

Questions and Answers

Executive
Thursday 21 May 2026

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

Item (A)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Alan Pearce:

“Please could the Council point out the specific section or line item within the Capital Strategy 2026/27–2029/30 programme where the £1.25 million in capital funding for the proposed 3G pitch at Faraday Road is recorded?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

The full cost of the project was set-up as part of the 2025/26 capital programme. Any unspent allocations will be slipped into 2026/27 as part of the outturn process.

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 have some clarification first, please? Can you just confirm that it is not at this moment in time in the capital budget?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

It is in the capital budget.

Alan Pearce asked the following question:

“So, the question was, can you show me where, the specific line?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

I cannot get to it at this moment in time, but I can send you where it is within the capital budget. Any unspent money will then be slipped into 26/27.

Alan Pearce asked the following question:

“Could you just repeat that, please? That’s quite important”.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

So the answer I've been given by the s151 Officer saying any unspent allocations will be moved into 2026/27 as part of the outturn process.

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Item (B)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health by Tracey Fenner:

"With regard to the recent proposal: "To cease directly providing adult respite in the community services, which will be commissioned from alternative providers".

Unfortunately I missed the consultation but looking at the results, it appears that 88% of respondents were from a particular ethnicity. Considering that the proposal was denied based on the feedback, I question that this process was sufficiently robust to carry such weight. For example, is it possible that the vast majority of the respondents were related/family members?

I would be interested to understand how a proposal that would save more than £29 000 per annum can appear to be so easily rejected. While I am considerate of the service-users' situation, I am also very mindful of the financial constraints that our council has to try to manage for the benefit of all."

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

Thank you Tracey for your question and thank you for paying so much attention to our consultation. Responding to consultations and raising awareness of them is vital for a well-functioning council.

Also vital is attention to detail, and when the data was transposed from one document to another an error was made. I can only apologise for this.

The data should have shown 88% against the category of 'White English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British', rather than against 'White Irish'. The original responses were considered and were later copied into a new document. We should, of course, have picked up on this error.

My colleagues and I are extremely sensitive to the budget challenges we face but on this. We don't want to reduce our services but also need to save money. On this occasion we felt the saving – which in the context of the total Adult Social Care budget is a small one – should be rejected because of the expected impact on those in receipt of the service. We have made some difficult decisions elsewhere, but here we felt the test was not fully met.



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Item (C)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Ian Hall:

“How much has been spent to date on the sports facilities at Faraday Road (including surveys) from the Lib Dems taking control of the council”

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

The total spend since May 2023 is £619,788.

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Item (D)

Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026

(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Paula Saunderson:

“Within the Sites in the Local Plan Review (now adopted), how many new Outdoor Sports Pitches are planned to be delivered via Developer Agreements and/or Contributions?”

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

Policy SP13 of the Local Plan Review 2023-2041 sets out that the North East Thatcham strategic development will need to include provision for outdoor formal and informal sports pitches and areas. The precise details of these will be established through the planning application process.

The other site allocations in the Local Plan Review 2023-2041 are non-strategic scale and therefore do not include site specific requirements for outdoor sports pitches but where development generates a need for pitches, this will be considered on a site by site basis and on-site provision or financial contribution will be secured where justifiable.

For example, there is a live planning application for residential development at Henwick Park, Thatcham. It is anticipated that the site will make a section 106 financial contribution towards outdoor sports pitches to mitigate the impact on Henwick Worthy Sports Ground.

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:

“In the papers before you tonight, Section 5.9(c), does not make reference to any of that, and neither does 5.10, which starts to list existing pitches. So you might want to make sure that that is very clear, in the delivery plan. We don't know whether Sandelford is strategic enough to deliver a pitch. So I think that needs to be clarified in the delivery plan.”

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

Thank you for your input. The delivery plan will be on the website, and it will be updated on a regular basis. So those sorts of sites will actually come up when they're due to be developed.

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Item (E)

Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026

(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Keren Ben-David Rostholder:

“Under the DfE HAF Statutory Guidance, the HAF programme is an educational tool designed to ensure children return to school 'ready to learn' and to develop new skills and resilience. For a child with an EHCP and complex needs, this enrichment is a critical extension of their education. Can the Executive explain why HAF is currently excluded from West Berkshire's SEND reform plans on the basis that it is 'not education'?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

Although the DfE Guidance does make clear the aims for the HAF programme, and links more broadly to the aims of Children's Services, it is not part of the Putting CYP First SEND Reform Consultation. The aims of the programme are defined by Department for Education as:

- receiving healthy and nutritious meals;
- maintaining a healthy level of physical activity;
- being happy, having fun and meeting new friends;
- developing a greater understanding of food, nutrition and other health related issues;
- taking part in fun and engaging activities that support their development and well-being;
- feeling safe and secure;
- getting access to the right support services;
- returning to school feeling engaged and ready to learn.

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?”*

Keren Ben-David Rostholder asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you, Chairman. In light of the response, I would like to ask, ‘The Council's written defence claims that national grant ring fencing and clinical constraints prevent scaling up holiday provision. However, official DfE guidelines allow local authorities to spend HAF funds flexibly to support high-needs SEND children. Given that West Berkshire Council already corporately commissioned West Berkshire Mencap to deliver safe one-to-one respite care for these exact pupils, can the lead member explain the logic of returning £38,485 to Whitehall when the Department for Education framework gives you the absolute legal flexibility to simply expand our existing Mencap contract for the summer holidays?’ “

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The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

This is very much along the lines of your other questions. We can commission it, but we have to have providers who will provide it. We are working with those providers to expand our offering for those children with SEN. It's not always available. We do work hard with them and will continue to do so. Thank you for your question.

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Item (F)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(F) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by John Gotelee:

"At the executive meeting on 22nd May 2025, The Leader said: "We do try to answer a question with a straight answer". Would there be any caveats that would prevent a member of the public from being given a straight answer?"

