

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday 19 September 2024

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 Sadie Owen on telephone (01635) 519052.



This page is intentionally left blank

(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Alison May:

“What consequences would arise if West Berkshire Council were to improve recycling and composting rates?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

West Berkshire Council is committed to improving the waste collection and recycling services we provide to residents. This commitment is demonstrated by the service improvements we have made over the last few years. Selected improvements include rollout of separate weekly food waste collections, plastic pots tubs and tray collections at Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) and Mini Recycling Centres (MRCs), an increase in collection points at MRCs for small electrical items and cartons, and coffee pod and vape collection points at HWRCs. Our most recent service improvement is collecting domestic batteries from the kerbside on black bin day.

Our commitment is further demonstrated within our draft waste management strategy which outlines a commitment to increase our recycling rate to 60% by 2030 and reduce the amount of waste put into black bins. These improvements will contribute to the achievement of the Council’s pledge to reach Net Zero by 2030. We will be consulting the public on our emerging draft Waste Management Strategy from later month, and we look forward to hearing from all stakeholders to help shape our bold vision for future waste management in West Berkshire.

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

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Item (B) | Executive Meeting on 19 September 2024 |
|-----------------|--|

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

“Regarding the Bond Riverside updates: With the last one being in February 2024. Are we to assume economic regeneration is at a standstill and the council has run out of ideas?”

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration answered:

Executive approved a report in May 2024 which set out the new vision and approach for Bond Riverside, which was publicly available. The website is currently being updated and this will be completed shortly.

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

Item (C)

Executive Meeting on 19 September 2024

(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by James Matos:

“What are the council's long-term plans to improve SEND provision in West Berkshire's schools?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

The Council recently published the SEND Strategy for 2024-2029 setting out its ambitions for the support of all children with additional needs. This can be found on the Council website. Work is now underway to develop the plans that will deliver these ambitions. Co-production is key to this work, with parent and carer voices being heard and influencing our approach, and participation to gather the view of children and young people. Alongside this, our work with the Delivering Better Value programme is seeking to ensure all resources are invested as effectively as possible to support children and young people to have the opportunity to achieve the best possible outcomes. We are looking to increase our provision right the way across the district.

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?”*

James Matos asked the following supplementary question:

“How will your plans effect the number of private placements commissioned by West Berkshire Council which can often be quite expensive and lacking in care”.

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

We would very much like to not use private placements at all and we will phase them out as and when we can, as we provide more of our own places.

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

| | |
|----------|--|
| Item (D) | Executive Meeting on 19 September 2024 |
|----------|--|

(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Alison May:

“There exists evidence that some Waste Contracts dis-incentivise recycling in the form of applying a charge for under utilised originally agreed waste arisings even if it is not used. Noting the new administration's commitment to openness and transparency, how does West Berkshire Council intend to share such known challenges with the citizens they represent?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

In partnership with our waste contractor Veolia, we are committed to and proactively working to improve the amount of waste collected for recycling and driving down the amount of avoidable waste generated by householders. This is demonstrated within our draft waste management strategy which outlines a commitment to increase our recycling rate to 60% by 2030 and reduce the amount of waste put into black bins, while contributing to the Council's pledge to be Net Zero by 2030.

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

Item (E)

Executive Meeting on 19 September 2024

(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by James Matos:

“When the council chooses to use private or other third party provision for our SEND children, how do you ensure the standards of care adopted do not lead to the kind of horrific incidents that we have seen emerge in Walthamstow?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

Before a child is placed in a setting, the Ofsted report of the school is reviewed to ensure that it is suitable to the child's needs, and that the provision is operating at an appropriate standard. The aim is to always place in school that is rated good or better.

If the placement is new to the Local Authority, the SEN Team will aim to visit the setting to be confident regard the quality of provision. Ongoing monitoring is then undertaken through the Annual Review process.

If concerns are raised there is a robust process in place where the Local Authority Designated Officer is informed who would then investigate and determine what if any actions are required.

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?”*

James Matos asked the following supplementary question:

“What measures are in place to monitor and regulate the use of restraint in special educational needs settings within our local area?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

I'll find out the answer for you to that as I do not have it to hand.

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

Item (F)

Executive Meeting on 19 September 2024

(F) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Alison May:

“How much waste does West Berkshire Council and/or their contracted Waste supplier import from other Local Authority areas?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

A very small amount of non-contract waste is accepted for treatment from other Veolia UK contracts. These materials are managed using the available spare capacity at our facilities and do not impact on the ability to manage our own collected materials. The amount of non-contract waste from outside the district currently handled at our facilities each month includes:

- about 650t of garden and food waste;
- about 30t of wood; and
- about 13t of mixed commercial waste.

The use of available spare capacity in this way is beneficial for improving the overall efficiency of operations, and the Council gets a small royalty payment for this. For context, over 70,000 tonnes of waste produced by our households is managed under the contract each year.

