

Questions and Answers

Council
Thursday 16 July 2026

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WestBerkshire
C O U N C I L

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

(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Keren Ben-David:.....	2
(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by John Gotelee:	4
(C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Katie Mills:	5
(D) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison by Graeme Sheppard:.....	6
(E) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison by Ben Holden-Crowther:	8
(F) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Paul Morgan:	10
(G) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison by Paula Saunderson:.....	11
(H) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation by John Gotelee:	12
(I) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison by Paula Saunderson:.....	13

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

Question (A)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
---------------------	---------------------------------

(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Keren Ben-David:

“Given that the Council's current HAF payment structures, specifically the lack of upfront funding and reimbursement delays of up to three months make delivering special needs summer clubs a high financial risk for providers. While families face high out-of-pocket costs and inconsistent respite care. Will the Council, in light of the new commissioning manager coming on board to reform short breaks, commit to replacing these delayed payment terms with a formalised framework that ensures frontline funding is deployed efficiently?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

Thank you for your question on the Holiday Activity Food (HAF) Programme and I am happy to set out how the funding currently works and the support available to providers.

For mainstream HAF activities, providers are usually paid within 30 days once they have submitted a valid invoice and the required attendance information. If any providers are experiencing any delays, I encourage them to contact West Berkshire Council directly so that these can be resolved promptly.

For specialist SEND HAF activities, the Council can provide funding in advance where this could help a provider deliver the services. For this summer, we have about 60 per cent of specialist providers receiving funding in advance and we are contacting the remaining providers to check whether they need any upfront funding and if so, what level of support would be appropriate.

As you know, HAF is a fully funded by Government, and it is mainly for children and young people eligible for benefit related free school meals. Some discretionary places are available through the Councils application process, and these are free for families.

HAF and Short Breaks are funded and managed through separate arrangements. Short Breaks are being recommissioned, but we are keen to look at ways to improve how the two programmes work alongside each other, so services are efficient, providers feel supported, and children and young people with SEND and their families continue to receive the right support.

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?”*



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

Keren Ben-David asked the following supplementary question:

“To build on this momentum, will the Council commit to modernising these payment rules well ahead of the easter and summer 2027 holidays, making it easier for children with more complex needs to get care and helping us set up a central local base to host our specialist holiday providers right here within our borders”.

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

I think I have already said we are exploring that, and I know the Education team are already looking into it. So yes, we will look at it and do what we can to provide the best possible service within the funding we get from Government.

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

Question (B)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(B) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by John Gotelee:

“How much has been spent (including any scheduled work that has not been carried out) on maintenance and repairs to the Faraday Rd rain gardens”

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

Mr Gotelee, thank you for your question. A total of £2,688 has been spent on repairs and maintenance to the rain gardens.

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

Question (C)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Katie Mills:

“What safeguards does West Berkshire Council use to ensure that Children’s Services referrals concerning children missing education are not influenced by active SEND complaints, section 19 requests or Tribunal proceedings, and how does the council audit outcomes where no significant harm is found?”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

Thank you for your question. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and all professionals working with children have a duty to identify concerns, share information appropriately, and act where they believe a child may be at risk of harm. The purpose of referral and threshold processes is to ensure concerns are considered objectively, proportionately, and consistently so that children receive the right support at the right time.

Children's Services referrals concerning children missing education are assessed against established safeguarding and welfare thresholds, based on evidence of need, risk, and the impact on the child. Decisions are made in accordance with statutory guidance, local threshold criteria, and professional judgement. There is a published Threshold Document which is used to consider level of need and/or risks in children's social care.

It is important to recognise that SEND complaints, Section 19 requests, mediation processes, and SEND Tribunal proceedings are separate statutory processes from safeguarding procedures and serve entirely different purposes:

- SEND processes are concerned with matters such as educational provision, special educational needs, disability-related support, and a local authority's duties under education legislation.

- Safeguarding processes are concerned with identifying and responding to risks to a child's welfare and determining whether statutory social care thresholds have been met.