The Deputy Leader of the Council answered:

I am not Jeff Brooks. Most definitely not. So my answer to you is we always answer questions with as clear an answer as we possibly can. There are some occasions where there is sensitive or personal data, and in those cases, we cannot share that information.

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:

"Yes, but I think you may find it difficult to answer because on a normal occasion, Jeff Brooks takes a very healthy interest in public questions. I asked a question at the last Executive, which related to pedestrianisation, and whilst every member of the Liberal Democrats here was in receipt of the so-called leaked document, I'm wondering why Jeff did not intervene as I was given a very dubious answer. He normally intervenes in everything else. So, this is why I say it is difficult for you to answer personally".

The Deputy Leader of the Council answered:

I cannot answer that because I am not Jeff, and I cannot answer why he didn't intervene. I will speak to him, and we will get you a response.

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Item (G)

Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026

(G) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Simon Pike:

“Local Plan Policy SP14 stipulates that the Masterplan for the North East Thatcham development will be “prepared in collaboration with the applicant, relevant town and parish councils, the community and other stakeholders”. Following the recent initial community engagement, how will the Council and its consultants developing the Masterplan progress this collaboration with stakeholders, and especially with the relevant town and parish councils?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

The recent consultation events were very well attended, and we are grateful to all those who took part. We have received a substantial amount of feedback, which is currently being collated and analysed to identify key themes and practical insights that will directly inform the development of the Masterplan.

We would also like to thank the Town and Parish Councils – and all other stakeholders - for their valuable contributions at the stakeholder workshop. This input is an important part of the collaborative process set out in Policy SP14. We found it to be a positive and constructive exercise.

At this stage, it is important that we take the necessary time to carefully consider all feedback alongside the emerging technical evidence to ensure that the Masterplan is robust, deliverable and reflective of local priorities. I do not wish to prescribe at this time precisely what the next collaboration with stakeholders will be, as I would rather this be informed by the review of the feedback received.

The next formal stage of consultation is planned for the summer, when a more developed draft Masterplan will be shared. We are keen to ensure this level of engagement continues beyond the masterplanning stage and follows through into the planning application process.

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?”*

Simon Pike asked the following supplementary question:

“An internet definition of collaboration is “the process of two or more people, teams, or organizations working together to achieve a shared goal or create a common

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outcome'. The consultation that took place, as I understand, was not conducted by the consultants who'll be developing the master plan, but by a specialist communications company. And I also understand from other documentation that's been made public that the consultation that you referred to in the summer will be on a final draft. So neither of those, as I understand it, constitute the collaboration that is called for and is being required in SP14 in the local plan. So I would ask you if you can give any more information about what will happen between those two, with the key stakeholders like the parish and town councils, or if not, if you could ensure that that information is made available as soon as possible so that we can be prepared for it as well".

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

We will make every effort to ensure that we actually get complete engagement with both the community and the parish and town councils. The only reason I can't give you an answer tonight about that is because we don't know what the feedback's going to show us. I won't see the feedback until after they collate it all. And as the consultation feedback has only just been collated and finished, I haven't got that information at the moment. Once I do have that information, I am very, very keen to make sure that everybody involved is engaged in that process. I can assure you of that.

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Item (H)

Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026

(H) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Paul Morgan:

“In response to a public question raised at the Executive meeting on 7 November 2024, the Council provided details on the costs and commitments spent on the Faraday Road Football ground for the period November 2023 to November 2024. Please can the Council now provide a detailed breakdown of all ADDITIONAL costs, capital, and revenue, that has been, will be, or is planned for periods between: a) 7 November 2024 and the end of May 2026, and b) 1 June 2026 and the end of the 2026 / 27 football season (May 2027)”

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

The project spend for the period set out is £244,000. This includes £100,000 paid to Volker highways for engineering and groundworks relating to Step 7 ground requirements; £17,000 paid to Sport Labs for consultancy, £40,000 to Portacabin for the purchase of accommodation units, £20,000 paid to Audience systems for an additional stand for FA grounds compliance, and £23,000 for salaries. Other costs relate to general grounds maintenance, enabling works and sports equipment.

In terms of future costs from 1st June 2026 these have not yet been established.

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?”*

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

“My supplementary is to do with part (b). Councillor Cottingham did say that £125K is in the budget for 26/27 for Faraday Road. So can you explain why you haven't got any of those costs for the floodlights or the 3G pitch in that point (b), please, Councillor Foot”.

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

I don't think that they are fully established at this time.

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

“So, they are not in the budget then?”

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

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If I may, I will just ask my colleague, Councillor Cottingham if he can shed any more light on that.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources commented:

So any slippage of monies will then be reprofiled into 26/27. So from the full cost of the original budget of £1.25 million, any underspend from 25/26 will then be reprofiled into 26/27

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Item (I)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Alan Pearce:

“Could the Council please confirm if the reprofiling of the £1.25 million capital funding into the 2026/27 financial year for the proposed 3G pitch at Faraday Road requires a formal vote at a Full Council meeting before it can be officially authorised for expenditure?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

The Council's Financial Rules are detailed in Part 9 of the Constitution, and the Capital Expenditure Controls are contained in Appendix C.

As noted in the Capital Strategy report that was approved by Council in February, the *“proposed capital programme will be subject to amendment through approved projects relating to financial year 2025/26 (including the 3G Faraday Road Pitch), which are subject to financial monitoring and where appropriate slippage applied into the subsequent financial year. Slippage is reported to the Executive via the outturn review and reporting process. Approved projects which are proposed to be externally funded, and a borrowing requirement is not anticipated, are subject to review through the budget monitoring process, should a borrowing requirement arise, this will be reported through to the Executive.”*

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:

“Obviously, that's a lot to process there. So basically, what I want to understand is, in the future, the funding for the 3G pitch at the moment is not in the capital budget. It's not. So, for it to be put in the capital budget to be spent, does it have to go back to Executive or the full Council?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

No, because it's slipping into the next financial year. So it was originally approved in '25, '26. Any underspend from '25 to '26 will then be reprofiled, slipped into '26, '27. So the original £1.25 million was approved at full Council back in April of '25, '26.

