

# Questions and Answers

**Executive**  
**Thursday 7 November 2024**

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<b>Item (A)</b>	Executive Meeting on 7 November 2024
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**(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Ian Hall:**

*“If the target is to increase recycling plastics to 60% , what happens to the plastics that aren’t recycled, are they used for energy ?”*

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

Thanks for your question.

Our key priority is to help residents to avoid generating waste as much as practicable. Then we aim to maximise recycling. This is the reason why we have been taking steps to make it easier for residents to recycling a wider range of materials. For waste types which are not presented for recycling and are put in the black bin, it is preferable to send them to energy recovery facilities rather than landfill.

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**(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Tom Westerman:**

*“Given that Northcroft Leisure Centre is a publicly funded facility, can the Council clarify why the decision to close the multifunctional squash courts was made without a thorough public consultation and scrutiny, and whether an assessment has been conducted to ensure that the proposed changes provide value for money and meet the needs of the community, especially with the rising popularity of squash and its inclusion in the 2028 Olympics?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside answered:**

“Thank you for your question; I appreciate that there is some concern from the local squash community about the renovation and development work at Northcroft Leisure Centre and the resulting relocation of squash provision to solely Kennet Leisure Centre. This allows the space at Northcroft, previously allocated to squash, to be repurposed to meet the evolving requirements of the wider population, specifically an enhanced softplay area for young children and studio and specialised exercise space for individuals with specific health conditions. This will maximise the use of this area to increase physical activity levels, whilst ensuring that there remains squash provision locally, at Kennet Leisure Centre in Thatcham.

This decision was accepted as part of the specification for the design for the renovation works and the decision was shared publicly on 15<sup>th</sup> July. Whilst disappointing to the squash community at Northcroft, it reflects the national decline in demand for squash provision. Sport England data from June 2023 revealed a significant drop in both regular (over 10%) and occasional (27%) play between November 2019 and November 2022.

As the decision to close the courts at Northcroft and focus provision at Kennet reflected the declining demand for the courts, public engagement was undertaken via direct communication by Everyone Active to those that had registered as users of the courts. It was also reported via Newbury Today. As previously stated, this change to the facilities at Northcroft reflects the declining demand for squash provision and supports the commerciality of the leisure contract with Everyone Active.”

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

*“West Berkshire District Council has recently stated during the September meeting of Executive that 42% of black bin residual waste could be recycled. This therefore suggests 58% of black bin residual waste is subject to a recycling process. How and by what means is 58% recycled?”*

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

“Our analysis of black bin content shows that 42% of materials put in could have been presented for recycling. The remaining amount is waste that cannot reasonably be recycled due its composition which includes items such as pet bedding, hygiene products, blister backs and plastic film. We currently do not recycle materials put into the black bin partly because they are heavily contaminated, and it is difficult to manage the quality of these items. We encourage residents to present materials for recycling using the recycling containers we provide or by sending the items to our recycling centres or using the mini-recycling centres located in West Berkshire.”

**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?”*

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

*“The 58% element then is destined for incineration and landfill, that seems to be an increasing trend. There exist opportunities to further improve upon the 58% element. Has the council considered how soft plastics could be collected and combined with those now collected by supermarkets and how nappies could be processed in ways now being tried out in Wales?”*

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

“Yes, the 58% is an opportunity for us to increase our recycling. We have been out to consultation on our Draft Waste Management Strategy which details the next steps we have been looking at. We are continually looking to evolve how we recycle curb side, for example we have recently introduced batteries and are imminently looking at pots, tubs and trays in the near future. We are continually looking at how we evolve that as we go.”

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**(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by John Gotelee:**

*“Does the council maintain a flooding assets register and if so could you please tell me what if any assets (private or council owned) are mentioned from the exit of the Thames Water sewer to the culvert under the entrance to Tesco inclusive?”*

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

“Yes, the flood risk asset register is currently being updated and screened to ensure that all assets contained within have been appropriately allocated. The highway drainage asset register is a live database which is updated as the network is maintained.

The watercourse, culvert and associated downstream structures south of London Road are listed on the register.”

**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:**

*“I actually asked the officers for this back in January and have just been blocked at every point. Is there any way I can actually see the register?”*

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

“Both will be shared on a single web page as part of wider digital updates planned over the coming months.”