(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Tony Vickers:

“How are we, as Highway Authority responsible for keeping roads and public footpaths open to all users, balancing the conflicting legal requirements to protect nesting birds and the literally growing problem caused by climate change of vegetation obstructing public highways, including rural road signs and footways beside roads - especially affecting pedestrians of all ages and those with mobility impairment?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

As Highway Authority we are responsible for the safe passage of all road users and must balance several conflicting requirements including the protection nesting birds.

Most of the hedges along the highway network are the responsibility of the adjacent landowners.

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

| | |
|----------|--|
| Item (B) | Executive Meeting on 19 September 2024 |
|----------|--|

(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

“In the light of the imminent imposition of VAT on private education fees, what assurance can the Lead Member for Education give to all West Berkshire parents that their children will be educated in a school of their choice.”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

There is a sufficient surplus of places at point of entry, Years R and 7, to accommodate expected levels of additional demand. Whilst families can indicate school preferences, these can't be guaranteed and places will be offered as per the published oversubscription criteria, if more applications are received than places available at a particular school. In-year demand in other year groups will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will depend on the location, the preferences made and the availability of places in that particular cohort. Overall, it is anticipated that there will be sufficient places at district level.



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

Item (C)

Executive Meeting on 19 September 2024

(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Can you explain how clawing back over £2million from Brookfields School, a specialist SEN school, is in the best interests of pupils with special educational needs?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

The West Berkshire Scheme for Financing Schools approved by the School's Forum includes provision for the clawback of excessive reserves in line with the Department for Education regulations. This provision was introduced to ensure resources made available to schools were spent in a timely manner, and not accrued to an excessive level in school's bank accounts. Where a clawback is made, these funds are reinvested to support the delivery of services to pupils with additional needs. This ensures the maximum level of resources are invested in supporting children to achieve the best outcomes possible. As you know, and the Leader has mentioned this just now, a review is taking place and should be finalised next week so 'watch this space'.

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 Ross Mackinnon asked the following supplementary question:

“Never mind the £2million or whatever the review figure spits out at the end of the process, how can withdrawing any money from a specialist special needs school be in the best interest of special needs pupils?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

If they are not spending it on those children, then it is not in their interest. It at least is going to be re-distributed to the children that need it.

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

Item (D)

Executive Meeting on 19 September 2024

(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Leader of the Council by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Do you think it is acceptable that a review into clawback balances for 2024-25 is still ongoing nearly 6 months into the financial year?”

The Portfolio Holder for Leader of the Council answered:

The School's Forum took the decision to proceed with the clawback of excessive reserves following the receipt of school budget plans in May. This led to decision about the level of clawback being made in July.

Following feedback from schools, a review of the clawback process was initiated, (I initiated that on 25 July in this Chamber). Due to school holidays, this could not be completed until September. We gave all schools the opportunity to put in submissions until 11 September, which was a few days ago, because clearly, they were out for the summer break.

Within two months we are in a position to, having visited the schools most affected, and we are talking about four schools out of a group of eighty schools, so let us get a bit of perspective on this. It is unfortunate that this has extended the process, but the question talks about why this review is still ongoing nearly six months into the year, and I would put it to you that it will be a review of slightly less than two months (impacted by the school holidays).

I think we would have probably done it within about four weeks, had the holiday not got in the way. It has extended the process, but appropriate time was allowed for schools to fully respond to the review and for this information to be properly assessed. We are just about there, so next week I will be making a statement, and we will show the different workings as a result of those submissions. Councillor Mackinnon, it is not six months, it is two months for the review. I said in the Chamber a couple of weeks ago at the Council meeting it is a serious review and next week you will find out just how seriously we have taken it.

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 Ross Mackinnon asked the following supplementary question:

“The fact remains that we are nearly six months into the financial year and that review is ongoing which is the parameters of my question, so I think my question is accurate. With the benefit of hindsight Councillor Brooks do you think you could have managed this one a little bit better?”

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

The Portfolio Holder for Leader of the Council answered:

I think what we are doing now is absolutely necessary and I think we will end up with a good result for all of the people and all of the children of West Berkshire. We will have helped protect the Council from an ever-increasing high needs block deficit. We will have shown the Department for Education that we are going to take this seriously, that we are going to try and make an impact on that so that when the government finally relent and give us an amount of money right across the country, which in my experience is never 100% of the challenge, but we will have made an impact on that. We will have shown the Department for Education that we are not going to leave the schools growing their reserves without necessarily committing them and therefore those reserves if you remember Councillor Mackinnon had grown to £13.5 million across the district. I think this review will be shown to be very fair, and we will have protected the Council, the children and all the people of West Berkshire by taking some tough decisions. I have said to all the schools that we have visited the clawback will be an annual process so now it will not be a surprise in any way. They will know in future that the clawback calculations will be made and that may encourage them to commit their funds as quickly as possible in consultation with us and we will do everything we can to help them get those funds as quickly as possible.