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Item (J)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(J) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Ian Hall:

“Was the stadium that planning permission at Faraday Road (which was allowed to lapse) ever costed against the funds put aside for Sports Hub at Monks Lane ?”

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

The 3G pitch at Faraday Road will be funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy. However, there is currently no funding allocated for an accompanying stadium.

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Item (K)

Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026

(K) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Paula Saunderson:

“Is there a Plan using any Existing S106 or CIL commitments to meet shortfalls shown in the new Playing Pitch Strategy, as the Annual Infrastructure FUNDING Statement does not list Development Sites and their agreed commitments?”

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

New playing pitches can be funded a variety of ways and this could include utilising S106 or community infrastructure levy funding where new development generates a need for additional pitches. S106 contributions can only be used to address the shortfalls identified in the Playing Pitch Strategy. There are some S106 contributions that have been secured specifically to address these shortfalls including the Section 106 Agreement for the Sandelford Park West development which includes contributions for enhancement works to the Playing Pitch at Henwick Worthy or Faraday Road. The Council has also allocated funding for improvements to pitches, courts and ancillary facilities.

The annual infrastructure funding statement does not provide full detailed site specific information on planned spend, as its main purpose is a retrospective overview of spend. As such, future reporting will set out additional S106 or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding allocated to implementation of the Playing Pitch Strategy.

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:

“Your annual infrastructure funding statement doesn't list, the sources from developments and trace through the allocation and then the final spend, whereas a lot of councils do that, and that makes it much clearer for the public. I am hoping, especially if you do become part of Ridgeway, they adopt that approach. So I think you could, on your next one, adopt a more informative approach by listing what is delivered from each development”.

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

Thank you for your observations.

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Item (L)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(L) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Keren Ben-David Rostholder:

“Furthermore, given the £38,485.10 surplus returned to the Treasury last year, why has the council failed to use its 15% discretionary funding allowance (approx. £60,172) to commission specialist providers like West Berkshire Mencap?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

I think I did answer your question earlier, so I think we'll move on, thank you.

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Item (M)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(M) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation by John Gotelee:

“Since 2003, there have been many visions to regenerate the LRIE as an economic powerhouse. Is the LRIE an area of missed economic opportunity?”

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

The Council is not in a position to oversee a complete regeneration of the site due to the scale of resource required and the financial risks. As such, the Council is proactively taking steps to work with local partners on smaller scale opportunities for commercial, community and environmental regeneration across the site. This includes working with leaseholders to unlock investment in their facilities, bringing football back to Faraday Road and working together with a number of organisations to improve links between Bond Riverside and the canal and town centre.

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:

“Over the years, and it's not just the Liberals, it's the Conservatives as well, there's been plan after plan for London Road Industrial Estate from, I think, 2003. And every time it seems to get shelved, and at the moment the road is falling to bits. What plans you have going forward to actually develop it for economic purposes”.

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

I answered that in my initial response, Mr. Gotelee. We're working with the leaseholders and businesses that are present on the units on that site. I do not accept your premise that the road is falling into disrepair.

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Item (N)

Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026

(N) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Simon Pike:

“Who has the Council engaged to lead on the development of the Masterplan for North East Thatcham and to undertake the studies required in Policy SP14 of a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Transport Assessment, Biodiversity Strategy and a Historic Environment Strategy and on primary healthcare and secondary education provision?” By “who”, I mean the identity of the consultancy, consultant or other business in sufficient detail to be able to find their professional credentials through internet search (though I recognise that some individual consultants do not maintain an ‘internet presence’).”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Thank you for your question, the masterplan is being created in collaboration with the North East Thatcham Partnership of landowners and includes quite a number of consultants to prepare the necessary reports to inform the masterplan, too many to list here but we would be very happy to provide this detail to you directly.

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?”*

Simon Pike asked the following supplementary question:

“Just to clarify, I wasn't asking for the professional credentials. I was just asking for the names to be given in sufficient detail that I could do that research”.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

I will make sure that you have that list.

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Item (O)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(O) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Ian Hall:

“Has the council ever thought of allowing another sport such as Lacrosse or Hockey to be played at Faraday Road ?”

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

No other sport has been considered for provision at Faraday Road. The facility provides a Step 7 ground standard, with limited playing time available, which serves local football teams.

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Item (P)

Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026

(P) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Paula Saunderson:

“As well as Sources Of Funding via S106 & CIL Developers Contributions, will the Council also be seeking GRANT Funding from various sources including Central Government (e.g., the Football Foundation) to deliver Pitches and Facilities within the lifetime of the new Playing Pitch Strategy?”

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

All funding options will be considered and pursued as appropriate to deliver against the new PPS. The PPS has been developed by a Steering Group which includes the Council and national bodies for sport which supports the ability of these bodies to provide grant funding. This steering group will work together to deliver the aspirations of the PPS collaboratively.

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:

“Would you consider when you are putting out the next stages of information for the public, the sources of funding. There are two types of grants. There are grants that you have to apply for, and then there are grants that council are given on various formula. Also within Section 106 and CIL, there are two different types of funding. So would you consider when you are looking at your sources of funding and reporting your financial assessments, splitting it slightly more into those two categories, splitting them down into two?”

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

That is certainly something we can consider.

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Item (Q)

Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026

(Q) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Keren Ben-David Rostholder:

“Will the council now commit to using this ringfenced funding to secure the specialist 1:1 placements needed to meet the 'urgent' holiday provision goals identified in your own 2024-2029 Strategy?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

The council will give specific attention to developing the HAF offer to children and young people with SEND and align to the work of Children's Services under the anticipated DfE expectation to have a School-Aged Childcare function.