**(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Alan Pearce:**

*“In November 2023, the Council confirmed that the (capital) costs to date to bring football back to Faraday Road was £230,000 (“Cost to date £185,516.83 for utility and perimeter fencing costs and high-level goal catcher fencing”). Please can the Council provide a detailed breakdown of all the ADDITIONAL costs, capital, and revenue, that has been or will be incurred from November 2023 to end of the 2024 / 25 football season (May 2025).”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

“As the Portfolio Holder is away I will answer your question. I am so pleased that football is coming back to Faraday Road and that Newbury Football Club will play their first game on Saturday. Since November 2023 the costs and commitments to date are as follows:

- The preparation of the football pitch and the surrounding grounds including the ball catch fencing is £79,500.
- The Installation of previously supplied changing rooms, clubhouse and toilet facilities is £58,500
- The covered stand cost £17,000
- The Portable and moveable flood lighting cost £5,000
- The Portacabin connection to utilities cost £17,000
- The Security fencing and pitch side spectator barriers cost £16,600
- The short-term hire of a portaloos for public use cost £485
- The Plumbing cost £27,500
- The provision of electrical connections cost £23,700

Therefore, a total of £395,000. That’s our commitment to the footballers of Newbury through the football community group and to Newbury FC.”

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

**Alan Pearce asked the following supplementary question:**

*“That’s nearly £400,000. Given what has been provided that seems a lot. Would you say that’s value for money to the public purse?”*



**The Leader of the Council answered:**

“I would, it is more complex than people might think in terms of having the utilities and all the facilities available from what was a piece of land. I believe we have done extremely well to bring this into play.

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

*“West Berkshire District council has stated at the September meeting of Executive that 42% of potential black bin residual waste comprises 22% food waste. The redirection of the 22% food waste to the appropriate waste stream suggests only 20% of waste will be classified as black bin residual waste. Can you provide a breakdown of the non-recyclable items that should only be deposited in West Berkshire District Council's black residual waste bins?”*

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

“During our last compositional analysis in August 2023, 42% of the black bin contents were found to be items which could have been recycled if presented in the correct recycling containers. 22% of the black bin contents was food waste, with the other 20% also potentially recyclable. That leaves 58% of the black bin being deemed non-recyclable. The non-recyclable items include pet bedding, hygiene products, blister packs, recyclable plastic film and polystyrene. We will be happy to share with you separately an infographic which shows the detailed breakdown of black bin contents.”

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

*“Given that the entrance to the LRE from the A339 was completed with out an Environmental Impact Assessment how can the regeneration of the LRE be progressed without first completing an EIA? Is there enough money in the budget?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration answered:**

“The Bond Riverside Estate, formerly the London Road Industrial Estate, is under review and exploration by the Council, with potential regeneration being phased and involving work with individual leaseholders and other interested parties so a single EIA may not be appropriate.

However, where leaseholders, working with the Council as freeholder, wish to bring about significant change on their lease plots involving a planning application, such applications will require to be accompanied by all relevant surveys, including environmental, to demonstrate how proposals meet all policy requirement. “

**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:**

*“I am a little confused by your answer. If it is the Council’s land, and they are regenerating it, it would be the Council that would do the environmental impact assessment as is required for every development over one hectare. I believe in this case you’ve used up 980 square metres which is almost a hectare on the junction without an EIA. Am I right in my thinking that an EIA would need completing before any further development could take place?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration answered:**

“Development is going to be phased so that as and when applications come forward the relevant surveys will be completed including the Environmental Impact Assessment.

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

*“West Berkshire District Council (WBDC) has committed to be carbon neutral by 2030 however the proposed forthcoming methodology fails to comprehensively include all applicable Scope 3 emissions. The selective exclusion of certain associated Scope 3 emissions will impact upon the credibility of WBDC aspiration to be carbon neutral by 2030. Can you provide an update on WBDC's current position in relation to Scope 3 emissions?”*

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

Thanks for your question.

We are in the process of refreshing our Environment Strategy, as we at the mid-point for the current 2020 – 2030 Strategy. We will provide further information about our methodology, successes achieved and the next steps towards Net Zero by 2030 in the coming weeks. We will ensure that our methodology is consistent with good industry practice.

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

*“With the dire state of the council finances is there any hope of making money through economic regeneration of the council's assets.”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration answered:**

“Yes there is.”

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**(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Adrian Abbs:**

*“Why are the squash courts being removed at the Northcroft leisure centre?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside answered:**

The Council is investing £4.6 million in a significant dryside refurbishment project of Northcroft Leisure Centre to ensure that it meets the evolving needs of the local population. The demand for squash locally has declined over time, reflecting the national picture. In order to ensure that maximum impact is achieved, meeting the wider and differing needs of local residents, the space available within the Centre, previously allocated to squash, will be repurposed to provide a specialised space for individuals with specific health conditions and extend the soft play area. Alternative squash provision will be available at the Kennet Leisure Centre in Thatcham. This will maximise the use of this area to increase physical activity levels, whilst ensuring that there remains squash provision locally.

