

Questions and Answers

Council
Thursday 17 July 2025

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WestBerkshire
C O U N C I L

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

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

Question (A)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications by Richard Garvie:

"The Leader of the Council says all of the right things about openness and transparency, but the answers members of the public receive when asking questions to this Council often fall short by being vague, lacking in detail or avoid the question all together. Given that questions are now required ten days in advance to allow officers time to prepare a response, will the Leader of the Council make the commitment to ensure the pre-prepared answers actually answer the questions in future and provide sufficient details?"

The Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications answered:

Your question says the Council often falls short by being vague, lacking in detail, or avoiding the question altogether. I do not agree with you at all; those are your words.

We do everything we can to answer questions as they are asked. Some questions are complex and so the answers become complex, it does not mean we are trying to avoid answering.

You say questions need to be submitted ten days in advance, let me get this clear, questions that do not relate to an item of business on the agenda for a meeting in question must be submitted seven clear working days before a meeting, not ten. Questions relating to an item of business on the Meeting Agenda must be submitted no later than two Clear Working Days before the Meeting. This enables officers to review and prepare responses to questions, but it also enables the Portfolio Holder to investigate and not just read the officers response, as I am doing. The words from officers guide me on the issue.

If individuals consider they need to clarify any response provided, they have the ability to ask a supplementary question. At times, this is done in writing after the meeting. These responses are published to ensure transparency and our commitment to openness in our processes.

You know if you provide examples to me, my door and phone line are open to you. I have even responded to you on a Saturday evening while I was preparing for a BBQ. Next week I am also introducing a 'ask the leader' session in order to be able to answer even more questions.

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

Richard Garvie asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you for your answer. I appreciate that yourself and certain other Members respond to questions personally. However, I believe that it is felt that some answers don't respond to the issues being raised. Can the Leader implement a new policy requiring prepared answerers to be submitted to him and the Chief Executive a few days before the meeting to ensure that responses answer the questions provided?”

The Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications answered:

Firstly, I think that all Portfolio Holders try to answer questions well. Also, the process you describe happens already.

If you want to provide any examples of questions you believe have not been answered appropriately, send them to me and we can see if there are any lessons that can be learned.

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

Question (B)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation by Lee Allen:

“Have the councils (West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse) decided where the HQ/Capital of the Council will be?”

The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation answered:

Thank you for your question.

The answer is no. The initial public engagement exercise that we undertook has only just finished for the proposed Ridgeway Council.

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

Lee Allen asked the following supplementary question:

“In Theale, I was told that there would not be a ‘capital’ but that it would be divided up between South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, and West Berkshire. I was wondering if this was true or which option was being used.”

The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation answered:

I think we need to remind ourselves of where we are and that it is far too early to have these types of conversations. We have only just finished the engagement exercise to find out what they think about the Ridgeway proposal and there is a huge amount of work to do between now and November, both in West Berkshire and South and Vale.

This includes Internal governance process, putting it in front of Members, and then submitting it to Government.

I don't want to speculate on what has or hasn't been said but I believe it is too early to have those conversations.

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

Question (C)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(C) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications by Alan Pearce:

“Please would the Council give a comprehensive assessment relating to agenda Item 13 Annual Scrutiny Report 2024/25 Ref 4.3 Items of particular interest described in further detail.

The report states at 3.1.3 “The work of the Sports Hub Task and Finish Group is ongoing”.

However, the Task and Finish group completed its report in the first week of February and the report has not been progressed to the Executive. For some reason after five months, it would appear the scrutiny process has come to a standstill or stalemate, and this is the reason for my question?”

The Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications answered:

Thank you, Mr Pearce.

You talk about the work of the Sports Hub Task and Finish Group, that the report was completed in the first week of February, but it has not been progressed. That was a version of the report.

Some Scrutiny Members, including myself, clarified with the Chairman that further witnesses ought to be interviewed. And I am grateful that she agreed to do that. Those extra interviews have now taken place.