Whilst the same child may be subject to both processes at the same time, they are distinct and should not be conflated.

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

Question (D)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(D) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison by Graeme Sheppard:

"In February I submitted a signed petition asking that the council make its disused site in Newtown Road into a community nature reserve. In June I was informed by email that the petition had been unsuccessful. Despite my many previous attempts to ask for an update, and in clear contravention of the council's constitution, at no point during the intervening period was I informed of what body or persons would consider the petition, I was not told when the meeting to consider it would occur, I was not invited to attend the meeting or provided with an agenda, I was not afforded the 5-minute opportunity to speak and present the petition, nor was I able to answer questions. Nor was the petition entered onto the council website. Given these many failings and clear breaches of its own constitution, will the council rectify the situation by running the petition consideration process over again in order that fairness and local democracy are correctly served?"

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

Thank you Mr Sheppard for your question and for the petition you submitted to the Council. I understand your petition was responded to by my colleague, Councillor Iain Cottingham, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources.

Having reviewed the timeline for the consideration of your petition, I understand that your petition was received by the Council on 12 February 2026, and its receipt was acknowledged via an e-mail to you on 19 February 2026.

You next wrote to the petitions officer on 2 April 2026 to ask who would be responding to the petition as you wished to write to them in advance of any decision being made. You were advised, on 16 April 2026, that this would be the Service Lead for Finance and Strategic Assets, a senior officer within Finance and Property. This is the officer who considered your petition in consultation with Councillor Cottingham.

The response to your petition was provided in writing on 27 May 2026 and this is one of the ways in which the Council can respond to an ordinary petition. Petitions are not automatically considered at a meeting of the Council, as was the case with your petition, therefore there was no meeting that you could have attended in order to make your case. That comes with the petition submission. Your petition did not meet the criteria to be a petition for debate.

You are correct in your statement that the petition was not entered onto the Council's website as it should have been. I apologise for this omission. I have also asked officers

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

to ensure that the communication undertaken with petition organisers is enhanced in line with the frequency outlined in the Petitions Appendix of the Constitution.

However, the Petitions Appendix has no provision to appeal against decisions made on petitions. In addition, a duplicate or near duplicate of a petition cannot be accepted within a 12 month period. The decision provided to you on 27 May 2026, for the reasons outlined in that response, therefore stands and the matter will not be reconsidered at this time.

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?”*

Graeme Sheppard asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you, yes, I do. At no point in the Constitution does it say I am not to be invited, indeed it says I should be invited, informed of the meeting, and given an opportunity – I wasn’t. This amounts to a gross departure from the Constitution. It is not satisfactory. Given the fact that you have departed from the Constitution, I ask you to correct your mistakes and hear the petition”.

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

Please allow me to take that to the officers and I will provide a written response.

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

Question (E)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(E) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison by Ben Holden-Crowther:

"The Monitoring Officer's Annual Report (Agenda item 12) mentions a Social Media Protocol as part of the Members Code of Conduct. Are there also policies to ensure that social media content published by officers on behalf of the Council complies with the law?"

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

Within the Constitution, there is an officers' code of conduct within Part 13 and in particular, the use of social media is detailed in paragraph 5.16. Furthermore there is a general expectation under 5.13 that all employees are expected to comply with the law relating to their work and general conduct. If they break the law outside of working time and the offence is one that could damage public confidence or have a direct effect on their work, they may be subject to disciplinary procedures

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?"*

Ben Holden-Crowther asked the following supplementary question:

"I was wondering whether you as a Portfolio Holder were aware that the Council's official TikTok account deviates a bit from that strict policy you outlined.

It is filled with copyrighted music and video content which the Council doesn't own or have a commercial license to use. For example, an edited video of Justin Bieber appeared, seemingly promoting the 'Your West Berkshire' magazine, accompanied by one of his popular songs.

Will the PH commit to immediately removing legally risky content from the councils TikTok account and confirm that tax payers won't be on the hook for legal action which could result from the Councils' careless approach to copyright and slightly juvenile approach to social media more broadly".

