

Questions and Answers

Council
Thursday 26 March 2026

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 Stephen Chard on telephone (01635) 519462.



This page is intentionally left blank

Public 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 Public Safety and Capital Projects (Built Environment) by Alison May:..... 2
- (B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Alison May: 3
- (C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Alison May: 4
- (D) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Corporate Programme by Alison May: 5



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

Question (A)

Council Meeting on 26 March 2026

(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Capital Projects (Built Environment) by Alison May:

“Air and water pollution are inherently transboundary. For example West Berkshire's sewage discharges, permitted or illegal, flow downstream impacting upon communities located within the Kennet Lower Valley area, via the River Kennet's tributaries and onto the River Thames. Our neighbouring local authorities, in particular Reading, continue to be subject forms of pollutants emanating from West Berkshire. Can the council update citizens with previous and future plans of engagement with Reading Borough Council which seek to address air and water pollutions challenges?”

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

Thank you for your question.

The Liberal Democrats have a long history of fighting for clean rivers up and down the Country. We have worked across authority, country, and national lines. But the rules and regulations about what we can make other authorities do are really quite limited.

However, we do work with Reading and Hampshire authorities a lot.

If there is anything we do together, we publish on our websites, through the JPPC. We publish our air quality monitoring, river pollution, and a whole bunch of information that is readily available. Therefore, it is difficult to pull out some specifics, but if there are specific examples that you would like us to look at, then I would be more than happy to speak to the person concerned.

Wherever possible we put our information on the Councils website and the JPPC agendas, the agendas come to this authority. It is all open to the public. If we are missing something, I would be more than happy to bring it forward as a suggestion. We are all about openness and transparency.

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?”*

As Alison May could not ask a supplementary, a written response would be provided.

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

Question (B)	Council Meeting on 26 March 2026
---------------------	----------------------------------

(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Alison May:

“During 2024 West Berkshire Council hosted a meeting to address the challenges and implications associated with sewerage infrastructure, both Thames Water and the Environment Agency were in attendance. Subsequent to this meeting associated challenges continue to persist. Can the Council provide a progress update on plans to convene a public meeting with Thames Water and the Environment Agency?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways provided a written response:

Thank you for your question.

I am pleased to let you know that Thames Water and the Environment Agency will be invited to attend a meeting of the Council's Resources and Place Scrutiny meeting in September this year.

This will also be attended by West Berkshire Council Officers and will be specifically to discuss actions relating to flooding and will cover the associated impact on Sewage infrastructure. This will be a public meeting, and further information will be available of the Council's website.

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

Question (C)	Council Meeting on 26 March 2026
---------------------	----------------------------------

(C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Alison May:

“Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) are spatial strategies for nature and environmental improvement as required by law under the Environment Act 2021. Berkshire's LNRS, which includes West Berkshire, was ratified by all Berkshire Councils resulting in the formal publication of Berkshire's LNRS on 7 October 2025. The next phase includes the implementation of the strategy to reconnect habitats and boost biodiversity. Can the Council provide a progress update on next steps?”

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside provided a written response:

As a Council, we were very pleased to work with colleagues across Berkshire to contribute to the development of the Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy. The Council supported the development of the final strategy and are grateful to the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead for their leadership of this process.

The Council will continue to support progressing the LNRS into its delivery phase and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead will remain the lead authority. Natural England convened a meeting for all the Responsible Authorities in February and have confirmed that financial support will be offered to all areas for the implementation of their LNRS. We do not yet know what amount of funding will be offered to Berkshire nor is there a public timetable for its announcement.

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

Question (D)	Council Meeting on 26 March 2026
---------------------	----------------------------------

(D) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Corporate Programme by Alison May:

“The Council's Transformation programme is a welcome initiative providing citizens with open and transparent access as the programme progresses through defined project phases.

Can the Council provide details of plans to mitigate against bias when considering the inclusion or exclusion of future transformation projects?”

The Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Corporate Programme provided a written response:

The Council applies a consistent, transparent process to reduce the risk of bias when deciding which projects enter the Transformation Programme. All suggested proposals require an outline business case which sets out the problem to be solved, expected financial return, costs, deliverability, and risks. Using business cases as the entry point helps us test financial viability early and base decisions on evidence rather than preference or assumption.

Decisions on what to include also make use of data to reflect possible impact. This creates an evidence base across proposals and reduces the risk that anecdote or individual judgement shapes prioritisation.

A final decision on the final list of projects for inclusion will be taken collectively at Executive. The cross-party Policy Development Group will also play a role in shaping priorities and providing democratic input as the programme is developed.

Equality Impact Assessments are used where proposals involve service or policy change. EQIAs help identify whether a proposal could disproportionately affect a particular group and require mitigation. This adds another safeguard against unintentional bias.

Finally, the programme is carefully monitored by our Projects Service to ensure that stated objectives and benefits materialise. This information is also available to the Scrutiny Committee, which reduces the risk of opaque or inconsistent decision making.

