

# Questions and Answers

**Executive**  
**Thursday 12 December 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.



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

*“Noting the inter-relationship between WBDC's Waste Strategy and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy combined with WBDC's commitment to the Environment will WBDC agree to commission an Environmental Report which at a minimum will provision Councillors with the assurance WBDC's Waste Strategy will be determined upon an imperative and necessary evidence base?”*

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

Thank you for your question.

The Council recognises the importance of having a comprehensive and evidence-based approach to developing its strategies. This has been the case for the development of the emerging Waste Management Strategy, which we recently undertook an extensive public consultation on between September and November 2024. The feedback obtained during the consultation is currently being analysed before a finalised strategy is published next spring. Further details on the Waste Strategy and the recent consultation can be found on the Council's website (<https://www.westberks.gov.uk/draft-waste-management-strategy>).

To assist with the development of the Waste Strategy, we appointed Eunomia Research and Consulting Ltd, as our external technical advisors. Eunomia is an industry-leading environmental consultancy whose approach is informed by a strong track-record of working with other local authorities, ensuring that the strategy reflects best practice and is tailored to the specific needs of our community. The emerging Waste Strategy also considered linkages with other Council strategies, and national policy and regulatory requirements. Separately, the Council's Environment Strategy will be refreshed over the next 5 months and our waste management approach will be considered as part of measures that are helping the Council to achieve greater environmental stewardship.

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

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Item (B)

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

**(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by John Gotelee:**

*“What is the cost to the taxpayer of servicing the council's borrowing?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:**

In the current financial year, West Berkshire Council is forecasting interest repayments of £8.0 million and principal repayments of £4.2 million. The weighted average cost of borrowing interest rate wise is 3.84%.

**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:**

*“That seems quite a lot, but which way is it going. Are you paying down the loans or is it going to get worse for next year and the rest of this year?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:**

The weighted average cost of borrowing is 3.84%. Interest rates are higher than that, so if we are borrowing more money, we will end up paying a little bit more than that over the long term.

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

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Item (C)

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

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

*"I understand that the Council, within the last six months, placed an order with consultants to provide a report regarding the viability of installing a 3G pitch at the Faraday Road Football Ground. If this is the case, please can the Council confirm the cost of this work and where it has been documented in the response to Executive public question (E) on the 7th of November 2024"*

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

The Executive Public Question which Mr Pearce refers to appears to relate to costs directly connected to the return of football at Faraday Road. Consultancy costs in relation to a design and feasibility study on the potential installation of an artificial pitch is entirely separate from the commencement of football in November 2023 and the current work to accommodate Newbury FC's competitive matches.

The procurement of consultants looking at the potential for a 3g pitch is set out in 3 phases, however at this stage it is only intended to commission phase 1 which is for a Design and Feasibility Study. The cost of the 1<sup>st</sup> phase is £26,975.

**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?"*

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

*"I wasn't expecting that answer and am, quite confused by it. Could I ask you to send a copy of the tender response of the people doing the work so that I can better understand what they are doing?"*

#### **The Leader of the Council answered:**

I am not sure that we can Sir, as that would be commercial in confidence wouldn't it? The bidders would not want us to share the tender responses and that would be irregular. You could put in an FOI request but I think the tenderers will request some redaction, so bear that in mind.

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

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Item (D)

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

### **(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Paul Morgan:**

*"In March 2024 (the "Settlement Date") the Council received a £25 Million (£5 Million x 5) loan from the PWLB. In response to questions from a member of the public and a Councillor it was advised that this money was to be "used to finance capital expenditure" but also "to fund short term cash requirements" and "for an overdraft for high needs block". Please can the Council clarify and provide full details of how much of £25 Million has been used / allocated / spent and what it has been specifically used for.*

*1)How much of this £25 Million has been spent / utilised year to date?*

*2)What are the specific capital projects that have or will be funded in this FY from the £25 Million?*

*3)Specific details on how much has / will be required to fund short term cash flow requirements?*

*4)Specific details on how much has / will be required for high needs block overdraft?"*

### **The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:**

Thank you for your question.

The PWLB loan of £25 million was fully utilised in financial year 2023/24 (i.e. prior to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024). The annual capital programme and outturn position of capital projects undertaken in 2023/24 has been published, key projects financed in 2023/24 included Special Educational Needs provision within school settings, planned enhancements to school establishments, completion of the Newbury Lido, and purchasing of additional temporary housing across the district.