I am saying the process has been somewhat delayed but for very good reasons for if the report carried on, you could say that the certain right people were not interviewed to give it clarity.

Only this week the Chairman and I sat down and discussed a number of things, including the pathway for completion. The work is ongoing.

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

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Alan Pearce asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you for your answer. It has been going on for some time and I can see it going on further. Would it be more appropriate for the current Chief Executive to deal with this rather than the Scrutiny Commission?”

The Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications answered:

No.

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Question (D)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(D) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation by Simon Kirby:

“Please say how the council has spent its 2022 allocation of £1,000,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, saying please for each supported project whether it has been completed successfully.”

The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation answered:

The list of projects are as follows:

- Newbury Wharf project phase 1: £420,180 (completed successfully)
- Cotswold project: £131,217 (completed successfully)
- Shaw House Garden project: £114,100 (completed successfully)
- Berkshire Growth Hub start-up and High growth support project: £60,000 over 3 years (completed successfully)
- Berkshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership set-up project: £3,400 (completed successfully)
- Newbury Parking review: £4,515 (completed successfully)
- Kennet Schools project: £46,035 (completed successfully)
- Hennick Worthy project: £97,798 (completed successfully)
- Town Centre footfall supplier: £1,800 (for reviewing project impacts, successful)
- Berkshire Prosperity board project: £20,250 (completed successfully)
- Thatcham feasibility study phase 1: £60,000 (completed successfully)
- West Berkshire Business Hub website: £700 (completed successfully)
- Admin and management costs: £40,000 (for successfully delivering projects).

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

Simon Kirby asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you. Does that all sum up to £1m?”

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The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation answered:

The figures provided by officers add up to a grand total of £999,991. All of these numbers have been ratified by MHCLG.

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

Question (E)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(E) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Paula Saunderson:

“Will the Local Transport Plan 4 to 2040 be a living document, as it will need to incorporate the Transport, Highways and Active Travel items from the Local Plan 2023-2041 Infrastructure Delivery Plan which is not yet finished? (e.g., A4 Bath Road in the vicinity of the North East Thatcham Site (SP14) plus new Sites RSA6 & RSA7.)”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Thank you for your question.

The Local Transport Plan is the overarching policy document which the Council will adopt, hopefully tonight, to provide the way forward towards 2040. LTPs are a statutory requirement, but although they look forward 15 years to allow for long-term planning, they are normally refreshed every 5 years.

With each refresh, changes are made to support other policy areas, for example with planning and environment. Delivery items in the actions list can also be amended or added to as funding streams become available.

Officers have already undertaken modelling work, for example on mitigation measures on the A4 at Floral Way and junctions east where these may see increased traffic, as well as changes in the modes of travel, as North East Thatcham is potentially built out. Budget has already been set aside for survey work to refresh the transport models themselves, which were previously updated in 2017-18. This work will commence in September / October this year.

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

Paula Saunderson did not ask a supplementary question.

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

Question (F)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(F) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications by Richard Garvie:

“The Leader of the Council sought to correct what he described as an injustice relating to CIL payments when he took up his position. It has been brought to my attention that those who were overpaid housing benefits from as long ago as 12 years are facing demands to make repayments even though this error was made by the Authority. Can the Leader commit that residents will not be held accountable for the errors of staff and / or software and that any repayments demanded will be waived and those that were paid will be returned to those residents?”

The Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications answered:

Thank you for your question.

For clarity, Housing Benefit overpayments occur when claimants receive more support than they're entitled to, often due to delayed reporting of changes in circumstances.

Legislation governs the recovery process, requiring prompt notification of appeal rights.

Now you refer to the correction of the CIL payment issue, which I will not go back over now. That drew my attention to when a number of residents came to me and said that this was wrong. If a member of the public believes that they have been chased for payment that they do not believe they should be chased for, they know where I am. If they want me to put a lens on individual cases, come to me.

I will confirm that we will not try to recover any overpayments as a result of a software issue.

