

# Questions and Answers

## Council

Thursday 27 November 2025

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

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<b>Question (A)</b>	Council Meeting on 27 November 2025
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**(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services, responded to by the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications, by Lee Allen:**

*“With child poverty in West Berkshire up 54% since 2014 and Lambourn seeing nearly 1 in 5 children affected, residents deserve answers. How is West Berkshire Council addressing this crisis and what’s the plan to tackle the related rise in asthma and childhood obesity among local children? (Which have increased alongside child poverty likely as a result)”*

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

Thank you for your question.

We share your concern on the rising levels of poverty, obesity, and asthma amongst our children. The causes of these issues are complex and multifaceted, consisting of structural, individual and environmental factors. Therefore, solutions to address these issues require a whole system approach working with partners and policy makers that support those most in need.

The Council, and partners, undertake a range of initiatives and work programmes that aim to support those experiencing hardship and improve health and wellbeing.

Since 2022 the Council has been a major participant in the local poverty forum which brings together the voluntary sector, Greenham Trust, and the Council to ensure that limited resources, including the Household Support Fund, are effectively targeted to meet local need in the most efficient way. This included the delivery of the Cost of Living Hub in 2022/23 to act as a central point of co-ordination and to identify wider health and safeguarding issues. An updated version of the Hub will shortly be re-launched under the ‘Let’s Talk’ initiative’.

The Council is also looking to support households in financial need through a new LIFT platform that will use data analytics and policy-driven insights to help identify and support financially vulnerable households to access state benefits to which they are entitled, including free school meals.

In relation to obesity, the council have recently undertaken a healthy weight needs assessment to understand the levels of childhood excess weight across the district and identify actions to reduce prevalence. We already provide a range of services to support children, including a healthy school’s programme, a cooking and nutrition programme delivered by Family Hubs, as well as sensory circuits physical activity programme for children with learning disabilities. The Council also provide a range of

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leisure and sport activities through Everyone Active to support children to maintain a healthy weight.

The prevention and treatment of asthma is a shared responsibility between the council and the local NHS. This includes preventative measures looking to reduce environmental hazards such as air pollution, to ensuring people attend their annual reviews with their GP. The council have recently funded (through the public health grant) our Environmental Health Team to conduct a 12-month pilot to proactively seek out properties where patients are presenting with ill health and undertake damp and mould assessments, as we know that this can impact respiratory health.

**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:**

*“How has it been allowed to get as bad as it is – as 54 per cent rise since 2014 is a lot”.*

**Due to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services issuing their apologies for the meeting, a written response would be provided after the meeting.**

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

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**Question (B)**

Council Meeting on 27 November 2025

**(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 Richard Garvie:**

*“I recently conducted an online survey in Calcot, Holybrook, Purley and Tilehurst and the overwhelming majority of residents wish to remain in West Berkshire. Given that Reading wish to change the boundaries, I also consulted residents in Tilehurst and Kentwood wards of RBC who told me they wish to join WBC (91.9% and 87.6% respectfully). Will West Berkshire Council stand up to protect these residents from the Labour Land Grab and conduct a poll of residents in each of these five electoral divisions?”*

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

Thank you for your question.

You may have seen that Reading Borough Council have now stepped back from their claims to five West Berkshire Council wards and have removed Pangbourne and Theale from their proposals. Whilst I am pleased that Reading have acknowledged, by these changes, that their proposals were flawed, it is disappointing that they have not abandoned this in its entirety.

There is significant evidence to support the fact that residents of West Berkshire do not wish to be part of Reading. This has been evident via multiple consultation and engagement sessions that have been undertaken by this Council over a considerable period.

I can assure you and all our residents, particularly those living in the wards of Tilehurst South & Holybrook, Tilehurst & Purley, and Tilehurst Birch Copse, that this Council opposes these proposals, and we have every intention of continuing to oppose these proposals by Reading should they be progressed further.

We are unable however to resolve to undertake further parish polls, similar to Theale, as that is a legal process only available to the resolution of a parish meeting.

**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 asked the following supplementary question:**

*“Approximately how much would it cost to do a parish poll, or a poll of each of the Tilehurst Wards. Is there a rough cost of a poll per Ward?”.*

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

Thank you. The Ward Member for Theale would be best placed to provide you with a specific number based on their recent experience, but I believe that it is no less than £1,000.