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

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**Item (E)**

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

**(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Paula Saunderson:**

*“Given the amount of National Press coverage of Local Planning Authorities concerns over the increase in Housing Targets, and in line with other LPAs, will WBC LPA please consider publishing its Response(s) to the recent NPPF Consultation and any response given to DHCLG correspondence on the doubling of our Housing Delivery Targets?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

The Council does not normally publish responses to such consultations on its website because there are a large number of consultations across the council and the ability to display these on our website is limited. But I can confirm that we expect it to be made available through the background information the government publishes when it responds to the consultation on the NPPF. Should you wish to have a copy of the Council's consultation response we can share this.

**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?”*

**Paula Saunderson asked the following supplementary question:**

*“I've seen responses from East Hampshire and Somerset etc. on both those subjects and we've got some more coming up on the White Paper for devolution and the reform of planning committees, and some of us do sign up to a planning policy newsletter. I am just wondering if some of it could be added to that communication channel”.*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

I will pass that on to the Portfolio Holder and Head of Place and see what we can do.

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

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Item (F)

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

### **(F) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Richard Bobrocki:**

*“Please can the Council confirm the current and former members of the Procurement Board together with the board meeting dates and attendees, during this current administration?”*

#### **The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:**

The Procurement Board meets monthly, and specific dates can be shared if so desired.

The Procurement Board Terms of Reference were amended in November 2024 therefore we have included members under the previous Terms of Reference which were in place until October 2024 as well as the current members:

ToR May 2023 to October 2024

- Executive Director/S151 Officer (resources) – Chair
- Head of Commissioning and Procurement
- Legal Services Representative
- Financial services representative
- Service Managers and procurement officers to attend for their specific agenda items
- Directorate representatives
- Corporate Category Manager (standing items on contract awards and upcoming renewals)
- Commissioning and Procurement Administrator (scheduling and administration)

ToR November 2024 onwards

- S151 Officer – Chair
- Service Lead Commissioning and Procurement
- Legal Services Manager
- Financial Services representative
- Service Managers, Category Managers, Procurement Officers and service representatives to attend for their specific agenda items only
- Commissioning and Procurement Administrator (scheduling and administration)

**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?”*



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

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**Richard Bobrocki asked the following supplementary question:**

*“Would it be possible, even if it is redacted, to have a list of the attendees and a copy of the minutes of those meetings?”*

**The Monitoring Officer answered:**

They would be internal working documents. You are clearly within your rights to submit a formal request, and we are required then to give you due consideration in accordance with the legislative framework. I suspect that they will be commercially sensitive, and they are part of a process that will lead to a decision that is often taken in public so that would also be another ground for exemption. Certainly, if you wish to submit a request that is your entitlement.

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

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Item (G)

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

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

*“What was the cost of Ardent designing the Rain Gardens in Faraday rd and as they are clearly flawed in design is there any way of getting that money back?”*

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

Total design cost, including planting schedule, is £11,750. The costs are externally funded by the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership. A significant part of the drainage design is below ground and functions in accordance with the designs done, and the above ground works conform with Highway standards.

**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:**

*“Thank you for that answer. The purpose of these gardens was, I believe, twofold, one was aesthetic, and the other was partial sustainable drainage systems (SuDS). The aesthetic is an absolute mess, so the SuDS, if I can just read one sentence from the Environmental Appraisal report: ‘sustainable drainage systems and below ground attenuation storage will not be acceptable, and that significant space will be needed for ‘at ground’ level suspended drainage systems’. So, it’s failed on that so shouldn’t the taxpayer have their money back?”*

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

Firstly, the rain gardens from an aesthetic point of view have been designed to improve the overall look of the estate to encourage investment into it. It’s a shame that vehicles have driven over areas of it as I’m sure you well know and we are looking at putting mitigations in place, and again there is money which will be externally funded and provided to do that, but it is a shame. The planting will be done soon as well and that will complete the project itself. From the sustainable drainage perspective, I am not a drainage engineer. I can come back to you with a more detailed response once I have spoken to officers, but Ardent who have put together the designs are an award winning multi-disciplinary civil engineering consultancy, and they do have specialists in flood risk, water and drainage. I know from a lay person’s perspective I would very much assume that they have designed it correctly, but I am happy to come back to you on the specifics if you wish.

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

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**Item (H)**

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

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

*"I understand that the Council, within the last six months, placed an order with consultants to provide a report regarding the viability of installing a 3G pitch at the Faraday Road Football Ground. If this is the case, please can the Council describe the Invitation to Tender (ITT) / brief, so I can understand what the report is going to cover."*

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

The tender brief covers three phases: Detailed design including feasibility, planning permission, and procurement and supervision of a 3g pitch facility. The full ITT brief can be provided.