This page is intentionally left blank

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 Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Corporate Programme by Councillor Ross Mackinnon: 2
- (B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Dominic Boeck:..... 4
- (C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Councillor Ross Mackinnon: 6



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

Question (A)	Council Meeting on 26 March 2026
---------------------	----------------------------------

(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Corporate Programme by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“How much did the Council spend on the new resident welcome packs bearing his photo and Leader’s message, and what is their purpose?”

The Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Corporate Programme answered:

The Welcome to West Berkshire packs have been created to help residents settle into their new home – offering a warm and welcoming first impression of the district and the Council. It brings together useful information in one place so people can easily find and access council services – from when their bin collections are and how to register at their local library, to how they can contact their local councillor.

Their primary purpose is to support people who are new to the district, giving them a straightforward introduction to life in West Berkshire. We believe they also offer value to people moving within the district, who may still benefit from updated information, reminders, and signposting to services.

The packs were designed, assembled, and printed in house at a cost of £434.26. We printed 500, that is 87p per pack.

The decision to print them as a set of postcards rather than a booklet is because, should information in them change, only the relevant insert needs updating which helps to future-proof these packs.

The question refers to the packs bearing my photo and the Leader message. And if that is offensive to Councillor Mackinnon, he can take that one out.

They are also available as a digital version, available online. Just to help residents to access our services.

I suggest good value for money.

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 Ross Mackinnon asked the following supplementary question:

“Can you advise us, and confirm, how these packs are being distributed to residents”.

The Portfolio Holder for Leader of the Council answered:

Amongst other methods, they are in our libraries, in the reception foyer. There were several hundred here for Councillor to take away.

I have knocked on doors recently and said, ‘are you new to the area’ and proffered this to them. That is the way of distribution.

I repeat, they were £434.26.

We have done a little bit of work, and we are doing further work, on how much it costs to process a question in the Council. We are about at the £300 mark in terms of officer time, distraction, and what they couldn't do with other work. I think this is better value than some of the questions we get from the other side, but that is a point of view.



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

Question (B)	Council Meeting on 26 March 2026
---------------------	----------------------------------

(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

“When planning officers commission a report for consideration in deciding a planning application, for example a report on traffic impact were a development to proceed, what steps do they take to ensure that it is of sufficient quality and accuracy to inform properly the decision?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you, Councillor Boeck.

When Planning Officers commission specialist reports there are several steps they follow to ensure the information is reliable and of good quality.

First, where external consultants are needed, officers will look carefully at which firms are suitably qualified and experienced for the type of work involved. Any appointment must follow the Council's procurement rules, and a clear brief is provided so the consultant knows exactly what is required.

Once a report is received, officers check it against that brief to confirm whether it addresses all of the required points. As they prepare their recommendation on an application, officers examine each report in detail. If any information is missing, unclear, or needs further explanation, they will go back to the consultant and the same applies when information is provided by internal or external consultees.

While officers make every effort to ensure accuracy, some reports involve highly technical specialist work. In those cases, the Council relies on the expectation that professional consultants are working to the standards of their respective disciplines.

Overall, the process is designed to ensure that the decision-making is informed by reports that are thorough, appropriate, and professionally produced.”

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 Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:

"I want to refer to a specific planning application, I don't want to discuss the application itself. A report was produced by a consultant to inform a decision on a transport ban for the development. I know the area well, read the report, it is clearly wrong. It is inaccurate and makes fanciful projections. What do Officers do to assure themselves of the quality of the work they are doing".

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

As you quite rightly say, we cannot comment on a specific planning application, and the one I believe you are talking is a live application. Therefore, I am quite happy, outside of this meeting, to discuss this with you.

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

Question (C)	Council Meeting on 26 March 2026
---------------------	----------------------------------

(C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Can the portfolio holder provide an update as to what has gone wrong at Kennet Valley School’s SEND unit as reported in the Newbury Weekly News, and what reassurances can she give to parents who are understandably concerned?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

Thank you for your question.

Kennet Valley SEMH resource provision is the responsibility of the Head and Governing Body of the school. Council officers have supported the school staff and the governing body to address a range of issues. The newly appointed Executive Head and the SEMH unit staff are working with parents at the school to provide the best education for pupils and appropriate reassurances to parents. A newly appointed Interim Executive Board with responsibility for governance will further strengthen the position of the school and will seek to address parents' concerns.

The school are also continuing to strengthen communication with families. A dedicated section of the school website has been created for Resource Base parents to provide regular updates and information, and they have recently held a parent meeting with senior leaders and the Chair of Governors to share developments and hear directly from families. Regular review points are now in place and updates are being shared with parents.

Looking ahead, the school is planning a programme of opportunities for parents to engage with the provision and wider school community, including coffee mornings and celebration events.

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:

“Thank you. You mention that the school’s SEMH unit is the responsibility of the Head and the governing body. Does the Local Education Authority not have responsibility as well?”

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

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

Indirectly yes. But no, for the day to day running of the school, the Board, the Head Teacher, and the staff are responsible for the School. If we have concerns, then yes it becomes our responsibility. But we are very happy with what is happening going forward, there is an improvement happening.

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