This poll is then arranged by West Berkshire and charged back to the Parish Council.

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<b>Question (C)</b>	Council Meeting on 27 November 2025
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**(C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health, responded to by the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications, by Lee Allen:**

*“Following West Berkshire Council’s recent U-turn on the proposed changes to the resource centres, can the Council now guarantee that it will not, in future, attempt to close, privatise, or reduce access to these vital community facilities?”*

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

Thank you, Mr Allen.

We made a decision to consult on these measures, and that was strongly informed by the strength of support which was shown for the Resource Centres. On consulting on the potential closure, we were led to believe that the voluntary sector could pick up the vast majority of the services we were providing. In reality, that did not stack up after we did the work.

I do not accept that there was a U-turn. When you consult, you are gathering evidence. Having gathered the evidence, it is not a U-turn if you decide to then not go ahead.

It was clear that these are highly valued facilities, you will appreciate that it would be disingenuous and irresponsible of any Leader to sign up to the sort of perpetual guarantee you appear to be asking for.

However, I will say this; we have no plans to close, privatise, or reduce access to the Resource Centres. We plan to maximise the value that the community gains from them, and the cost/ benefit ratio so that they operate as efficiently as possible. We can put more services in the resource centres and make the more accessible to other member of the public, through family hubs and the like. We expect that to include additional uses for the resource centres on top of their current core function. That is the best way forward and what the consultation told us.

**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:**

*“Thank you, Councillor Brooks.*

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*If it were to be looked into in the future would a similar consultation be launched again to ensure that these services would continue to be provided to residents?”.*

**The Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance answered:**

We are committed to the Resource Centres – this administration is committed to them having done that work.

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<b>Question (D)</b>	Council Meeting on 27 November 2025
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**(D) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications by Richard Garvie:**

*“It has been identified that if you support the extended pedestrianisation in the ongoing consultation you can do so anonymously but if you oppose it, you have to enter your personal information. This renders the consultation flawed and although this is probably an innocent mistake, the consultation should be ended and restarted in the new Year to give residents faith that the process is fair. Will the Council void the current consultation and pledge to run a new consultation in the new Year?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Leader of Council, Strategy and Communications answered:**

Mr Garvie, thank you for your question.

I am pleased to let you know that the consultation is not flawed, it is in line with the regulations for statutory consultations, which state that the Council must inform objectors of the decision at the end of the process, hence why details were asked for in this instance.

However, we acknowledge that we can do this better, so we will be amending future consultations to ask for details of all respondents, not just objectors (as per the legislation).

We have introduced a well know survey software – SurveyMonkey – as another avenue for consultations, as well as putting out written submissions. This means we have made the consultation system more accessible, and I believe it is already benefiting our consultation 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?”*

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

*“I believe the concern was that people could anonymously support the proposal as many times as they wanted and, the feeling from those who objected, was that they could only object once. I appreciate you will take these concerns into account for future consultation. Can you confirm if there will there be a future consultation on pedestrianisation”.*

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**The Portfolio Holder for Leader of Council, Strategy and Communications answered:**

The Consultation has only recently concluded, and we need to work through the responses, so talking about holding another consultation at this point is premature.

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<b>Question (E)</b>	Council Meeting on 27 November 2025
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**(E) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Capital Projects (Built Environment) by Lee Allen:**

*“Since the start of the pedestrianisation trial in Newbury town centre in May 2025, there appears to have been a significant rise in reported crime, particularly violent and public order offences. Many residents now feel increasingly unsafe, a concern that seems to be worsened by the dimming of street lighting in the town centre. Is the Council aware of this increase in crime and the growing feeling of insecurity among residents, and will it review the impact that the pedestrianisation trial and reduced lighting levels may be having on public safety in Newbury town centre?”*

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

Thank you for your question.

Your question implies two points that I would like to clarify. Firstly, you imply that there is an increase in crime since the trial started, and secondly, you suggest that the lights have been dimmed.

To my knowledge the Council has not dimmed the lights, nor has there been an increase in crime.

When the pedestrianisation was put in place, it was monitored very carefully. Unless you have access to information that the Council does not, it appears that your question is fundamentally flawed.