**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?"*

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

*"Can I just clarify, was the figure that you said earlier, £28,000 for this work?"*

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

*As I said to your earlier question, Phase 1 has been commissioned and that is for the design and feasibility study and the cost for that was £26,975.*

**Alan Pearce asked the following question:**

*"Would you meet with me after? I was expecting that figure to be more like £60,000 for the work needed.*

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

You are a ward resident, and I am quite happy to meet with you as a ward resident and so we will meet outside this meeting and have a discussion about it.

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

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Item (I)	Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024
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**(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Paula Saunderson:**

*“As part of the forthcoming additional Public Consultation on the Local Plan Review 2023-2041 Main Modifications please will WBC LPA consider holding Local Staffed Exhibitions for Areas with significant impacts from Site Allocations, especially those added later in the plan cycle which have not been included in previous Consultations?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

I can confirm that we will be undertaking consultation in accordance with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and the statutory requirements for consultation.

The SCI states that we will:

- Make all relevant documentation available during formal consultation periods at the Council's offices in Market Street, Newbury.
- Place all relevant documentation on the Council's website [www.westberks.gov.uk](http://www.westberks.gov.uk).
- Send all relevant consultation documentation (either electronic or paper) to statutory/specific consultees.
- Make formal consultation documentation available (either electronic or paper) through all public libraries across the District.
- Notify all those registered on our electronic database as and when appropriate.

We will therefore meet our statutory requirements but are unable to go beyond that at this formal late stage. This approach is in recognition of the resources the Council has 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?”*

**Paula Saunderson asked the following supplementary question:**

*“I recognise that it is at a late stage but at no stage were there any Staff Exhibitions undertaken and this is out of step with other LPA's that I monitor and who are going through Local Plan reviews now. Your statement of community involvement does not preclude these. I would like you please to consider, if there are any more consultations trying to include these because they get to the hard to reach and those that are not digitally enabled, which is 15% of the West Berkshire population.”*



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### **The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:**

I am grateful for that, and I will take that away. I do know, and I think Councillor Stewart would have been there and I think Councillor Gaines went to a public meeting around the Pincents Hill site, and so Mrs Saunderson where there are meetings, we will attend. But I will take it away and consider it.

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

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Item (J)	Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024
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**(J) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Richard Bobrucki:**

*“With respect to the Faraday Road Football Ground, it looks like the Council, since June 2023, has placed a significant number of contracts valued at over £9,999. Can the Council please confirm: a) how many contracts in total have been placed that are over £9,999 but less than £49,999, and b) how many contracts in total have been placed that are over £50,000.”*

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

- To date 6 purchase orders have been raised for amounts over £9,999 but less than £49,999
- There are 2 purchase orders have been raised for amounts over £49,999.

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

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Item (K)

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

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

*“In what way has economic regeneration made a positive or negative contribution to the councils finances?”*

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

West Berkshire Council delivers economic regeneration projects through working with the town and parish councils, residents, businesses and community groups to develop regeneration projects that best meet community needs. The Newbury Town Centre Masterplan and Hungerford and Thatcham Town Centre Strategies are examples of place improvement projects which aim to bring more residents and visitors into our town centres, supporting the district's economy. The Council had also been supporting small rural businesses across the district to diversify for growth through the rural business capital grant scheme, helping to boost the local rural economy.

**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:**

*“That didn't quite answer the question, really I was looking at the economic bit, are we plus or minus? Is it costing us money the economic regeneration? I am very aware that funds are tight in West Berkshire Council and so regeneration to me would be building up industry and profits from that way?”*

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

I'd say with any local council regeneration would normally have a positive impact. There would be new businesses coming in and so there would be an increase in business rates and revenue. Anything that attracts more visitors into our town centres and into our district and boosts local tourism and local spending is going to have a positive impact as well. If we are helping businesses to grow and diversify again and we are creating more employment as well which I can specifically say is the case with some of the small rural businesses, we have given grants to. It is enabling them to actually expand their workforce which is fantastic, so yes, overall, it has a positive effect.

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

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Item (L)

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

**(L) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Alan Pearce:**

*“My understanding is any member of the public that is not a member of Newbury Community Football Group can have no input into decisions taken by the Faraday Road Football Ground steering group. Please would the leader of the Council (Who is also the Chairman of the steering group) consider allowing me to join the steering group so there can be some input from someone not associated with any football group or political party, but who has a vested interest in how the Faraday Football Ground and surrounding designated employment area (DEA) is developed?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

Any member of the public would be able to attend this at the invitation of the Newbury Community Football Group, as they are the body with Newbury Football Club itself who we are consulting. I give you that as the route into those meetings and look forward to seeing you if they believe that adds something to the discussion.

**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?”*

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

*“I find it incredible actually. I have a lot of knowledge with planning and the whole situation with Faraday Road. So, you won't invite me personally yourself then?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

No. I have given you a route into that meeting and if they wish you to come along, I will welcome you to the discussion.

