic abuse to be aware that there is support available.

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

Item (F)

Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022

(F) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Councillor Alan Macro:

“What actions are the Council taking to ensure that the circumstances that led to the tragic death of one of its care home residents, that was the subject of a recent "Report to Prevent Future Deaths" by the Assistant Coroner for Berkshire, are not repeated at any of its care homes?”

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care answered:

As you would expect, we have expressed our sincere condolences to the family of this gentleman and have also communicated with the families of the current residents of Birchwood so that they know the work that we are doing. In the case of Birchwood, we have made substantial changes. This includes changes to relevant policies and processes, changes to personnel and the management structure. We have a dedicated and comprehensive ongoing improvement programme for Birchwood to drive up standards across all of the areas which affect the wellbeing of residents. This includes additional monitoring and audit, improved training and greater use of technology.

As Portfolio Holder, I have been meeting regularly with the key managers responsible for driving forward the improvements and I can vouch for the commitment they have shown to maintain high standards and ensuring we are providing good quality care to all our residents. Thank you for your comment earlier thanking them. Senior Officers and fellow Members also share this commitment.

The learning is being used to inform how we practice in our other two homes.

The Executive will be aware of the national picture in Adult Social Care and the significant difficulties facing Local Authorities in the areas of staffing and resources. I am content that we are bringing focus and energy to the delivery of care in our services, but it should be noted this is within an increasingly challenging landscape.

The Portfolio Holder 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:

“You did mention changes in management. Something that came out of the Assistant Coroner's report was that part of the problem was a lack of oversight caused by planned and unplanned absences by various managers. Could you assure me please that that situation will not happen again?”

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care answered:

I would never assure anything in terms of there may be moments or days where there will be changes as to who is on the ground on a day-to-day basis. What I will say are that the changes in the structure and the additional oversight that we now have is a

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Service Manager who is responsible for all of our care homes and also the Shared Lives service. She spends a lot of her time at each of the individual care homes; she is responsible for auditing; for having the conversations with each of our registered managers within those homes around the auditing; and she is the one that is on the ground with them helping them to develop their plans, and to improve where there have been some gaps and we are aware that those need to be addressed. My personal opinion about this is that it feels like a really good oversight situation. I can't say 100% that there will never be a situation where we might have somebody that is not in the place that they need to be, but we now have that additional resource there to be able to step in in those circumstances.



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

Item (G)

Executive Meeting on 15 December 2022

(G) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

“Does this Council have a handle on how many families in private sector tenancies are getting no fault evictions in West Berks and whether there has been a recent increase due to the cost of living crisis?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

Throughout the year, there has been a steady increase of households being evicted from private sector tenancies in West Berkshire. It is not currently possible to determine if this is due to cost of living impacting either the landlord or the tenant. I have asked the Housing Team for more information and will share this with you when it is available.

The Portfolio Holder 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:

“The sooner that we do know the better able we will be to plan. Given that we don't really know at the moment, how can we be sure that we are going to have enough support? Is there any modelling that we can get from anywhere to help us plan for this likely scenario?”

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Leisure and Culture answered:

The only data that we have is when the Housing Team is approached directly by the tenants in distress. We are also aware of a number of landlords who are becoming distressed sellers because of increasing mortgage costs. I'm very happy to share whatever information we can pull together which I suspect will be early in the New Year.

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