**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:**

*“Would a report by Thames Valley Police about an increase in crime be taken into account in potentially dropping the pedestrianisation and reverting it back to the previous model?”*

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

Of course, we would gladly look at any relevant data, and we would encourage the Police to forward on any research they have done on this to confirm what you are saying.

This Council takes its responsibility to its residents very seriously and will continue to do so in the future.

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

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**Question (F)**

Council Meeting on 27 November 2025

**(F) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Richard Garvie:**

*“When it comes to pedestrianisation, I don't think anyone would prefer Northbrook Street to be a busy traffic throughway. If the consultation is scrapped and rerun next year, can we have some public workshops prior to the new consultation - One for elderly and disabled, one for Businesses and an open public workshop where residents can put forward ideas on how to make the new arrangements work prior to a final consultation on the extension?”*

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

Mr Garvie, thank you for your question.

We have received over 3,200 responses to the consultation which has proved an excellent public engagement exercise. As part of this we engaged directly with residents, businesses, and other stakeholders.

Officers and Members are currently analysing the consultation responses and until this analysis is complete, it would be remiss of me to offer decisions and next steps at this point. Once this analysis is completed, we will continue to work with organisations like Newbury BID, business, Town Council, and Community Organisations to help shape a future outcome.

**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.**

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<b>Question (G)</b>	Council Meeting on 27 November 2025
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**(G) Question withdrawn**

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

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<b>Question (H)</b>	Council Meeting on 27 November 2025
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**(H) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Richard Garvie:**

*“What percentage of Thatcham residents supported the 20mph Town Proposal in the recent consultation?”*

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

Mr Garvie, thank you for your question.

The consultation recently closed, and officers are analysing the responses to this. At this point it is too early to answer this question.

**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:**

*“Do we have any idea when we can expect the result from the consultation – could you provide a timeline for when we could get some information about this consultation?”*

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

There were a significant number of responses to that consultation, and that will take time to work through to ensure that we get the right solution, so I unable to provide an exact time. However, I would like to see this done as quickly as possible.

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

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

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<b>Question (A)</b>	Council Meeting on 27 November 2025
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**(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:**

*“What advice have you received from the police regarding their support for your proposals for 20mph speed limits in various locations across West Berkshire?”*

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

Thank you for your question.

When we make a proposal to change a speed limit, the police are consulted and make their comments on the specific proposal that is in front of them, so it is difficult for me to answer as the Police have not yet been consulted on all locations.

They have, however, provided some general comments in previous correspondence, stating:

“Thames Valley Police welcome the opportunity to engage on plans for road safety improvements and acknowledge that 20mph limits can be a useful road safety tool. The policy of Thames Valley Police is to use sound practical and realistic criteria set in the Department for Transport (DfT) guidance on introducing speed limits when responding to Highway Authorities in an effort to promote consistency and to reduce the burden of constant and unnecessary enforcement.”

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

*“Have the Police advised you against any specific proposals which are now being progressed?”*

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

We are current in the process of reviewing the consultations for Thatcham and other areas and there are some that are coming via an Individual Executive Member Decision in the coming weeks. We are also working on the Thatcham consultations.

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

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<b>Question (B)</b>	Council Meeting on 27 November 2025
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**(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:**

*“Residents have complained that when responding to consultations on the Council portal, they are required to provide additional details if they do not support Executive proposals, which are not required if they do support the proposals. Why is this?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Leader of Council, Strategy and Communications answered:**

Thank you for your question, Councillor Mackinnon.

As mentioned previously, the consultation was done in line with the regulations for statutory consultations, which state that the Council must inform objectors of the decision at the end of the process, hence why details were asked for in this instance.

However, you may have heard from earlier in the meeting, and I repeat it now, we acknowledge we can make it better and so we will amend future consultations to ask for details of all respondents, not just the objectors as per the legislation.

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

*“You said you didn’t think the consultation was flawed – if however, at the next local elections, voters had to provide more details in order to vote Lib Dem than Conservative, would you consider that a fair result, and it was enough to say that you would do better next time?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Leader of Council, Strategy and Communications answered:**

This is a not a serious question. I repeat the answer I have given you, we are adapting the process as people have asked us to do.

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