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**(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration by Councillor Martha Vickers (asked at the meeting by Councillor Phil Barnett):**

*“What is the Peace Garden on Newbury Wharf costing this Council and do you consider this value for money?”*

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

The implementation of the Peace Garden project is the first stage of improvements to Newbury Wharf. The construction cost for the improvements to the Peace Garden of £422,000 is funded from the external funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership. However, it is still extremely important that value for money is delivered.

I do believe this project is value for money. The Peace Garden was not an inviting place to be and was not being used to its best potential, particularly as it is a prime waterside location in the town centre. Improvements to the garden will enlarge it and turn it into a really welcoming green space with paths and play areas where everyone will be able to walk and relax. There will also be dedicated accessible parking for cars as well as parking for motorbikes and bicycles. The taxi rank will also stay where it is, as will the public toilets.

The overall vision for Newbury Wharf is to transform it into a highly appealing town centre destination for both our residents and our visitors. The changes will improve the public green space for residents, boost tourism along with local spending and encourage walking, which will in turn support health and wellbeing for residents and visitors.

Newbury Wharf is a key part of the town centre. It is also a historic site and we should absolutely be maximising this, and I'd like to also add Chair and Councillor Barnett that I visited the site today and it is fantastic even though works are in progress. It is really taking shape well. I talked to a couple of the contractors on the site and one of them told me that they had received a lot of positive feedback already from passers by which is good news.

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

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Item (B)	Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024
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**(B) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:**

*“Does the Leader agree that Opposition members represent their residents, and as such, questions that they ask at Council and Executive meetings should be answered clearly and directly, regardless of how politically uncomfortable that may make members of the Executive?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

Of course we should answer questions clearly, directly and irrespective of how politically uncomfortable that they may make us. I feel uncomfortable most of the time because it is a tough role, and you are there to be shot at for sometimes very good reasons.

We certainly should and I think we really try to do so and I have tried as a Leader to be very open to the public, and open in these meetings.

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

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**Item (C)**

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

### **(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Dominic Boeck:**

*“What is the annual cost to the Council of maintaining the grass pitch at Faraday Road?”*

#### **The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:**

Provision of £18,000 per annum, i.e. £1,500 per month, has been made for the maintenance of the Faraday Road pitch and for the maintenance of associated buildings. This sum includes; pre-season preparation, in season repairs including verti-draining and topdressing, weekly cutting and pitch markings. Also includes the cleaning of the changing rooms and clubhouse.

**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:**

*“You haven't really answered my question. You have told me about the pitch plus a lot of other things as well. Could you tell me what the cost would be to maintain a modern 3G pitch, if you have considered it?”*

#### **The Leader of the Council answered:**

We don't have a modern 3G pitch there at the moment.

#### **Councillor Dominic Boeck commentd:**

The administration has chosen to forego a 3G pitch elsewhere in favour of this.

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

As mentioned earlier, there is a design and feasibility study going out for a 3G pitch at Faraday Road. We have not had the results of that yet and obviously that will inform our decisions going forward.

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

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Item (D)

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

**(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:**

*“Does the “Newbury Community Football Group” have, or at any time had, a say in who can use the pitch at Faraday Road?”*

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

Newbury Community Football Group represent Newbury FC (senior men's and women's team), AFC Newbury (boys' and girls' teams), CSA 07 football club which form the two key youth football teams in Newbury representing approximately 600 children, Procision which is a local football academy working in conjunction with Newbury College. That forms part of the Newbury Community Football Group (NCFG) umbrella and NTFG have been involved in the Faraday Road Steering Group in support of measures to enable league football to return to Faraday Road.

It was always the intention that Newbury FC would return to play league football at this site. The Steering Group also discuss how spare pitch capacity is allocated, for example for matches on Sunday mornings and afternoons as any additional allocation may have an impact on the capacity for Newbury FC to fulfil league fixtures. The state of the pitch has to be at a certain level to allow football league matches to be played. Final say on allocations is however, a matter for the council to determine, and this has always been the practice even when your administration ran the council.