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

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

I am aware that some videos and music can be added to videos shared publicly, and there are some restrictions around the duration of songs that can be shared. I will take away your comments. I personally don't use TikTok but will speak to the relevant officers in the Council, and should anything need to be removed, I will make sure that is done.

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

Question (F)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(F) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Paul Morgan:

"My question relates to Agenda item 15 - 2026-2027 Council Strategy Refresh Why is the Council's "ambition to open a new Community Sports Stadium in Faraday Road in 2027" not included in 2026-2027 Council Strategy Refresh?"

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

This Administration does continue to work towards the provision of significantly improved community sports facility at Faraday Road, and this will be reflected in the delivery plan for the refreshed Council Strategy.

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?"*

Paul Morgan asked the following supplementary question:

"As you know, when the administration took power in 2023, you had a viable planning application and business case for the whole site, not just part of it. Now it is dropped from the Strategy, will you consider looking at alternative options to fulfil your obligations for an enhanced community facility at Faraday Road"

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

I will commit that we are working towards providing a significantly enhanced community facility at Faraday Road, and we will continue to do so.

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

Question (G)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(G) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison by Paula Saunderson:

“Agenda Item 9 - Updates from Committees B.) Extraordinary Personnel & Standards Cttee

Qu: The Meeting included:

- 1. the Monitoring Officers Annual Report 2025-2026*
- 2. the Annual Update on HR Activity 2025-2026*

However, only Item 1 has come to this Full Council for Consideration so why is this please and does a Years HR Activity have less importance for feedback from All Councillors than the MO Officers Annual Report?”

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

The distinction arises from the different purposes and reporting routes for the two reports.

The Monitoring Officer's Annual Report is specifically concerned with matters of governance, ethical standards, constitutional compliance and the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct. As these matters relate directly to the conduct of elected Members and the Council's governance framework as a whole, it is considered appropriate for the report to be presented to Full Council for information and transparency.

The Annual Update on HR Activity, whilst an important report, is primarily concerned with workforce management, employment matters, organisational development and staffing issues. Oversight of these matters is delegated to the Personnel and Standards Committee under the Council's governance arrangements. Consequently, the report is considered and scrutinised through that committee rather than being routinely referred to Full Council.

Any recommendations requiring Full Council approval, or any matters of strategic significance affecting the Council's overall policy framework, establishment or governance arrangements, would be referred to Full Council through the appropriate decision-making process.

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

Question (H)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(H) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation by John Gotelee:

“With reference to the LRIE, going forward, do you think it has a future as an industrial estate, or does its future lie in residential housing?”

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

Thank you for your question.

The London Road Industrial Estate (Bond Riverside) is designated as an employment area in the most recent Local Plan (2024), and the Council intends to support its long-term future as a commercial hub for the area. As with many long-standing industrial estates, there are opportunities for investment in both new employment uses and complementary uses.

Proposals to introduce new uses to the site will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and revised National Planning Policy and the new Local Plan currently in development may enable fresh opportunities, but the overall estate will remain as primarily an employment hub for the foreseeable future.

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

Question (I)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(I) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison by Paula Saunderson:

“Agenda Item 12. Monitoring Officers Annual Report for 2025-2026

Qu: The Purpose of the Report is to bring to the Attention of Members a Summary of Complaints or other Issues within West Berkshire. Therefore, why does the Report only include Complaints Against Councillors, and it does not include Stage 1 & Stage 2 Complaints against Officers and/or Services?”

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

Thank you for your question.

The purpose of the Monitoring Officer's Annual Report is to provide Members with an overview of matters falling within the Monitoring Officer's statutory responsibilities, including standards, ethical governance, Member conduct, constitutional matters and related governance issues.

Complaints against councillors are included within the report because they are considered under the Council's Code of Conduct arrangements, for which the Monitoring Officer has a specific statutory role under the Localism Act 2011 and the Council's standards framework. These complaints are therefore reported as part of the Council's governance and ethical standards arrangements.