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?”*

Keren Ben-David Rostholder asked the following supplementary question:

“So are you committing to looking at not having an underspend next year, and ensuring that the total HAF allocation is going to be spent like neighbouring counties?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

We will definitely attempt to do that. If the provision is there from providers like Mencap and Swings and Smiles, we will try and spend that allocation to ensure every child that needs it gets a HAF programme.

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Item (A)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

"A WBC press release on 10 April said "A key milestone was the decision to bring the School Improvement function in-house, backed by an investment of £325,000." By how much did the School Improvement function's budget increase following this 'investment'?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

Budget was increased by £325,000, due to the funding now coming directly from the council which will allow the school improvement function to deliver the statutory responsibilities. Previously, the school improvement function was a traded service, meaning visits were of the schools choosing rather than being for the LAs QA purposes.

The schools that aren't paying into the service or buying it directly will be better off by that amount. And we can deploy the funding back into the schools. So the net effect is the same amount of money, but we will be working with all the schools across the district, not those that choose to buy 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 Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:

"Can I ask a question of clarification? You said that the budget had been increased by £325,000. So could I ask, what was it, and what is it now?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

It was zero and it is now £325,000, I believe.

Councillor Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:

"Is it?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

I'm going to have to check that because AnnMarie is not here now.

Councillor Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:

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“When you spoke about this at the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, you said that the budget was £325,000 pounds, but that the traded service was not bringing that much money in. So, you were diverting money from elsewhere in the budget, into school improvement to £325,000 pounds. So, my question is, what has changed? There is no new money, by your own admission at the Scrutiny Committee. How can you expect the school improvement service, which is the means by which Council is able to influence achievement in the schools to work if there is no new money in it. So how can the School Improvement function improve?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

I think we have recruited staff within the team who are now going out and working more with schools rather than just the funding change. And as I say, I'm going to have to go back and check this detail

Councillor Dominic Boeck made the following comment:

“I'm surprised that you don't know this, given that I've asked the question. The school improvement, the whole function is about officers, experienced education professionals working with schools, intervening with schools when necessary.”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

I know what the school improvement team do.

Councillor Dominic Boeck made the following comment:

“But you don't seem sure. You don't know how much they've got. You don't know how many there are. You don't know what they're doing, what the plan is.”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

Enough questions. I will go back and ask that question and you will get a written answer.

Councillor Dominic Boeck made the following comment:

“A written answer to my first question? That is not what I need. The fundamental point I'm making in my second supplementary is how is the school improvement team going to influence, going to improve the performance of our schools?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

I will come back to you.

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Item (B)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Yet another Extraordinary Executive meeting has been scheduled for 11 June. In the last full calendar year under the previous administration (2022), there were no Extraordinary Executive meetings. By contrast, in the most recent full calendar year under this administration (2025), there were three Extraordinary Executive meetings. Already in 2026, and only five months in, two Extraordinary Executive meetings have been called. This sharp increase raises a serious question: are there issues with the Council's governance, or is there a deeper issue driving this growing reliance on extraordinary meetings?”

The Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison answered:

Thank you for your question, and I can assure you that there are no issues with the Council's Governance.

Two of the Extraordinary meetings that you refer to that took place during the 2025 calendar year (March and November), were called to deal with decisions relating to local government reorganisation. Until approached by neighbouring Councils in Oxfordshire in February 2025, West Berkshire Council had nothing on its forward plan relating to this, and the timetable for these decisions was set by government. The extraordinary meeting in July was to approve an urgent contract award following the unplanned exit from the market of a critical supplier. This was beyond our control.

In 2026, the Extraordinary meeting in January was to consider potential redundancies and was scheduled appropriately. The meeting that will take place in June was called to meet the timetable for a significant contract award, which we determined was appropriate given its scale and value, to reserve to the Executive for decision. That could not come to this meeting as the procurement process has not yet concluded.

And I believe there was an Extraordinary meeting in the last two weeks, which was scheduled by your request, Councillor Mackinnon, for an item that was withdrawn on the night. So in conclusion from there's no gap or failure to follow governance process, and the processes here at the Council are working correctly. In view of the above, it is clear that the governance processes are working appropriately.

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?”*

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

Councillor Ross Mackinnon asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you for your answer. You didn't mention the Extraordinary meeting, which was called at very short notice to discuss the pay award, which is an annual item that I think had been left off the forward plan for some reason. I don't know why you didn't mention that. And you've mentioned a meeting that's been called for June. That's not just on the agenda, well, on the forward plan. There are other items there, like asset optimisation, which have been scheduled for that. Why is that? Why did you not mention the pay award in your answer?”

The Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison answered:

I believe the pay award was in relation to the pay statement. And I think it was something that was just missed off by accident. But I will come back to you because I don't have that detail in front of me.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon made the following comment:

“There are issues with governance then, if you're missing important things off by accident.”

The Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison answered

Everything was scheduled in the timetable. It was just missing off the agenda item. But I will take that back.

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

Item (C)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation by Councillor Howard Woollaston:

“What estimate has the Executive made of the one-off and recurring costs of local government reorganisation, and where would those costs fall if expected savings do not materialise?”

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

The forecast costs of Local Government Reorganisation are included across Oxfordshire (and West Berkshire) in the business case that we discussed at full Council last year, and it went through Executive. And the government also included those numbers in its consultation during early 2026. It's a little too early to consider what may or may not happen going forward when no decision has actually been made on local government organisation

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 Howard Woollaston asked the following supplementary question:

“I can understand the figures put out nearly a year ago, but I would have thought there would be some sort of monitoring process given what is evolving. But bear in mind, we have a decision likely within the next two months. So, I'm slightly surprised that you're not doing something. Do you have an update or know when you may get one”.