**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 don't think Councillor Foot addressed my earlier point, because the question I asked was about how you chose which groups to work with, which I don't think has been answered. Members of the Newbury Community Football Group have called me in public a ‘f\*\*\*wit’, I and my colleagues have been called ‘s\*\*\*houses’ in public. I personally have been called ‘a fraud who takes backhanders’, and collectively the previous Executive were called ‘typical lying Tory b\*\*\*\*\*’. That's from the group itself. On their social media sites, they have allowed comments to be posted which say that ‘we were arsonists, we burned the clubhouse down for the insurance money’, ‘we were c\*\*\*\*’. We did not get the benefit of the censoring and some of you may think that it is rich that Ross Mackinnon is saying this, given ‘he dishes it out’, but it is hurtful.*

*My question really, and it's a very serious one, is that is it really good judgment to have invited a group, and people like that to work with the council, into the offices to have a say in how Council assets are used?”*

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

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### **The Leader of the Council answered:**

I will say that I have not heard about that abuse before and it clearly did not happen yesterday, it has been happening for a while and I wish you had told me that. Let me be quite clear, this Administration, Executive, and me will never condone that sort of abuse, it is totally out of order and beyond inappropriate.

### **Councillor Ross Mackinnon answered:**

I appreciate that answer, and I have spoken about it publicly at previous Executive's during the administration. I have bought it up, but I appreciate the answer that you have just given.

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

Can I also add to the Leader's comments. I was completely unaware that this has been going on and like all of us, we wholeheartedly condemn that sort of behaviour. I have to say to you that during the steering group meetings that I have sat in on I have never come across a hint of that sort of behaviour from the people we have had in the room. If I may, you said just now that I didn't answer the question as to how we chose Newbury Community Football Group, but if I can read back the question to you it says "does Newbury Community Football Group have, or at any time had, a say in who can use the pitch at Faraday Road?". It does not say why did we choose Newbury Community Football Group.

Going back to the bookings, it is exactly the same process that has gone on for a long time with West Berkshire Council allocating pitch time to organised clubs, to allow them to fulfil their fixtures, and then if there is time left over those spaces can then be looked at for being booked out by other organisations but the football league standard for the pitch has to be at a certain level and so the pitch has to be protected so that it is not over-played.

### **Councillor Ross Mackinnon answered:**

The question that I was referring to that you did not answer was the one posed earlier in the meeting, which had been promised an answer at this point.

### **The Leader of the Council answered:**

For several years the Community Football Group has existed to pull together the various football groups and associations locally in order to represent them, and that is why when we ask to discuss or engage we look for a voice that can give us a tremendous amount of information and representation through one body. I understand that Mr Pearce is probably still smarting that I won't allow him to come as an individual to that meeting but there will be many individuals that will wish to represent the voice of football in Newbury, but this group had the loudest voice whether we like it or not. That is as direct an answer as I can give you as to how we engage with an organisation that represented so many football groups

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

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Item (E)

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

**(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Dominic Boeck:**

*“Since the Faraday Road pitch opened in November 2023, how many bookings have been made by members of the public?”*

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

Since November 2023 until start of this current season – approximately 28 bookings. The council's booking software went live at this site in March, prior to the current football season and since then there have been 41 bookings, mostly youth games. In total approximately 69 bookings for mostly youth football have been made at Faraday Road and this equates to about 103.5 hours of football played at the site and that this is pretty much the maximum number of hours the site can currently sustain for the reasons that I mentioned earlier.

**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:**

*“How many of those were booked by members of the public?”*

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

As I've just said the booking process is the same booking process that West Berkshire Council has always had. In other words they organise the schedules of pitch allocations based on the organised teams that they have on their sheets, and then if there are spaces left over those can be booked out, to usually organised teams. It is not the case that a group of 22 people can rock up and book a session at Faraday Road because that is not the way West Berkshire Council has operated in the past. Councillor Woollaston was obviously a Portfolio Holder before me and he would, I am sure, support that it is the same booking system.

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

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Item (F)	Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024
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**(F) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:**

*“Manchester City FC moved from Maine Road in 2003. Arsenal FC moved from Highbury in 2006. Hamilton Academical FC moved from Douglas Park in 1994. Does spending hundreds of thousands of pounds on keeping Newbury FC “at its spiritual home”, as the administration told us was its objective at Scrutiny Commission on 26th November, represent a good use of council-taxpayers’ money?”*

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

As we all know in 2018 Newbury Football Club was evicted from Faraday Road. Ultimately the stands were dismantled and removed, the clubhouse burned down, and your Administration spent approximately £191,000 clearing the site. There was a situation where there was ultimately a dog walking meadow on the area of the square where the football ground used to be. During the 2023 local election we campaigned as a group to return football to Faraday Rad and obviously we won that election and the residents as we canvassed them had a huge amount of support for returning the football to Faraday Road. We have actually had to invest in approximately £230,000 to get the ground back to a level to allow Newbury Football Club to perform in the league.