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

Item (E)

Executive Meeting on 19 September 2024

(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Community Engagement by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Residents in Bradfield Southend have long reported poor to non-existent mobile signal in many parts of the village and surrounding areas. What can the council do to improve mobile coverage in this and other “not-spots”?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Community Engagement answered:

There are 3 major networks covering the village of Bradfield Southend; Vodafone, O2 and Three UK. Barriers preventing development, such as cost, may mean that alternative options need to be considered.

We have been successful in improving the network across West Berkshire, through the Digital Infrastructure Group partnership (DIG). Our overall 4G network outdoor coverage provided by at least one mobile operator has improved from circa 55% in 2014 to 99.99% by West Berkshire being open to business and encouraging Mobile Network Operators to invest.

We have partnered with Vodafone on a pilot implementation of a new innovative technology “OpenRAN” at the 6 Bells in Beenham to provide an improved 4G network to a rural village. Vodafone now plan to commercialise this solution.

We are currently looking at ways to map out “not spots” and will be working with our deliver partner to do this in the most effective way.

By leveraging these options, we can work towards ensuring reliable mobile coverage across Bradfield Southend and surrounding regions.

If any residents have specific issues, please get them to contact the DIG team and we will see what we can do to help them.

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 Ross Mackinnon asked the following supplementary question:

“Will you work with me to help residents do that and to help their mobile signal in an area that has long struggled?”

The Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Community Engagement answered:

I am more than happy to work with you Councillor Mackinnon to assist your residents. The only thing that I would say is that we obviously have to be mindful that we are working with private mobile network operators. The Council can only do so much, but we need to bring those other partners involved, and if those other partners have concerns then obviously, they need to be addressed as part of that process as well. Absolutely, in terms of improving mobile connectivity it is something that I stand full

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

square behind. I can't tell you how annoying it is when you travel into an area and you are unable to use your phone, so fully understand where you are coming from. I do understand the situation that your residents are in. if there is anything I can do to assist you, and your residents then please reach out.

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

| | |
|----------|--|
| Item (F) | Executive Meeting on 19 September 2024 |
|----------|--|

(F) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Deputy Leader; Planning and Housing by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“What assurances can you give residents and campaigners that Pincent's Hill will not be developed for housing as part of the Local Plan?”

In the absence of the Deputy Leader; Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing it was agreed that the question would be answered at the meeting of Council on 26 September 2024.



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

Item (G)

Executive Meeting on 19 September 2024

(G) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“How many West Berkshire pensioners are likely to lose their Winter Fuel payments as a result of the Government’s withdrawal of the allowance?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

At the moment there are 32,857 residents over the age of 65 in West Berkshire. We are currently trying to quantify the exact number who will lose their winter fuel payment as a result of the government’s withdrawal of the allowance.

The current estimate is roughly 93% of those residents, so approximately 30,600 residents of West Berkshire are over the age of 65 who currently receive the winter fuel allowance we estimate to be losing that with the change in policy.

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 Ross Mackinnon asked the following supplementary question:

“Do you consider that this policy change by central government will put additional pressure on the Household Support Fund, which the Council administers?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

Probably yes and one of the things we are looking to do as an Administration is, those pensioners who are not claiming the various pension credits which would make them qualify for the winter fuel allowance, we are exploring avenues to see if they can come into West Berkshire Council to have their forms completed and things like that. We are actively looking at potential to increase the participation of pensioners who at the moment, for whatever reason are not applying for the winter fuel allowance which they would do under the change. So, I would guess there would be an increase in the number of pensioners that will be actively looking at this particular scheme.

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

Item (H)

Executive Meeting on 19 September 2024

(H) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Will you abide by the result of the consultation into the extension of pedestrianisation of Newbury town centre?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

We will wait until we have the feedback and the feedback is reviewed and analysed of this pre-trial and pre-experimental consultation.

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 Ross Mackinnon asked the following supplementary question:

“I realise I was unfair to you earlier on when I waved my ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ piece of paper at you, because I should have included another option which was ‘Maybe’, and that really does include all the options. So, I am going to put you on the spot and if the feedback is negative towards the pedestrianisation, will you abide by it; ‘yes, no or maybe?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

I think it would be unfair of me to pre-empt any feedback from the consultation at this point.

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

| | |
|----------|--|
| Item (I) | Executive Meeting on 19 September 2024 |
|----------|--|

(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Deputy Leader; Planning and Housing by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“If the Local Plan had completed its examination and adoption process before the Labour Government doubled its housing targets for West Berkshire, what protection would the district have had from these new targets?”

In the absence of the Deputy Leader; Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing it was agreed that the question would be answered at the meeting of Council on 26 September 2024.

This page is intentionally left blank