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

There is a lot of work that has already gone on behind the scenes to get ready for whenever MHCLG's decision is made. It's always difficult getting the balance right because we don't want to drive officer time too early when we're speculating as to when that decision is likely to be made. But there will be monitoring. Those main costs will probably come in from July, because that is when we are expecting MHCLG to decide on which of the business cases it will take forward in consulting firm.

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

Item (D)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

“What steps did the administration take between May 2023 and March 2026 to improve the poor attainment of deprived children at KS2, a situation that you said at the recent Children and Young People Scrutiny meeting that you ‘inherited’?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

2013 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector Michael Wilshaw noted that the disadvantaged outcomes were an embedded problem, which was a press article at the time.

Since coming into administration, we have prioritised Children's Services investment, ensuring the factors that keep children safe and happy are the foundations for us to build on across West Berkshire. We are at a stage of maturity now where we are focusing on the effect of education and the attainment of children, particularly the most disadvantaged. We have seen improvements in our good levels of development, our GLD, which is taken when a child leaves reception, and this is the expected development. Of those, in 2022, 64.8% achieved a good level of development. In 2023, 66.4. 2024, 66.8, and in last year, 72.1. So our investment has been so far with the younger years. It's very difficult to turn around quickly the levels of attainment at key stage two, but that is where we are about to start focusing our attention.

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:

“The whole 2013 Sir Michael Wilshaw issue is a complete red herring. That's a long time ago, Councillor Codling. I remember what that was about. I don't think you know the detail of his report. Children's Services went through some very difficult times in the early '10s, which the administration was able to turn around very quickly. The specific point around the attainment of all our children, and in particular, the attainment of our more deprived children, is what we are addressing now. You said in the same Scrutiny Committee meeting that I mentioned earlier on, that when you took control three years ago, you saw some problems that needed to be fixed. My question to you is, what concrete action, what specific actions have you taken since you took power? Bearing in mind that three years after you took control of the administration, you received a very damning letter from Dame Kate Dethridge which was specifically in its criticism. What have you done to address that?”

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

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

We have started from the ground up. If you don't get the foundations right, there's no point in putting a roof on. We have worked with those early years children. The improvement is happening there, and the same thing we'll be looking at those older children from now on. We had to start somewhere.

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

Item (E)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(E) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Why was the Extraordinary Council requisitioned by Conservative members on 29 March to debate pedestrianisation delayed for nearly 7 weeks, to be held after the publication of the administration’s decision on how to proceed was published on 14 May?”

The Deputy Leader of the Council answered:

This question was already taken at full 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:

“Don’t I get a supplementary though as it is a valid question on the agenda. I want to make a point of order, and please take this in good spirit. This is why you end up with Councillor Brooks shouting at members of the public who want two and three supplementary questions, because you don’t answer the question. You’re supposed to get an answer to the question that’s submitted, and then a supplementary based on that answer. Many of the questions tonight have not answered the question at all. So the Member or the member of the public has to press for an answer to the original question. If you want to improve your Leaders’ blood pressure, maybe answer the question, and then people won’t get so exercised when they have to ask two supplementary questions to get their question answered.

At that meeting, the Chairman said that the Leader had not been consulted about the scheduling decision. Can I ask if the Leader was informed about the requisition before the scheduling decision was made”.

The Deputy Leader of the Council answered:

I don't know the answer to that. It wasn't shared with me or requested with me. We will come back to you.

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

Item (F)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(F) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Howard Woollaston:

“Can you provide an update on the output of the financial improvement group, which started meeting recently and has input from external financial experts?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

The finance improvement group (FIG) has met twice since March and has considered a range of themes. Its initial focus has been on assets, and opportunities for more effective asset optimisation, as well as ensuring good progress is occurring against the finance improvement plan, and focus on the 2025-26 outturn, and in year financial position.

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 Howard Woollaston asked the following supplementary question:

“Could you confirm who the members are and what their particular experience is for this?”

The Chief Executive answered:

We have one individual who is a previous Section 151 officer with considerable experience as a CFO. We have one who's a very experienced local authority Chief Executive. And we have another who is a member of the LGA.

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

Item (G)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(G) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“In light of West Berkshire’s concerns about reduced government funding settlements as pointed out at the extraordinary meeting in January, what specific areas of council spending are currently considered financially unsustainable without transformation or service reduction over the next three years?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

It is important to be clear at the outset that, as highlighted in previous meetings, the Council is operating within a significantly constrained and uncertain national funding environment.

The challenge we face is systemic rather than isolated. Like many local authorities, West Berkshire is experiencing sustained demand growth and cost pressures in a number of key statutory service areas, alongside real-terms reductions in core government funding. That combination is placing increasing pressure on our overall financial sustainability over the medium term.

I can assure you however, that the Council’s approach is not simply to accept or manage decline through service reduction. Rather, we are moving deliberately to a clear corporate position of financial sustainability, underpinned by a Finance Improvement Plan and a structured and strategic transformation programme.

Through this approach, decisions about future service delivery will be taken transparently, corporately, and with full consideration of impact, including equality impacts and the needs of our communities. It is also important to stress that this is a multi-year programme, and we will continue to engage Members, staff and residents as it develops.

In summary, the issue is not that specific services have already been deemed unsustainable in isolation, but that the current funding and demand trajectory as a whole is not sustainable without transformation. The Council is therefore taking a proactive, planned and strategic approach through Transformation and by the measures set out in the Financial Improvement Plan, to ensure that we can continue to deliver vital services in a way that is financially sustainable over the next three years and beyond.

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?”*

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

Councillor Ross Mackinnon asked the following supplementary question:

"You answered it in the negative, as in there is no specific area, I guess. Can you commit to really get rockets under this financial improvement group? I've been told that it's only met twice since March. It comes at an external cost. We all want it to work. So can I urge you as the Portfolio Holder to really keep that momentum going?"