**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:**

*“You mentioned the manifesto, so I think I am on good ground to bring up what that actually says. Your manifesto says ‘immediately returning the grass to bookable football space and agreeing outline plans with NCFG for a new pitch with enhanced stadium facilities. I don’t think that you have returned it to bookable football space, because the public can’t book it. Hundreds of thousands of pounds for one football group to control, does it represent a good use of council taxpayers’ money?”*

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

The simple answer is for me to say yes it does. If I may with all due respect refer you back to what I have already said that Newbury Community Football Group represents Newbury FC (senior men’s and women’s team), AFC Newbury (boys’ and girls’ teams), CSA 07 football club, Procision and recently Cold Ash veterans have applied as a group to book those grounds. The priority is for the organised teams to book first on that pitch which passed its inspection for step seven and the pitch has to be maintained to a certain standard to allow those matches to progress. There is a limit

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

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to the number of matches that can be played on it and as already explained the booking process is that with the spaces available after that other organised groups can book pitch time. There is a charity match in a week's time which exactly fits those criteria. It is incorrect to say that people cannot book that pitch. They just go through West Berkshire Council in the usual way and if there is space it could be booked.

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

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**Item (G)**

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

**(G) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Dominic Boeck:**

*“Burghfield FC, Mortimer FC, AFC Aldermaston, and Hungerford Town FC currently occupy higher places in the FA Football Pyramid than Newbury FC, yet have not benefitted from the council-taxpayer spending hundreds of thousands of pounds to provide them with a ‘spiritual home’, let alone keep them at one. Why has the Council decided to commit taxpayers’ money to provide Newbury FC with such preferential treatment?”*

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

Burghfield FC, Mortimer FC, AFC Aldermaston and Hungerford Town FC have not been evicted from their grounds, whereas Newbury Football Club has. As an aside, Newbury Football Club lost a fair number of their best players because they no longer had a ground in Newbury. Consequently, the team deteriorated, and they got relegated, which is why there are currently playing at a lower level. It seems mad to me that Hungerford FC and Thatcham FC are playing at a really good level amateur football and not Newbury FC. I am really proud that they have their home back and that we can progress and get them moving up the league.

**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 don’t think that there is any way that you can say that it isn’t preferential treatment to spend so much money on a ground for Newbury Football Club. I wonder whether you will consider in due course to give similar support to Burghfield, Mortimer, Aldermaston and Hungerford and perhaps I could ask you to level the playing field?”*

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

If I may I will answer that in two parts. First of all you spent about £191,000 in effect removing the ability for football to be played at Faraday Road, so we have had to invest to get it back to that level. We said that we would do that and that is what we have delivered in 19 months, which I am very proud of.

The playing pitch strategy refresh is ongoing and all those other clubs form part of that playing pitch strategy refresh and the findings of that will be announced in due course.

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

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**Item (H)**

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

**(H) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:**

*“Burghfield FC’s website states: “The club remain intent on establishing a dedicated home location, and work will continue as we look to secure suitable land that can be developed to match our requirements. Our long-term intention is to develop a site that will not only be our home - housing a clubhouse that can be used for events such as our presentation day - but also a place that can be used by schools and the local community offering state of the art facilities and all-weather 4G pitches.” Will the Council commit financial and operational resources to assist Burghfield FC with their mission?”*

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

The Council is currently undertaking a review of the Playing Pitch Strategy which will provide an evidence base for future prioritisation and investment in facilities within 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?”*

**Councillor Ross Mackinnon asked the following supplementary question:**

*“I’ll remind you of what Councillor Brooks said in response to my earlier question and providing clear and direct answers would be nice. ‘Will you commit financial and operational resources to assist Burghfield FC with their mission?’. Their mission appears to be very similar to what Newbury FC have been trying to do. I put it to you that Burghfield never had a ground to be evicted from, and never had the pleasure of a nice Council owned ground. Newbury were not evicted. It was a Council owned ground, and they booked the pitch. All of these other football clubs find their own facilities. So again, will you commit financial and operational resources to Burghfield, or Mortimer, or Aldermaston given that you have £400,000?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

Your distaste for Newbury Football Club over several years is coming out again tonight. Your distaste for this Council righting a wrong and getting our largest and premier team locally back where it makes some economic benefit to the town as well, your distaste for us doing that is very clear, but as Councillor Cottingham said earlier a lot of people voted for us in the Newbury town area, and part of their motivation might have been our intention to get Newbury Football Club back to Newbury and we have done it.



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

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

The playing pitch strategy is being refreshed and so all of these issues that you have raised will be looked at and we will get that evidence base and come back and present that in due course.