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

Richard Garvie did not ask supplementary question.

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

Question (G)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(G) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health by Lee Allen:

“How can West Berkshire Council justify the proposed closure or outsourcing of the three vital day care centres – The Phoenix Centre in Newbury, Hungerford Resource Centre, and Greenfield House Resource Centre in Calcot – given their crucial role in supporting some of the most vulnerable residents in our community? These centres provide essential services, promote independence, and offer vital respite to families and carers. What assurances can the Council give that the needs of service users will continue to be met effectively, safely, and locally under any new arrangements? Furthermore, what guarantees will the Council provide to the dedicated staff at these centres many of whom have years of specialised experience regarding their job security, terms and conditions, and continuity of employment?”

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health answered:

Thank you, Mr Allen for your question.

You know the council is facing a serious financial crisis and we need to constantly consider how to become more efficient and use our funds more effectively.

We know that the resource centres support some of the most vulnerable residents in our community, among others. Our research shows that other organisations, other than the Council, for a host of reasons, are able to often deliver services more efficiently than we can through these in-house services. So, we really need to explore what the options are available to us at the moment.

We have tried to be extremely clear that the work will not proceed unless alternative services can provide equally good care to our customers.

We are keeping in touch with care staff to keep them up to date with what is happening – we value their hard work and know that they provide excellent care.

There are also already many people using independent day services; those people are happy, safe and well cared-for. And the staff at these independent centres do an excellent job as well.

We are still in the process of deciding how we will proceed, we are undecided, but if we decide to close any or all of the resource centres, we will of course work with affected staff and those who use the centres.

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

We know that there is high demand for care staff, and this is a sector with no shortage of opportunity.

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

Lee Allen asked the following supplementary question:

“Yes, if closures are the route chosen, do you fully grasp the damage that will be done to the lives of the workers, residents, and the families of those who use those services?”

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health answered:

I really need to emphasise this, we know that these recourse centres provide an important service to those who receive it.

We will continue to talk to affected people, and we will not proceed unless we can provide an equivalent service.

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

Question (H)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(H) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications by Simon Kirby:

“Is the Newbury Town Centre Steering Group” still in existence and steering the Newbury town centre strategy of the Town Centre Masterplan.”

The Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications answered:

Thank you, Mr Kirby.

Responsibility for managing town centre steering groups has been devolved to Town Councils. Newbury Town Council now convenes and oversees their meetings, with the most recent called in December. The Council continues to work in close partnership with members of the Town Centre Steering Group on various initiatives, including the delivery of the Wharf project, the pedestrianisation scheme, the promotion of major town centre events, and other emerging developments impacting the town centre. It is worth reminding ourselves that the pedestrianisation trial was proposed in the Town Centre Masterplan.

A working group within the Council has been formed to look at delivery of further projects within Newbury Town Centre, aligned with the masterplan; these projects are subject to development of viable funding models and business case. But to answer your question directly, they are still in existence.

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

Simon Kirby asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you, Councillor Brooks. So, the Steering Group is fully devolved to the Town Council. I found notes for one meeting on the West Berkshire website, so the West Berkshire website won't have minutes for this group. Will I need to go to the Town Council website?”

The Portfolio Holder for Leader answered:

I would like you to look at the Town Council website, but I will check to see if we can draw attention to that place on our website and where the minutes can be found.

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

Question (I)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(I) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Paula Saunderson:

“The Action Plan at the bottom of LPT 4 to 2040 does not include any Highways works for these Rural arterial Roads which are often mentioned in Planning Meetings as being under pressure or having poor safety:

- a. B4000 - Ermin Road*
- b. Valley Road from Woodspeen to Lambourn*
- c. B4009 - Long Lane along which there are several Sites included and suggested via the Local Development Plan*

Therefore, can we realistically expect NO Improvements to these Rural Roads in the next 15 years?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Thank you again for the question.