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

Toby has been running the financial FRP, which has been basically looking at the detail of the performance against budget, looking at savings, looking at changes to deliver those savings. So there's been quite a lot of deep dives into line items in individual Service Directors and Executive Directors' budgets. It has been quite an interesting process which we've been undertaking to actually get into that level of detail. Probably it's something which I must admit would have been nice to see three years ago, but we are where we are. We're getting that level of detail. But yes, I'm confident that we have a greater understanding across both Members and officers of the key drivers of delivering budgets, revenue budgets within the actual envelope, which we passed in this chamber back in February.

So yes, we're doing everything we possibly can. However, as we know, we have certain costs which can be outside of our control, not least children's social care.

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

Item (H)

Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026

(H) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Howard Woollaston:

“Which single financial risk keeps the Executive most concerned about the Council's position over the next two years?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

The single financial risk keeping the Executive most concerned about the Council's financial position over the next two years is the underlying structural deficit gap between our net revenue spend and available funding. Along with the combined long-term impact of relying on exceptional financial support. Exceptional financial support has an escalating compounding burden, and it will drive a larger future revenue gap, which also is caused by the lack of the severe central government funding reductions, which have cut grants to us and redistributed our business rates, leaving the Council with a £26 million compounded loss in funding.

The Council is also forecasting continual social care growth, expenditure growth driven by relentless high inflation demand in both Adult and Children's Social Care commission budgets. So we've seen both an increase in volume and also an increase in rates. Also we've had historic low level of financial reserves to absorb unexpected overspends.

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 Howard Woollaston asked the following supplementary question:

“Are you at all concerned about the level of interest that you are borrowing and continue to borrow, and the impact it has on the revenue budgets going forward for many, many, many years to come?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

I did say that in my answer, saying that the long-term impact of relying on exceptional financial support, which is borrowing and the compounding nature of it. The fact that with the current public works loan board rate of around about 6%, you're looking at roughly 10 %, 10p in the £ for every year that the EFS would be borrowed. So yes, we fully recognize that the fact that it is a compounding issue for us.

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

Item (I)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“How much additional council tax has the average household paid since 2023, and which services are demonstrably better as a result?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

The average band D council tax household in West Berkshire has increased by £357.03 from 2022-23 to 2026-27

Over this period the Council's recycling rate has improved from 49.8% to 55%. Since 2023, additional recycling services introduced since include:

- Plastic pots, tubs and trays
- Domestic batteries
- Flexible tubes such as toothpaste containers

Also new at HWRCs since 2023 are:

- Coffee pods
- Vapes
- Mattress recycling
- Water filter cartridges
- Foil
- Paint reuse

Highways services have achieved a triple green rating, one of only three in the country, and though there was no direct comparator, is reflective of the investment that has been put into West Berkshire's highways over the past three years.

The Castle gate short break service has improved its Ofsted rating from 'good' to 'outstanding' twice in a row

Residents can now enjoy longer opening hours of the Newbury Lido where visits have risen from 14.5k before Covid to 56.6k now.

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

Investment in leisure centres across the district has seen user numbers rise from 848k to just over a million users

Planning performance for major applications has improved from 81% approved with the timescales to 89%.

There has been a significant reduction in agency workers in children's social care from 34% to 6%, which has contributed to a more than halving of the agency bill by the administration and improving services through having permanently employed staff.

We have put in place an offering for towns and parishes to enhance the services in their local area to benefit local residents, this has included seeing additional opening hours at Pangbourne library.

Residents are now benefiting from our use of the LIFT (Low Income Family Tracker) scheme which has provided an estimated additional £192,000 back into the pockets of local residents since its introduction. In addition, from the March data we are seeing the following improvements reflected in pension-age residents since we launched LIFT:

- Those showing as being in relative poverty dropped by 19%
- Those showing as being in fuel poverty dropped by 12%
- Those showing as being in food poverty dropped by 50%
- Those showing as being in water poverty dropped by 19%

We have also introduced the 'let's talk' service for residents and have held 172 drop in sessions including at all of our Libraries, Northcroft Leisure centre, Hungerford Town Hall, Speen Community Café, Community Group in Alice bye Court in Thatcham, Thatcham Food Larder, Linear Park and all of the Foodbanks.

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:

"Would you accept that presenting a long list of isolated initiatives doesn't really answer the central question? And can you understand why residents are feeling that they're not £357 better off under services after three years of rising council tax? Can you understand why residents think that?"

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

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

Personally, I feel certainly they have significant value for money from the £7 per week increase, which would probably buy two coffees from Costa, so I think it is a small price to pay for the increase which they've seen in services.

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

Item (J)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(J) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Does the Executive accept that leaks of sensitive reports, such as that relating to pedestrianisation, undermine public confidence in both the competence and integrity of the Council’s administration?”

The Deputy Leader of the Council answered:

The Executive does not condone unauthorised leaks of confidential or draft material, noting that they can raise data protection risks and create confusion by making incomplete work appear like a settled policy.

The Council rejects claims that leaks indicate poor competence or integrity, stating it operates within a robust governance framework aligned to CIPFA, Solace, and LGA guidance that balances openness and accountability with appropriate information controls while proposals are still being developed.

Two principles are emphasised. One, options must be safely developed and tested and challenged before decisions are taken, and two, decisions must then be made transparently through proper democratic processes with full information shared at the right time. The Council commits to strong information governance, ensuring members and the public receive accurate, complete information via proper channels and upholding transparency and accountability. Any concerns about information handling are treated seriously and managed through robust internal processes.

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:

“Well, if leaks of the sensitive reports like pedestrianisation don't relate to competence and integrity of the Council’s administration, I wonder if I could ask you why do you think that leak happened? Could that have been the person who leaked it really saying that there was a massive disconnect between that information in the internal report and the Council's public position? Well, if it's not competence and integrity, why was it leaked do you think?”

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

The Deputy Leader of the Council answered:

I personally cannot comment on why that was leaked by whoever it was. What I will say is, if there are concerns about information handling, we take it seriously, and we will address it through appropriate and robust internal processes.

