

Questions and Answers

Council

Tuesday, 26th March, 2024

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

26 March 2024 Full Council Public Questions

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

Question (A)	Council Meeting on 26 March 2024
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(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity by Alison May:

“West Berkshire District Council's (WBDC) declaration of a Climate Emergency on 2 July 2019 subsequently further strengthened on 5 October 2023 to include an Ecological Emergency, is an acknowledgement by WBDC of their commitment to reversing Climate change. Can the council therefore confirm: Whether they intend to develop a Decarbonisation Plan and if this plan is part of their 'Net Zero by 2030' target?”

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity undertook to provide a response in writing subsequent to the meeting.



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Question (B)	Council Meeting on 26 March 2024
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(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Acting Leader, Portfolio Holder for Transformation, Strategy and Governance by Richard Garvie:

“Can the Leader of the Council tell me whether West Berkshire Council has participated in discussions to be part of a larger Combined Local Authority?”

The Portfolio Holder for Acting Leader; Strategy, Communications, Governance and Transformation answered:

it's interesting this question and I'm not quite sure where you're coming from it seems you may have sort of put two and two together and got to 36 later in the agenda we talk about the Prosperity Board and I'm not sure if that's why this prompted this sort of question it's not difficult for me to say to you Mr Garvie that the Leader and myself the Deputy Leader, Acting Leader and general fact totem has not participated in any discussions to be part of a larger combined Local Authority”.

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

Richard Garvie asked the following supplementary question:

“could you go on record to decline or say that you would not be part of any discussions for the remainder of this electoral cycle.”

The Portfolio Holder for Acting Leader; Strategy, Communications, Governance and Transformation answered:

“Subject to any government interference after the elections. I have no interest in looking at larger combined authorities across Berkshire to the west or anywhere else. I think West Berkshire Council does a great job, particularly in the last 10 months and I look forward to it continuing to do so. Thank you very much Mr Garvey”.

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Question (C)	Council Meeting on 26 March 2024
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(C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity by Alison May:

“West Berkshire District Council's (WBDC) declaration of a Climate Emergency on 2 July 2019 subsequently further strengthened on 5 October 2023 to include an Ecological Emergency, is an acknowledgement by WBDC of their commitment to reversing Climate change. Can the council therefore confirm. How they intend to deliver a Net Zero Change to their existing Private Funding Initiative (PFI) waste contract?”

The Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity undertook to provide a response in writing subsequent to the meeting.



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Question (D)

Council Meeting on 26 March 2024

(D) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel by Richard Garvie:

“Can the Council tell me how many social housing units have been sold off by Housing Associations in West Berkshire since the Local Elections in May and how many units have been acquired to replace the units sold?”

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel answered:

“The Council does not hold data for all of the social housing disposals in the district.

However Registered Providers (housing associations) are required to notify the Regulator of Social Housing about any disposal of a dwelling that is social housing. As a result, the individual Provider would be able to provide this information. However We have asked Registered providers to notify us of Properties that they have plans to dispose of. As a result some Notifications of pending disposals are now being provided to the Housing Service.

For financial year 2023/24 it is anticipated that 275 new units of affordable housing will be delivered in the district. We are committed to deliver 1000 affordable homes by 2030.

The tenure mix of the new homes being delivered in 2023-24 is as follows:

- 40% Social rent
- 30% affordable rent
- 30% are shared ownership

I am also delighted to say that once such site at Sterling gardens has just become available with 119 affordable homes and these are set to have families moving in over the next few weeks.”

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?”*

Richard Garvie asked the following supplementary question:

“I appreciate you don't get the information that I requested about the number of units that have been sold off, but could you as Portfolio (Holder) please get hold of that information because I genuinely believe this is a great Scandal and developing into a

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great Scandal, so if you could get that information and share it as a Council I'd very much appreciate it".

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel answered:

"Thank you, Mr Garvey they're not obliged to give us that information. We can ask for it, so it's voluntarily given to us by those housing associations, but I mean as I say we have asked them to do it and some of those housing associations have come back with us those answers".