The Local Transport Plan is a Strategic document. The Council reviews its road network regularly, reviewing accident and speed data to identify if improvements are needed, in consultation with Thames Valley Police as necessary.

If any new developments are brought forward which may have an impact on a nearby road, those impacts are assessed and mitigations sought through the Planning process.

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

Paula Saunderson asked the following supplementary question:

“In terms of Parish Council’s understanding your transport plans, you have a one year, three year, and this longer term one. Would it be possible to have them on one page on the website?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Yes, if you’re referring to the improvement plans, they are on the website already, but I will take this away and see if it is possible.

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

Question (J)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(J) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Richard Garvie:

"6,348 people signed petitions to request the change to three weekly bin collections. Many more declined to sign due to the level of personal information required to verify signatures are genuine West Berkshire residents. Given that this is not simply a case of "40 people on Facebook" opposing this change, will the Council now agree to pause the reduction in bin collections aspect of the new Waste Strategy?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Dear Mr Garvie, thank you for your question.

As of now, the Council has not received any petitions in relation to the proposed changes to the residual waste collections. Should we receive a petition it will be considered and progressed in accordance with the Council's constitution.

At this point in time, we plan to continue with the changes in the service in line with the improved Waste Management Strategy in regard to black bin residual waste collection.

You may also have started to see the communications highlighting these changes and that they will come into force from September 2025 and a new collection calendar will be sent to residents in August.

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

Richard Garvie asked the following supplementary question:

"Thanks for the answer. The official Facebook page of the Council said that the criteria for a larger bin cannot be published as residents may abuse the system. Can we please have those criteria published on the website, because surely if a resident qualifies they qualify."

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

I don't believe that related to the answer provided to your question. However, what I will say is that we have a robust process and I have shared what neighbouring authorities do and what our process is.

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

I would encourage residents to reach out to their local Ward Members and follow the process we have communicated through our website and will publish in due course.

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

Question (K)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(K) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications by Paula Saunderson:

“In the past this Report went to Governance Committee before coming to full Council and it also mentioned other important areas of work and scrutiny pertaining to the CONSTITUTION & work of the Monitoring Officer & Deputies such as the responsibility to:

- a. Uphold the CONSTITUTION via Monitoring its Use*
- b. Reviewing its Operation*
- c. Ensuring its Principles are Upheld*
- d. Recommending necessary Changes*
- e. Ensuring Decisions are made Lawfully & Fairly*
- f. It is properly Maintained and Understood*

Therefore, as this Report is constrained to Councillor Conduct & Ethics, how and when will there be a Report on the above Officer responsibilities for 2024-2025, including Part 12 - changes to Statutory Roles & Senior Management Structures, plus Matters that need including in the Forward Plan of the Governance Cttee and the Work Programme of the Constitution Review Task Group?”

The Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications answered:

Thank you.

The Monitoring Officer's Annual report is being considered by Council tonight. The purpose of this report is to report on standards and conduct within West Berkshire Council. It has not been possible for the Governance Committee to consider this report at a formal meeting due to the scheduling limitations of our meetings this year. It would be usual for the Governance Committee to consider this report, but all members of the Executive have been apprised of the contents ahead of Council consideration.

The Annual Governance Statement is being considered by the Governance Committee on 29 July. This considers the Council business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. This will be considered by Council in Autumn.

The forward plan of Governance Committee is publicly available and details the work to be considered.

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

Now, the Constitution Review Task Group is an internal meeting held in private and continues to meet regularly to discuss areas of the constitution that have yet to be formally updated. When the work on a particular area is completed, this progresses through our governance processes and is available for the public to consider at that stage. Part 12 is up to date at the present time, and it is within the Monitoring Officer's delegated powers to make minor amendments to the Constitution such as this section to ensure it remains relevant. It might be that a critical member of staff's title has changed, so the Constitution needs to refer to the right title. Often these are small important changes but are not high impact or urgent.