By contrast, Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints relating to officers or council services are managed through the Council's corporate complaints procedure. They concern service delivery and operational matters rather than Member conduct or standards issues. Responsibility for the management, performance monitoring and reporting of service complaints rests with the relevant service areas and senior officers rather than through the standards regime.

As a result, service complaints are reported separately through established corporate performance and complaints reporting arrangements and are not ordinarily included within the Monitoring Officer's Annual Report.

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

(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor David Marsh:.....	2
(B) 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:	3
(C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Howard Woollaston:.....	5
(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 Councillor Ross Mackinnon:	7
(E) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Howard Woollaston:.....	9
(F) Question not related to an item of business submitted to Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Corporate Programme by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:.....	11
(G) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Howard Woollaston:.....	13
(H) 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:	15
(I) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Howard Woollaston:.....	17
(J) 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:	18
(K) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Howard Woollaston:.....	20
(L) 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:	21

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

Question (A)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
---------------------	---------------------------------

(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor David Marsh:

“How many council tax payments must residents miss before they receive a reminder notice, and on what basis might they subsequently be issued with a summons and lose their right to pay by instalments?”

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources answered:

Council Tax is normally payable by monthly instalments over either 10 or 12 months. If an instalment is missed, a reminder notice is issued requiring the overdue amount to be brought up to date within seven days. Residents are entitled to receive a maximum of two reminder notices in a financial year, i.e. from April to following March.

If the overdue instalment is not paid within the period specified in the reminder notice, the taxpayer loses the statutory right to continue paying by instalments and the remaining balance for the financial year becomes payable in full. If the balance remains unpaid, the Council may commence recovery proceedings by issuing a summons and subsequently applying to the Magistrates' Court for a Liability Order.

Where a taxpayer has already received two reminders in the same financial year and brought the account up to date each time previously, a further missed instalment will result in a final notice being issued which requires payment of the full outstanding balance for the year. Failure to pay that balance may then lead to the issue of a summons and court proceedings

In summary, a resident may receive a reminder after the first missed instalment, but they can lose the right to pay by instalments if they fail to comply with a reminder notice or, after receiving two reminders in the same financial year, miss a further instalment. Continued non-payment may then result in a summons being issued.

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

Question (B)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(B) 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:

“Can the Leader set out his understanding of the role of opposition councillors in scrutinising Executive business at public meetings, including where questions arise during debate on agenda items?”

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

The Council's Constitution recognises the important role that all councillors, including opposition councillors, play in ensuring transparency, accountability and effective decision-making across the authority. The Constitution is founded on the principle that Council decision-making should be open and accountable, with scrutiny forming a key part of the Council's governance arrangements.

In terms of scrutinising the Executive business and decisions, this should be principally undertaken through the Council's scrutiny committees which are established to examine decisions, policies and performance and are expressly in place to ensure the Executive are held to account on behalf of residents.

This Administration has very much strengthened scrutiny, introducing the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and supporting opposition Councillors to chair two of the three Scrutiny Committees. There is ample opportunity for opposition Members to scrutiny this administration's proposals and policies.

In addition, the Constitution provides opportunities for councillors to question Executive Members through the formal written question process. Councillors may submit questions relating to Council business, matters for which the Council has responsibility, or the wellbeing of West Berkshire, and may do so in accordance with the procedures and timescales set out in the Constitution.

During public meetings of the Executive, the Chair (myself) is responsible for the orderly conduct of business and for applying the meeting procedure rules. The Executive's primary purpose is decision-making. Accordingly, debate on agenda items is generally directed towards consideration of the report and the decision before the Executive. Opposition councillors who are not members of the Executive may participate in accordance with the Constitution and any procedural rulings made by the Chair, but there is no constitutional right for non-Executive members to engage in unrestricted cross-examination of Executive Members during those meetings.