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

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Item (I)	Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024
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**(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Dominic Boeck:**

*“The Liberal Democrats made a manifesto commitment in May 2023 to make parking cheaper across the district. What is the average charge today in Council-owned car parks for one hour’s parking on a weekday lunchtime, and how does that compare with May 2023?”*

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

As an administration we have had to take a very pragmatic approach to car park charges given the testing financial situation that we inherited and continue to tackle. We have honoured our commitment to consider a package of lower cost parking in consultation. As you are aware we consulted on a range of car park charges a year ago which have been brought in during this year. We consulted and we listened, and we did make changes to the original proposal and whilst locations have seen a very modest increase in average ticket sale price (around 20p), some specific and targeted sites have seen fees introduced that are lower than those previously.

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

*“What is the average charge, that was the question?”*

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

Parking is a very varied scheme of charges, so it is really hard to give an average price without giving the context of the localised scenarios.

I have a couple if you want me to list them off in terms of localised scenarios:

A good example is the Northcroft Leisure Centre – previously if you wanted to stay over 3 hours the day-time price was £5, and now this is down to £1 and £2 tickets for different stay lengths.

I’ve given you an average where we have seen an average increase of 20p and can provide a raft of examples to illustrate the differences.

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

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Item (J)	Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024
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**(J) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:**

*“What would be the immediate consequences for development in West Berkshire if the Local Plan were to be withdrawn or otherwise struck down?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

It is clear that failure to follow the Instructions is likely to lead to further intervention from Central Government and the production of the Local Plan Review would then be taken over, further eroding any influence on the plan making process locally and leading to additional costs. Central Government would charge the Council for the cost of this intervention. Looking at the NPPF today, it underpins the likelihood of this happening.

The Council would then be required to start the plan making process again, adhering to the revised NPPF and a likely significantly increased housing need (increase from 495 to 1057 under the proposed new methodology), plus the additional cost of a new Plan. This could lead to unacceptable speculative development and costly appeals.

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

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Item (K)

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

**(K) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Dominic Boeck:**

*“With so much money being poured into a football pitch in Newbury which, according to the administration, can only be used for 2 matches per week, and will, we are told, eventually be replaced by a brand new facility, can you explain to residents who use Downland Leisure Centre 4,500 times annually why their facility is threatened with closure to save just £30k per year and cost 5 jobs?”*

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

The Council is currently consulting with the public to understand their view as to whether the Downland Sport Centre should be removed from the leisure operating contract. The consultation closes on 23 December 2024 and the responses will be reviewed to inform any decision.

**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 go back to my question, why would you even consider closing the centre just to save £30,000 per year and at a cost of 5 jobs, particularly when you are pumping money into other sports facilities around the district?”*

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

Nobody said anything about closing a leisure centre. What we are doing is going out to consultation at the moment. The consultation has not closed yet. It will close on 23 December and as I have just said we will look very closely at those responses. I had a very helpful discussion with the head teacher at the Down School yesterday and was shown around the centre by the business manager of the school and we had a constructive conversation. It is not correct to say that the leisure centre is going to be closed down. We are awaiting the results of the consultation and will look at that going forward

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

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Item (L)	Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024
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**(L) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:**

*“Does the administration support the efforts of at least one Liberal Democrat councillor to rally support for, and solicit donations to, a campaign to have the Local Plan set aside by a Judicial Review?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

Any individual member who has the strength of feeling that a development, perhaps in their ward, is damaging, they are entitled to take action such as that suggested in the question. They may well then fetter their discretion in terms of sitting on a planning committee, but there is nothing to stop them doing 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:**

*“Thanks for your previous answer, because it was clear and direct. Given that residents in Bucklebury are being asked to put their hands in their pockets for this, to fund the KC’s opinion for a judicial review on the Plan, and given the consequences that you have just told me, if the Local Plan were to be set aside would the Executive attempt to inform the residents of Bucklebury about those consequences because I don’t think that they are being told the full story?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

I think they are. At the last Council meeting there were statements made when we gave an update on the Local Plan. Those were clear statements that those residents could, and perhaps should, have heard from myself and the Portfolio Holder at the time. The Inspector may come back and say that the Plan is unsound so I think that we have to see how this plays out.

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

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Item (M)	Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024
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**(M) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:**

*“Why have the administration refused to add comments from Thames Valley Police to the consultation website for the proposal to switch off street lights in West Berkshire, despite recognising that the information presented to residents is unbalanced?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:**

The consultation website identifies empirical evidence which supports the proposal. All responses to the consultation will inform the final decision.

Officers have met with Thames Valley Police as part of the consultation and will ensure that any response received from them will be highlighted before any final decision is made. If a decision is then taken to continue with this proposal, the Council will work with Thames Valley Police to ensure that, wherever possible, the views of the Police are accommodated.