The Monitoring Officer is only obliged to prepare a report in the event that there may be a contravention of law, maladministration or injustice by the Authority. Reports that are considered by the Executive or Council are considered by the Monitoring Officer prior to publication to ensure our high standards are upheld.

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

Paula Saunderson asked the following supplementary question:

"The thrust is that this is an important function for Council but the report only covers the conduct of Council, but the Monitoring Officer conducts many important tasks. With some other functions as well, when they do reports, the financial and resources side doesn't seem to be recorded. An annual report is normally an opportunity to express if you are full resourced. Not sure where this happens. Is there any way to look into this".

The Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications answered:

We have 1,500 staff so providing dynamic detail on structures and vacant posts is a moving feast. But we will look into it.

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

Question (L)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(L) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Richard Garvie:

“Will the Council make available all correspondence between Lee Dillon, Nigel Lynn, all elected members, West Berkshire Council Officers and developers of the proposed Eagle Quarter from the date of the last local election to present so that it can be established why this unpopular proposal was revived and the public can examine the finer details of discussions?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Good evening, Mr Garvie.

Thank you for your question.

For any details of this correspondence between Officers and Member, you will need to submit a Freedom Of Information (FOI) request through the appropriate Council channels. The Council will respond in line with the FOI regulations.

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

Richard Garvie did not ask a supplementary question.

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

Question (M)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(M) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications by Richard Garvie:

“Will the Council make available all correspondence between Lee Dillon, Nigel Lynn, all elected members, West Berkshire Council Officers, the operators of Faraday Road & Northcroft Leisure and contractors appointed for the large amount of public money spent on both facilities plus and documents related to procurement and / or appointments?”

The Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications answered:

Thank you for your question.

If you would like to submit an FOI request, we will disclose the documentation in line with the FOI rules and timescales.

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

Richard Garvie did not ask a supplementary question.

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

Question (N)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(N) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Richard Garvie:

"It has been brought to my attention that the recipient of a recent planing decision went on to donate tens of thousands of pounds to the Liberal Democrats. Can the Council release all communication with that applicant from before, during and following the application specifically involving Nigel Lynn, Lee Dillon, all West Berkshire Council Officers and all West Berkshire Councillors? On behalf of his party, could the Leader of the Council convince officers of his political party to also provide all correspondence and documentation related to these financial transactions and what the money was spent on as an act of openness and transparency?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you again for the question.

This question is referencing application 23/01507/FUL. It is important to note that this decision was made under delegated powers. What that means is that planning officers determine the application without reference to Members.

This application was for the proposed solar array to serve various properties at Westrop Farm. The panels were located within the corner of an agricultural field to the east of Westrop Farm with one of the existing buildings known as the Granary being used to house the necessary inverters and batteries with the cables being laid underground.

No objections have been raised by Statutory Consultees, or Parish Councils and local residents. The scheme is policy compliant and there is limited impact on the character and appearance of the area or residential amenity, which is why it was determined by officers.

For details of the correspondence, it is recommended to submit a Freedom Of Information request through the appropriate Council channels. However, the Council does not hold any correspondence with Lee Dillon MP in his capacity as the local Member of Parliament.

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

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Richard Garvie did not ask a supplementary question.

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Question (O)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
Relevant Officer(s):	Clare Ockwell

(O) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications by Richard Garvie:

“Can the Council please make available to the public all election spending returns related to the two West Berkshire Parliamentary Constituencies from the 2024 General Election and in relation to the 2023 West Berkshire Council elections?”

The Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications answered:

Following submission, candidate expenses are available for public inspection for a period of two years, free of charge. Town and parish expenses are available for one year. The 2023 West Berkshire Council returns have now been destroyed, but by making an appointment, the Parliamentary expenses are still available for inspection.

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

Question (P)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(P) Question rejected by the Monitoring Officer as it was not about a matter over which the Council has responsibility.