Where questions arise in relation to agenda items, the Constitution provides formal mechanisms through written questions, public meetings, and the scrutiny function. In

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

practice, Chairs may also permit questions or points of clarification during debate where this assists the conduct of business and the informed consideration of an item, but this remains a matter for the Chair's management of the meeting and must be exercised consistently with the relevant procedure rules.

Therefore, I do support the fact that opposition Councillors have a vital and legitimate role in scrutinising the Executive on behalf of their residents and have plenty of opportunity to do so.

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 for that answer.

Do you recognise that accountability is not just about complying with the letter of the Constitution, but also about creating the confidence that difficult questions are welcomed, rather than avoided in whatever forum they arise?"

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

Questions are extremely welcomed, and although you don't like it, and it seems you cannot recall the way in which your administration ran Executive meetings. From 2019 to 2023, and fourteen years before that, the last Conservative Leader allowed one, question per opposition Member on an item on the agenda.

I have enabled opposition Councillors to ask more than one question. I have been a lot more inclusive on this, but you are intent on turning Executive meetings into Scrutiny and I have told you that is not what we are going to pursue.

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

Question (C)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Howard Woollaston:

"Council Strategy 2023-2027:

When this administration achieved control of the Council over 3 years ago there were two fully costed and approved options for a holistic and complete solution for a new 3G pitch and club house . The Monks Lane Sports Hub and the NCFG scheme for Faraday Road . Can the portfolio holder explain why both of these planning consents were allowed to lapse?"

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

Cllr Woolaston, thank you for your question.

I would like to clarify that there were not two fully costed and approved options, whilst the Monks Lane option was costed and had planning, it still had significant conditions attached which would require discharging. The NCFG application simply did not have enough detail to satisfy your statement that this was fully costed and approved.

I am aware that the Monks Lane Sports hub was costed and had planning permission, however this administration correctly determined that this option was not in the best interest of the local footballing community, and this was backed by the electorate during the 2023 election campaign.

The NCFG application, whilst commendable in its ambition was very much an outline application. It lacked detail around drainage, archaeology, soil analysis, biodiversity net gain and water filtration. It was apparent from the outset when this Administration came to power that it would not be possible to discharge the onerous planning conditions that were attached to this application before it lapsed, therefore it was deemed necessary to prepare another application.

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 Howard Woollaston asked the following supplementary question:

"Whilst I understand Monks Lane, because you campaigned against it the whole time. The NCFG proposal was a well thought through plan as to how it could be developed. I would have thought a sensible Administration would have welcomed it with open

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

arms, finding solutions to the problems. You have wasted three years as far as I am concerned."

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

I mentioned that the NCFG application was outline, with substantial conditions. As you hinted, there are multiple questions about Faraday Road, so we will have an opportunity to come back to that.

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

Question (D)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(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 Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Can the Leader confirm how the administration recognises the constitutional and democratic role of the Leader of the Opposition in holding the Executive to account?”

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

Councillor Mackinnon said, during an Executive meeting, I have a constitutional role. There are two references in the Constitution; one detail their special allowance payment and two, to receive the Leader's annual report, and the leaders of oppo groups are entitled to ask questions of the leader.

Two references.

Nationally, the leader of oppo is not stat role and not in main local gov legislation as far as we can ascertain, not in LGA 1972 or Local Government and Housing Act 1989. That is not to say I don't recognise the important role of councillors, including that of the Leader of the Opposition. I give him great respect, I expect some back.

The Council's governance arrangements rely on effective challenge, scrutiny and debate, and opposition members play a key part in that process. The Leader of the Opposition may fulfil this role through participation in Council meetings, debate, councillor questions and through the Council's formal scrutiny arrangements established by the Constitution as has been detailed in the previous question; the Constitution distinguishes between Executive decision-making meetings and the Council's scrutiny function.

We respect the contribution of all opposition councillors and the leader of the opposition groups, but we ensure that decisions are subject to the appropriate democratic challenge and are done in the right place.

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:

“I appreciate the procedural position, but could you explain how limiting visible scrutiny from myself and other opposition Members, builds confidence in the Council at a time when the governance of the Council has been called into question in many quarters.”