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**(B) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Dominic Boeck:**

*“What progress has the Leader made in restoring the confidence of school leaders and PTAs in the Council, following the clawback debacle?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

“As part of the review process that I initiated following the initial decision made by the School’s Forum in relation to the clawback of excessive surpluses from schools, the Portfolio Holder and I offered to meet with all schools that were potentially subject to clawback. Those schools that took up this offer received us very positively and we had good, detailed conversations about the issues that had contributed to the accumulation of their reserves and a wide range of other issues.

The outcomes of the review showed that we listened very carefully to what schools had to say, and the recommendations to School’s Forum were adjusted to reflect this. These recommendations were accepted by the Forum, and only two schools were found to meet the policy in relation to clawbacks.

I have committed that we will establish a twice annual Schools Assembly, the first of which is booked for January, at which the portfolio holder and myself, along with other members of the administration, will invite all schools and Chairs of Governors to discuss how we can work together as effectively as possible.

This administration is committed to supporting our all of our schools to offer every pupil the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Only today I received an email from a Chair of Governors who thanked me for the review and for the outcome. You used the word debacle; I think the debacle is more that the Conservative Minister at the time, Michael Gove, allowed schools in the high needs block across the country to rack up huge debts that we are wrestling to make an impact on. That’s the debacle in terms of the time bomb that has been put on Councils up and down the country which has to be paid for. We are doing all that we can, and I hope that we are developing a good relationship with schools. They know where we are and can come talk to us anytime”

**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 Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:**

*“I am not sure it is fair to blame your handling of the situation on Michael Gove. I am not going to challenge you on the decision you made to clawback money, I am going to challenge you on the fallout. What sort of progress are you making in restoring the trust between Governors, PTAs and the Council? I have had feedback from schools directly and indirectly that there is still a suspicion there and concern that more money will be clawed back.”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

“I refer you to the statement I made in this Chamber. The clawback will be an annual event so it will not surprise to schools. If a school is trying to allocate it is unallocated reserves and this council through our property department is somehow preventing, them from doing this because we are not responding to certain things then let us know. The trust is about doing as we say we will do. We reviewed every line of their allocated reserves, we enabled them to allocate them where we might have been part of the blockage in so allocating them, we did what we said we would do and only two schools had a clawback. We will make sure the process of clawback is fully understood before we begin the process next year.”

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

*“The impending imposition of VAT on private school fees and the increase in the rate of employers’ National Insurance contributions will bring further pressure on the viability of many of West Berkshire’s education settings. What lobbying of government did Council undertake before the Autumn Budget was announce?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:**

No, we did not directly lobby the government regarding the autumn budget. The focus of the Council was in supporting the LGA’s response the LGA Autumn Budget and Spending Review Submission 2024. We are a stronger voice within that as part of a larger group. This set out very clearly the issues many areas are facing in effectively meeting the needs of all children, young people and their families.

**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 Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:**

*“I am disappointed that you did not take the opportunity that you have to lobby government directly. You could have done that as well as engaging with the LGA. Did you think about asking Lee Dillon to speak to ministers about the matter?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:**

“I will refer you back to the fact that we are a member of the LGA which provides an excellent collective voice for Councils across the country. I have personally spoken to our MP Lee Dillon informally and he knows how much pressure there is on schools, and we talk about these things regularly.”

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**(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Community Engagement by Councillor Dominic Boeck:**

*“If victims of antisocial behaviour request a case review, what support does the council provide them?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Community Engagement answered:**

Antisocial Behaviour Case Reviews can be requested if at least three reports from one person within a six-month period have been reported to agencies, the problem is ongoing and there has been either no or an inadequate response from agencies. Persistence of the antisocial behaviour, harm and potential harm and the adequacy of the any response will be considered.

If an antisocial behaviour case review is called, the needs and support for the victim will be discussed at the Review Panel. As this is a multi-agency panel, it is for the lead agency to liaise with the victim, provide advice and support and very often the Council is not the lead agency. They will be advised of the outcome of the review and of any necessary actions

Alternative approaches may be undertaken if it is deemed that case review is not appropriate, but the problems need to be addressed e.g. case conference, problem solving meeting, referral to Mini Maps and the monthly multi-agency meeting.

**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 Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:**

*“Thank you for that comprehensive response. Aldermaston Parish Council raised an antisocial behaviour case in July 2023. I’ve attended meetings with multiple agencies, local landowners, residents and nothing is happening. I spoke to the Leader about a month ago who promised me a meeting and nothing is happening. People in my community are living in fear and I want to know what the Council is going to do to move this forward?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Community Engagement answered:**

“Whilst I fully understand the needs of your community, I myself have emails in my inbox from my own residents who are suffering from anti-social behaviour and nuisance, what I would say is the case that you’ve referred to was deemed to be not appropriate for a case review. That is not to say that the issues are not serious nor that as Portfolio Holder I am not motivated to try and help you resolve those issues for your residents. If you have issues, or residents with outstanding queries that they think are not being answered or feel that the Council could do more, then please reach out to me.”

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