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Question (E)	Council Meeting on 26 March 2024
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(E) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel by Richard Garvie:

“Can the Council inform me what discussions have taken place with Housing Associations (if any) relating to the sale of affordable housing units in West Berkshire and whether concerns have been raised with the Leadership of those entities about the number of housing units laying empty?”

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel answered:

“Empty Homes are a Major concern. The issue of properties lying empty pending disposal has been raised by officers and Members in meetings with Registered Provider partners. The matter is a standing agenda item in these meetings in order to enable parties to understand plans and potential alternatives. However, some good news in order to dissuade properties from remaining empty for an extended period from 1 April this year, where the property has been empty, for a period of more than 1 year, an additional premium is applied.

- a 100 percent premium will be added to properties that have been empty for between 1 and 5 years.
- a 200 per cent premium will be added to properties that have been empty for between 5 and 10 years.
- a 300 per cent premium will be added to properties that have been empty for more than 10 years.

Additionally, there are plans currently in place to have an option on the report a problem page of the website where residents can report potentially empty properties. We are also investigating other possible ideas to address the empty property issue”.

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Question (F)	Council Meeting on 26 March 2024
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(F) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of the Council by Richard Garvie:

“At the Extraordinary Meeting in December, Councillor Dillon talked about Viable Villages and the need for affordable housing units in the villages. During his time as Leader of the Council, can Cllr Dillon inform me how many times he met with Leadership of the Housing Associations and what discussions were had about the future provision of affordable housing in our villages?”

The Leader of the Council undertook to provide a response in writing subsequent to the meeting.



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

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(A) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Leader of the Council by Councillor Dominic Boeck:2

(B) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People's Services by Councillor Dominic Boeck:3



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

Question (A)	Council Meeting on 26 March 2024
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(A) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Leader of the Council by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

"The discussions between Berkshire local authorities on the transfer of funding from LEPs were entered into in response to technical guidance given by government in August of last year. What involvement from WBC members has there been in these discussions and what contribution, if any, was made?"

The Portfolio Holder for Leader of the Council answered:

"The Leader and now myself have been involved in a series of meeting with other local authorities over the last nine months (and I understand the previous Council Leader also attended those meetings) to enable the Berkshire Prosperity Board to be set up and receive the funding previously received by the LEP. The Chief Executive and I have kept the Executive Members updated and I also understand the Chief Executive has kept the opposition party updated.

The Berkshire Prosperity Board, (when formed) will be agreeing a set of themes to help deliver our ambitions across the whole of Berkshire. We are at the very early stages of discussing how to develop and progress these themes into specific delivery plans, including setting up a Business Board. It has been agreed by the Berkshire Leaders that all our constituent Members will be updated when these delivery plans are developed further and I'll give an extra assurance that I'll make sure assuming I remain in this position I will make sure that the prosperity board reports back here a great deal more than your Local Enterprise Partnership representative used to report back I'll do better than that and I'll remind you it was Councillor Alan Law for several years and we heard very little about it in this chamber we're going to do better than that"

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 Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:

"Councillor Alan Law is not here to respond to that so I'd like to make that clear. Thank you I'm pleased to hear you committing to report back Councillor Brooks very happy about that. Government issued guidance on the 4th of August and a letter to the Local Authority leaders went out at the same time. LEP funding is going to be withdrawn next month the equivalent announcements have already been made by I think everybody but us and Slough and I just wonder why are we so far behind the other authorities".

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The Portfolio Holder for Leader of the Council answered:

"I don't think we're behind at all. Look I was at a meeting where this got agreed by the Berkshire leaders only about three or four weeks ago and crikey we've met as soon as we can after that meeting with the Berkshire leaders with the Chief Executive sat in the room and said this will work. Now take it back to your authorities and get it approved and that's what we're doing we ain't late on this at all Councillor Boeck I can tell you that thank you".

Question (B)	Council Meeting on 26 March 2024
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(B) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Young People's Services by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

"How will council ensure that Delivering Better Value Programme targets are achieved in the one-year period proposed for the new Service Director post?"

Councillor Dominic Boeck withdrew his question at the meeting.



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