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

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

It has only been called into question by you. I am challenging you to bring some coherent policies and strategies which you don't seem interested in doing. So, I refer you to the previous answer, we have more scrutiny committees now, two run by Members of the opposition. There is plenty of opportunity for scrutiny, so take advantage of it.

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

Question (E)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(E) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Howard Woollaston:

"Council Strategy 2023-2027:

It is looking likely that approaching £2.5 million will have been or will be spent by this administration on Faraday Road including the 3G pitch. Can the portfolio holder explain why no attempt has been made to get grant assistance?"

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

Cllr Woollaston, thank you for your question.

Grant funding was considered through The Football Foundation. However we, and by that I mean West Berkshire Council, can only apply for this once (we have one bite of the cherry for the whole district) and the timescale for securing the grant funding along with the conditions that are attached to the funding did not make it suitable for the Faraday Road scheme.

You will be well aware that we are under pressure from you and your colleagues about the timings for delivering on what we are hoping to do at Faraday Road, and it was deemed too long to go for the Football Foundation grant funding.

However, there will be other projects resulting from the playing pitch strategy that will be appropriate and we will make full use of any grant funding available to the Council.

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

Councillor Howard Woollaston asked the following supplementary question:

"Isn't the reality that you didn't really consider grant funding. We know it takes two years. You should have started it at the beginning of your Administration".

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

I just mentioned, we get one bite of the cherry for Football Foundation grant funding. At that stage, we didn't have a playing pitch strategy delivered and we will be using

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

grant funding, of course we will, elsewhere in the district for the delivery of the playing pitch strategy.

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

Question (F)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(F) Question not related to an item of business submitted to Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Corporate Programme by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

“Can the Leader set out the principles the administration applies when deciding whether to bring major business to an extraordinary or special meeting rather than an ordinary scheduled meeting?”

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

The administration's starting point is that major business should normally be considered at an ordinary scheduled meeting wherever the timetable allows. Extraordinary or special meetings are used where there is a clear business need to make a decision before the next scheduled meeting, for example because of statutory, contractual, procurement, financial, employment or operational deadlines.

Additional Executive meetings are not unusual and have been used by successive administrations where circumstances require decisions to be taken outside the normal cycle. For example, six additional meetings were held in 2018/19 and two in 2019/20. Since this administration came into office, one additional meeting was held in each of 2023/24 and 2024/25, three in 2025/26, and two so far in 2026/27.

There are policies that need to be brought through at pace. Next week we will hold an extra meeting of the Executive in order to press ahead with the next generation of Transformation. As a result of cross party working through the Policy Development Group. We were told in the CIPFA report that we needed to broaden out our Transformation programme. We expect to crack on with this next week.

It seems that Councillor Mackinnon would slow us down as he would rather not attend extra meeting.

The most recent extraordinary meeting, on 11 June, was called to enable the timely letting of a key contract, where the procurement timetable required a decision before the next ordinary meeting. The previous extraordinary meeting, in January, was called to consider employment matters that were also time sensitive.

In summary, the principle is not to use extraordinary or special meetings as a matter of routine, but to use them where the timing of the decision requires it and were doing so enables the Council to act responsibly, lawfully and effectively.

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:

“Thank you for your answer. Shouldn't the default position be to maximize scrutiny and openness rather than relying on special meetings wherever possible, where the oft trumpeted by you tonight, ability to submit written questions and the public to submit written questions, is limited to zero. I wonder how many of the special meetings you referred to had more than one item on the agenda”.

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

I am answering the question about questions from the public in another question he has put tonight, so I will answer it then. And I didn't look back and 2018/19 to see what other items were on those meetings.

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

Question (G)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(G) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Howard Woollaston:

"Council Strategy 2023-2027:

Can the Portfolio Holder confirm whether you have gone out to tender for the 3G pitch element of Faraday Road and if so when will you know the costs?"

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

Councillor Woollaston, thank you for your question.