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

- (A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Phil Barnett: 2
- (B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Capital Projects (Built Environment) by Councillor Phil Barnett:.. 3
- (C) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Alan Macro: 5

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

Question (A)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Phil Barnett:

“This spring and early summer has seen minimum rainfall in the South East England, effecting the growth of grass in Parks/Open spaces and road side verges Obviously, this has effected the scheduled grass cutting required to be undertaken by West Berks Council.

Therefore can the executive member for the environment and highways identify if any financial savings have been achieved with the reduction in grass cutting?”

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

Thanks for your question.

It is true that reduced rainfall has affected grass growth in recent months. I can confirm that this has not yet resulted in any financial savings.

Our grounds maintenance contract is structured around staff availability and readiness to deliver services as needed, regardless of temporary fluctuations in weather or grass growth. As such, the resources required to maintain these public spaces remain allocated and costs have not changed as this is a temporary situation.

It is also worth noting that the grass cutting frequency was reduced from seven to five cuts a year as part of last year's budget consultations. Thus, the temporary reduction in grass growth has helped the contractor to get on top of the new cutting requirements this year and to learn relevant lessons for how a more typical vegetation growth season can be effectively managed in future.

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

Councillor Phil Barnett did not ask a supplementary question.

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

Question (B)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
Relevant Officer(s):	Deborah Vincent / Moira Fraser

(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Capital Projects (Built Environment) by Councillor Phil Barnett:

"Many West Berks residents are now living in high rise apartments, totally dependent on efficient lifts to take them to their respective flat, if living above ground level. In the case of persons with limited mobility a necessity, where breakdowns on lifts occur, unless lifts can be repaired immediately [and many lifts are old and spares difficult to source] residents have no alternative than to move out and source alternative accommodation until the lift can be repaired, sometimes months [or reside in their apartment and have daily necessities delivered to them, if it can be arranged]. Therefore what can West Berks Council do to make sure landlords or Management agencies conform to the Disability and Discrimination Act?"

The Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Capital Projects (Built Environment) answered:

I am sure that all Members across the Country have the same issues. When residents have issues related to bad maintenance or inappropriate work that reduces their ability to access services or their homes, I would recommend any Member contact Adult Social Care.

When lifts break down, it can be frustrating even to go to the shops. If there are any examples where you would like us to speak to Adult Social Care, please bring them forward.

As an Authority, we try to enforce as much of the statutory disabled legislation as we can, although not all of it is under our responsibility. Where you know it is happening, please contact the property managers and chase this up.

My mother, who had a stroke around seven years ago, would be stuck in her flat when the lifts were out and no one knew what was going on. Neighbourly contact reduces as well.

If you have any example, we will do our best, but we are not the decision makers in most cases.

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

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

Councillor Phil Barnett did not ask a supplementary question.

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

Question (C)	Council Meeting on 17 July 2025
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(C) Question related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Alan Macro:

“The Local Transport Plan (LTP4) talks about the desire to create a better maintained Highways Network. With this in mind, how many potholes has WBC repaired within 28 days in 2025 and how many dangerous potholes have been repaired within 72 hours in 2025?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Thank you for your question, Councillor Macro.

In 2024/25 we repaired 3,048 potholes. This compares to 2,011 in 2022/23 and 2,928 in 2023/24, which is more potholes.

Dangerous potholes are either filled in 2 hours or 24 hours depending on the location and severity. In 2024/25 we were made aware of 567 dangerous potholes and 99% were repaired within 2 or 24 hours in line with the Council's standards.

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

Councillor Alan Macro asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you, that sounds encouraging. Could you tell us what the Council is doing to try to prevent potholes developing in the first place?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Thank you.

We all know that prevention is better than a cure, so looking to the future we are investing in our roads and highways network and have enhanced our Highways Improvement Programme with an additional investment of £4m this year, doubling the amount of schemes that we do in terms of resurfacing.

This means our roads will be more structurally sound and therefore reducing the number of potholes that appear in the first place. We recently finished the A4 east of Hungerford, which is excellent, and we did this two days early.

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

Our ambition is to be in the top ten per cent nationally for well-maintained roads in the next two to three years.