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

Item (K)

Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026

(K) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“In a TV interview on 1 April, you (Cllr Pemberton) said the following regarding the pedestrianisation trial: “It is a trial and not something we’ve looked at previously for pedestrianisation over this period of time, but generally speaking I think the response that we’re getting now is positive”.

(<https://www.facebook.com/ThatsTVThames/videos/we-obviously-want-to-make-a-decision-as-quickly-as-we-possibly-canportfolio-hold/1198891685464513/> - 0.15 – 0.26).

Given the overwhelming majority of responses to your consultation were negative, and your own leaked briefing note showing no economic benefit, why did you make this comment?”

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

At the time of that interview, I was reflecting the fact that the administration had received a range of positive feedback regarding the trial from a number of stakeholders, including the town council, representatives of the nighttime economy, and the Newbury BID.

In addition, some residents responded positively to the trial, and I have also personally received supporting comments from residents during the course of the trial. It's also important to note that even amongst responses expressing concerns about the trial, some included constructive suggestions about how the arrangements could be improved. The purpose of the trial was precisely to test the scheme, gather feedback, and better understand its implications and its impacts before any long-term decisions are made. We recognize that views on trial are mixed and that further consideration is needed. That is why our administration has decided to pause the current arrangements and undertake further consultation before determining the next steps

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?”*

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

Councillor Ross Mackinnon asked the following supplementary question:

“So I think your answer there said that you had received some specific responses from the BID and some stakeholders, and some from the consultation were positive. The wording you said, though, there ‘is generally speaking, I think the response that we're getting now is positive’. But that interview was dated on the 1st of April. You knew the consultation results at that point, you knew the internal review report and the Beauclair results. So generally speaking, would you say that the response that you had up to the 1st of April was really positive? Generally speaking.”

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

Generally speaking, yes, I would. We view pedestrianisation as a forward-looking scheme and initiative, and it's all part and parcel of redesigning the shared space within the town centre to make it nicer for all users to enjoy and experience. So yes, I did think generally speaking, the responses were positive.

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

Item (L)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(L) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

"In an answer to a public question at Executive on 19 March, you (Cllr Pemberton) said: "The data also suggests that there was also a significant increase from visitors outside Newbury and Thatcham. So, 36 per cent of that spend was from visitors coming into the town and spending more on retail."

Yet the leaked internal report (as published in the Newbury Weekly News on 26 March) said: "The report also admits analysis of the amount of people going into town, conducted by company Place Information, detected 'no uplift' in weekly numbers."

Why did you suggest an increase in visitors and retail spend in your answer, when your report confirmed the opposite on both counts?"

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

The report that you're referring to was an internal working document that had been leaked to the press, before it had completed the appropriate due diligence and review process.

The publicly available Beauclair report identified a notable decline in year-on-year sales from local customers during the trial period. However, it also showed that overall sales in Newbury in 2025 were higher than in 2024. In answering the original question, I was referring to that broader context and the data relating to spending patterns, including spend attributed to visitors from outside Newbury and Thatcham.

My response was therefore an interpretation of the available data at that time and was heavily caveated. I accept that the evidence does not demonstrate a clear uplift in overall footfall or retail performance directly attributable to the pedestrianisation trial. Equally, however, the available data does not support a definitive conclusion the trial caused an overall decline in sales. That is precisely why further analysis, engagement, and consultation are necessary before any longer-term decisions are made

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:

"It's just something specific that you mentioned there. You said that the data suggests that there was no increase in footfall during the trial, but the quote, and this is the

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answer to Mr. Gotelee's question, "The data also suggests that there was also a significant increase from visitors outside Newbury and Thatcham."

This goes back to the analogy I drew earlier on. That may be true, but overall, football was down. And would you not accept that selectively quoting data in an answer to a question from a member of the public is, it's not lying, we would never say that, but it's a misleading answer. It doesn't give the true picture."

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

I don't believe that anything that I have said at any point, Councillor Mackinnon, is misleading. The very nature of the conversation that we are having is open to interpretation. There were no firm conclusions reached from the data set out in the Beauclair report. And if you wanted to, I could speak at length about the veracity of data that's in that report. I said to you earlier, I'm not a statistician, but if I was to speak to the Parkway shopping area, for example, if I was to speak to the management team there, they would say that we've recorded an increase in footfall.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon commented:

"Are you questioning the report?"

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

I am not questioning the report. I'm merely making the point that it is open to interpretation because the data itself was drawn from a number of different sources. Parkway does not stand apart from the rest of the town centre, Councillor Mackinnon. What happens there also affects Northbrook Street. I've answered your question, Councillor Mackinnon. I do not accept I've misled anybody.

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

Item (M)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(M) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

"I received the agenda and reports (including pedestrianisation) for this meeting on publication at exactly 4.00pm on 13 May. The Newbury Weekly News published a detailed article referencing the pedestrianisation report's contents with comments from Cllr Gourley at exactly 4.00pm on 13 May. Were the media given access to the report, and notified of the Executive's decision, before Members and the public?"

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

You don't tell us when you speak to the press, and we don't need to tell you.

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 a disgraceful attitude. This relates to when members of the council and the public are informed of Executive decisions.

I'm aware of the concept of embargoed press briefings. But this agenda and this paper was published at four o'clock on the 13th of May. And again, I'm going to ask my question again because you're not answering it. You just question my motivation.

Nikki Hinman published an article on the website at the same minute. It's minute per minute, which contained comments from Councillor Gourley and a detailed analysis of this report, which means she had had that report for several days.

So my question is, why are the media being given access to detailed Executive decisions, notified of the Executive decisions, and given interview quotes from Executive Members before members of the council and the public? That is surely improper?"