The contract for the construction of the 3G pitch will be let through an appropriate national framework.

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 Howard Woollaston asked the following supplementary question:

"It might be through a framework, but it is still the same question, do you know when you are going to get the costs through. Yes or no, simple question".

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

May I answer that in your next question.

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

Question (H)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(H) 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:

“Can the Leader confirm what opportunities are available for members of the public to ask questions when major decisions are brought to extraordinary or special meetings, and how the administration ensures that the use of such meetings does not reduce public participation?”

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

The current constitutional position is that extraordinary or special meetings are convened to deal with specific business that needs to be considered before the next ordinary scheduled meeting. For that reason, the current procedure does not provide for general written questions from members of the public or councillors at extraordinary meetings in the same way as it does for ordinary meetings.

However, extraordinary meetings remain public meetings, with agendas and reports published in advance in the usual way, subject to the normal rules on exempt or confidential information. Members of the public are therefore able to see the business being considered and the reasons for the decisions being taken.

I recognise, however, that where major decisions are taken at extraordinary meetings, it is important that the process supports transparency and public participation as far as possible. I am therefore minded to propose a change to the Constitution to allow written questions from both members of the public and Councillors in advance of an extraordinary or special meeting, where those questions relate directly to items on that meeting's agenda.

We have the Constitution Review Task Group for this very purpose, and on which Councillor Mackinnon sits. It has met 13 times since July 2024, and I note he has attended only one of those meetings in that time. I did write to him, asking if it was proving difficult to attend and might he want to substitute himself, I don't think I ever got a reply. I will address this, I think it makes sense, and will address it through the Constitution Review Task Group that I hope he might attend.

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:

“On the point of the Constitution Review Task Group, you are right, you did. For Members information, it has an unhappy habit of being cancelled and rearranged at short notice. Those are held during the day. I have a day job. Certainly, it would be my intention to attend many more of those meetings. When they are consistently rearranged and scheduled for when I am teaching, my day job, I am afraid that myself and other working Members of the Council sometimes struggle.

Shouldn't your instinct be to always widen public participation rather than simply satisfy the Constitutional requirements, and will you suspend standing orders on Thursday to allow Members and the public to allow written questions.”

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

I am not sure I can suspend standing order for that. All you had to do was reply to my email to say you are finding it difficult to get there in the daytime, but you didn't even reply.

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

Question (I)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(I) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Howard Woollaston:

"Council Strategy 2023-2027:

When will a detailed fully costed report be provided to Council and the public on the further costs of Faraday Road?"

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

The full cost of the project will only be known once planning permission is gained which we anticipate achieving later this year. Following this full scheme costs will be reported to the Council's Executive.

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 Howard Woollaston asked the following supplementary question:

"You are unlikely to get planning consent till I would have thought November, then you go out for costings. You are not going to get there in time, are you?"

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

I don't think I need to reply to that question, thank you.



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

Question (J)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(J) 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:

“Will the Leader confirm whether a member who has submitted a written question is still entitled to ask a separate question during debate on an agenda item, provided that the question is relevant to the matter under discussion?”

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

The Constitution states that ‘Councillors who are not Members of a Body but attend a Meeting of that Body will, at the absolute discretion and upon the invitation of the Meeting Chairman, be permitted to speak at the Meeting’.

Not just the Executive, but Members of any body who attend the meeting, will at the absolute discretion and upon the invitation of the meeting Chairman, be permitted to speak at the meeting. The Executive is effectively a cabinet meeting to make decisions. There are plenty of Councils who hold these in private, others who allow only one question, and actually they ask opposition Members to walk to the lectern as if they were a member of the public. That is not the West Berkshire way.

But I look to Councillor Mackinnon to show respect for a time-honoured process. Abiding by the Chair's decisions and rulings and respecting their right to manage a meeting. And not to talk over them because he has something to say. It is him who is drawing us into these unseemly questions and answers because he can't find a way, of which there are man, to scrutinise our policies.