**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:**

*“You have changed your mind from the Scrutiny Commission meeting where you recognised that the information presented was unbalanced. My question is ‘are you happy with the reasoning that you have just given me?’. Thames Valley Police’s comments are in opposition to this proposal. It is based on empirical, academic evidence which they do cite. Why would you not include that empirical evidence?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:**

At the time it was getting my understanding as to where that opinion was coming from, whether it was from the Police Crime Commissioner or from Thames Valley Police itself. From my perspective there is no reason why not to include empirical evidence on the impact effect of turning streetlights off. If Thames Valley Police are able to provide that then no problem.

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

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Item (N)	Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024
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**(N) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:**

*“When the last boundary review reduced the number of West Berkshire Councillors from 52 to 43 in 2019, the Conservative administration cut the number of Executive portfolio holders from 10 to 9. On taking control of the Council in 2023 the Liberal Democrats immediately increased the size of the Executive back to 10 members. We are told that the Executive must consider “difficult decisions” like closing leisure centres and cutting the mobile library. Will the Leader revert to 9 Executive members, contributing over £10k per year to the required savings?”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

This was brought up in the budget last year and I said to you at the time that we will keep it under review and that is what I am going to do. The budget is being built and this is being kept under review. Watch this space.

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

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Item (O)

Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024

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

*"Item 6 of the Agenda– Paragraph 2.2 (d) states £0.76m of external funding relating to street lighting improvements, essential maintenance budgets, drainage & flood risk projects and car park improvements is allocated to cover in year expenditure. Is any of this funding earmarked for drainage improvements or flood prevention around Burghfield Bridge?"*

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

Thank you for your question, Councillor Mackinnon, the answer is yes.

**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:**

*"How much?"*

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

Of the £760,000 that was bought forward for use in the current financial year, I can confirm that of the £338,000 was specific to Drainage & Flood Risk, just under £40,000 has been spent already at Burghfield Bridge.

This has funded drainage improvements on the Reading Road, several visits to cleanse the drainage system on Pingewood Road North and an extensive condition survey of the Pingewood Road North drainage system. As a result of this survey, we have identified a couple of improvements which will cost hundreds of thousands of pounds. These will be considered for inclusion in the coming years capital programme, and against other priorities identified in the recent Section 19 report.

**Councillor Ross Mackinnon asked the following question**

You spoke very quickly then, could you just repeat please how much has been spent already and how much has been earmarked for future spending.

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

Just to recap, £338,000 was specific to Drainage & Flood Risk, just under £40,000 has been spent already at Burghfield Bridge, and we have done an initial costing of the works required on the drainage system and that is into the hundreds of thousands of pounds and will be considered for inclusion in the upcoming capital programme.

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

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<b>Item (P)</b>	Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024
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**(P) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:**

*“Item 7 of the Agenda– Appendix A table 1.1 shows £3.9m of transformation funding being allocated to the revenue budget to partly plug the £11m overspend. After this allocation how much is left in the Transformation budget?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:**

Thank you for your question.

In the current financial year there will be £1million of funds left in the transformation budget.

**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:**

*“What is that going to do?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:**

We have plans to top it up which I will discuss with you in Part II of the meeting later, hopefully through the disposal of an asset which we have talked about earlier this evening.

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

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Item (Q)	Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024
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**(Q) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:**

*“Item 12 of the Agenda: Could the proceeds from the sale of commercial property be used to top up the Transformation budget?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:**

Under the use of flexible capital receipts, funds can be allocated for the financing of capital expenditure and to fund transformational expenditure.

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

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Item (R)	Executive Meeting on 12 December 2024
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**(R) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:**

*“Item 14 of the Agenda – paragraph 5.6 - One of the KPIs on the Performance Portal noted as Green is “Agree plans for sports at Faraday Road through working with the local sporting community (31/12/24)”. Which sporting groups did the Council work with to agree its plans for sports at Faraday Road?”*

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

*The Council worked with the Newbury Community Football Group to agree plans for Faraday Road. Newbury Community Football Group represents Newbury FC, and a previous list of representatives that I have mentioned, and it was agreed with Members, that once football commenced at the site in 2023, Newbury FC would return to play their competitive matches at Faraday Road, at the earliest opportunity.*

**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:**

*“So, it appears that NCFG were the only group that you worked with. Is it the case that a prominent Liberal Democrat local politician is a member of the Newbury Community Football Group and isn't it therefore the case that there is lots of money in the pot for your 'muckers' but you are taking the residents for 'suckers'.”*

**The Leader of the Council answered:**

That is a nice soundbite but almost goes to a line of saying that we are corrupt. That is an inference which I resent, and I can give you absolute assurance that does not influence our decision making whatsoever.

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

I've said on numerous occasions this evening that Newbury Community Football Group is an umbrella organisation of several football groups within the Newbury community. It is not right to refer to it as one organisation, it is multiple, and Newbury Football Club is just one member of that.

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