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

You know full well the answer to that question. You know full well it's standard practice for embargoed media briefings to be held for complex and high-profile issues. These enable journalists to gain a deeper understanding of the issue, to give them the

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

opportunity to ask questions, to give them the time to prepare accurate and balanced reports on those issues, which are, as I'm sure you will agree, based on the debate we've had this evening, of significant interest to our residents.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon commented:

"Can you answer the question then. Were the media given access before the public?"

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Item (N)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(N) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Can the Executive guarantee that the ongoing commitment to some form of pedestrianisation and the masterplanning exercise referred to in the report will not become an open-ended financial commitment requiring further capital exposure in the context of an already strained financial position?”

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

Any future work relating to pedestrianisation or the wider master planning process will need to be considered carefully and proportionately in light of the Council's overall financial position.

There will inevitably be some costs associated with further engaging and consulting--consultation with stakeholders, whether through officer time or, if appropriate, external consultancy support. However, one of the key lessons from the trial has been the importance of engaging more fully with stakeholders to better understand the range of views and priorities involved.

This applies not only to any future consideration of pedestrianisation but also to how we make meaningful progress on delivering the wider master plan, which is now four years old. Any future expenditure will remain subject to the Council's normal governance, scrutiny, and budget-setting processes. I'm not sure what your reference to open-ended is driving at as we consult, we will aim to complete that process in the quickest and most efficient way possible, and no reasonable member or officer would commit resources in the way you're trying to suggest without a clear plan or terms of reference

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:

“It sounds like you're recognising that any ongoing commitment to pedestrianisation could require some council funding. We've just heard, in all seriousness quite a, a troubling item about children's mental health. And why don't you level with residents that if you stopped vanity projects like this, you might be better placed to deal with some serious issues like children's mental health. Would that not be better?”

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

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

It's not a vanity project, Councillor Mackinnon. We're trying to transform the shared space within Newbury town centre.

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

Item (O)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(O) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“What is the capital cost of implementing the PPS in full and how much revenue provision would need to be made available to finance borrowing of that scale should external funding not become available?”

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

The purpose of the PPS is to provide a strategic framework to 2041 rather than a costed blueprint for delivery, Funding sources will be reviewed for projects as they arise, and contributions agreed. It is at this point that any capital costs to WBC would be determined. The delivery of the PPS is the responsibility of the entire steering group not just WBC.

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:

“It's really just a clarification. So, we don't know the full cost at this stage, would that be fair?”

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

We don't know the full cost at this stage.



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

Item (P)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(P) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“On Sunday, I tried to book the Faraday Road pitch for 90 minutes of adult football. There was no availability at any time for the rest of May, June and July – so I gave up. When is the next available slot to book at this pitch?”

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

Faraday Road, along with all of our grass pitches across West Berkshire, is allocated to existing teams to enable them to complete their competitive fixtures during the football season. Once the final scheduled matches have been played, pitches are then taken out of use to allow for essential end of season renovation works, which are critical to maintaining pitch quality and safety for future seasons. As a result, there are no bookable slots available at Faraday Road for the remainder of May, June, or July. The pitch will not be available for casual or one-off bookings during this period.

The next potential availability for booking at Faraday Road would typically be at the start of the next football season, subject to the completion of renovation works and the allocation of fixtures.

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:

“The start of the next football season will be August. There's actually no availability showing until the end of 2026. I take your point about existing teams and existing commitments, but how can you answer there be consistent with an answer you gave to me earlier on when I said would you commit to these facilities being available to the community, other clubs, grassroots organizations, rather than higher paying users, rather than existing teams? It seems that existing teams have a block on this. How can both those things be true?”

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

Well, first of all, I would say that existing teams are ones that are accredited and are on our booking system. They're in their leagues; they have their fixtures arranged. As yet, we don't know what the fixture programme is for the current 2026/27 football season. They haven't been allocated yet.

And the other point I would make is that it underlines the fact, the reason why we're so keen on putting in an artificial grass pitch, because as I did say earlier, the grass is

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

a problem because it has a certain amount of wear that it can tolerate, and we have to look after the pitch.

Remember, it fell into somewhat disrepair after the original renters of that site were evicted. I believe the ground won awards for the quality of its pitch. But for a number of years, it was a meadow and obviously we're in that process of getting it back to a reasonable standard, and that's ongoing.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon made the following comment:

“So a clarification, Chairman. Do the existing users get first refusal for the new season?”

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

I don't think that is strictly the case. I think it is that the way the bookings are managed are by clubs that are in a league set up. This applies across the district. It is done on a first come, first serve basis.

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

Item (Q)	Executive Meeting on 21 May 2026
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(Q) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“What external assurance exists for the sequestration assumptions being used in the Environment Strategy?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

The Environment Delivery Team commissioned Future Nature WTC (a Wildlife Trust Consultancy) to undertake a study into ‘Carbon Storage and Sequestration by Habitats’ on Council owned land. The assessment included high-level carbon storage and sequestration calculations to provide a general overview of the amount of carbon currently being stored and sequestered by habitats across the Council’s landholding. Sites with the greatest potential for increasing carbon storage and sequestration were identified through an iterative process, and detailed site-specific scenario modelling by [Wilder Carbon Ltd](#) was undertaken to provide an estimate of the amount of additional carbon sequestration that could be achieved through specific habitat creation and restoration measures on these sites.

The data entitled ‘carbon sequestration on WBC land’ included within Figure 5: How projects contribute to meeting net zero of the Environment Strategy Annual Progress Report 2024-2025, is based on the finding of the Future Nature WTC ‘Carbon Storage and Sequestration by Habitats’ report.

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 has the conclusion been of those external assurance providers on those assumptions?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

The details are in figure 5 of the Environment Strategy and articulates the sequestration, the bit that we expect off of our assets as they are. They have also done a bit of work for us on what the potential is as well for increasing that carbon storage and sequestration on our sites and doing some detailed site-specific scenario modelling to help estimate the amount of carbon sequestration could be achieved in future as well.

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