For the record, at the last Executive meeting. Councillor Mackinnon asked 16 questions, with supplementary questions that because 32. I don't think that is a bad crack of the whip. On the ones where he had asked a question about an item, I said to him at the start, would you like to take the tabled questions now and we can weave them into the item. And I am sure he is astute enough to do so. He said he would wait till the end, so I said fine, but I don't need any questions from you during the item as you have those at the end.

But he doesn't like it. And he is enjoying the theatre of putting all these questions down and disrupting Executive meetings, and frankly sir, at Executive meetings, you become unmanageable and unchairable. After 34 years I have never seen any Councillor give less respect to the function of a chair. When your leaders in the past, one was here tonight, said Councillor Brooks, you are out of order and should not be saying that or interrupting, I took notice. I knew when I had gone too far. You sir do not.

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:

“Do you think, during a debate, it is best when it responds to the discussion as it unfolds, rather than being confined to questions drafted days in advance”.

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

That is the issue, you used the word debate. You want to turn every item of an Executive meeting into a debate, because it suits you.

You are there to ask questions as I was, remember Members one question for 18 years, of clarification and understanding. I have seen Members opposite trying to make long statements at an Executive meeting. That is not what it is for.

When you say you will call everything in, that is not your decision, that is on the Chair's of Scrutiny. If they put all policies through Scrutiny, they won't get much other work done, but that is up to them.

I will give an assurance to Councillor Culver, I have written to the Monitoring Officer about getting more policies through Scrutiny before they come to the Executive, I want more synchronicity. So, Councillor Mackinnon will continue with this kind of attack. I wish you would come up with some alternative policies and a coherent opposition because you are totally incoherent in how you are trying to oppose this administration.

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

Question (K)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(K) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Councillor Howard Woollaston:

"Council Strategy 2023-2027:

Does the Portfolio Holder agree with me that even if planning permission could be obtained in time to develop the 3G pitch at Faraday Road in the last 10 months of this administration , you will have spent approaching £2.5 million to provide an artificial pitch with floodlights, poor quality stands, with changing rooms and a club room in rented portacabins . Is this good value for the Council Tax paying public of West Berkshire?"

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

Councillor Woollaston, thank you for your question.

However, I completely disagree. This high-quality facility will give excellent value to the local community and fulfils a key commitment that the public wholeheartedly supported when this administration was voted in.

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 Howard Woollaston did not ask a supplementary question.

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

Question (L)	Council Meeting on 16 July 2026
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(L) 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:

"Will the Leader commit that major strategies and financially significant decisions will in future be considered by the relevant scrutiny committee before final Executive approval?"

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

As I have said before, the Executive recognises the important role of scrutiny in providing challenge, supporting transparency and helping to improve outcomes for residents.

However, the scrutiny work programme is for the relevant scrutiny committee to determine. It would not be appropriate for the Executive to direct which matters scrutiny should consider, as that would compromise their independence, Councillor Culver for one would not allow that to happen.

What the Executive can commit to is supporting effective scrutiny by engaging constructively with the relevant committee where major strategies or financially significant decisions are identified for review, and by making information available in a timely way wherever practicable. You have heard me say just now, I am looking to do that.

There may be occasions where statutory, contractual, procurement, financial or operational timescales mean that a decision cannot reasonably await prior scrutiny consideration. I would like to limit it, but I don't think I can eliminate it. In those cases, the decision will still be taken through the Council's established governance processes, with the usual opportunities for transparency and accountability.

In summary, the administration supports the principle of scrutiny considering major strategies and significant decisions where this can be accommodated within the committee's independent work programme and the decision-making timetable.

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?"*

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

"Thank you for that. Would you agree that if we have pre-decision scrutiny before the Executive a few weeks ago, we would have avoided a situation where the Executive

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

voted through a strategy none of them had read and might have had a better debate at the Scrutiny Committee than the non-existing Executive debate.”.

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

It is not a statement of fact that we had not read that strategy, but he accuses everyone of not reading it, you have ended on a low as you normally do.

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