Public Document Pack

Questions and Answers

Executive

Thursday 24 September 2026

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West Berkshire Council

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

Item (A)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by John Gotelee:

"Have the changes and resurfacing of the Robin Hood roundabout represented good use of public money?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Yes, I believe the maintenance and improvement works at the Robin Hood junction represented excellent value for money. The junction was last resurfaced in 2008 and had become very worn. Without this scheme, more frequent and costly patching would have been needed simply to keep it in a safe condition.

The works included approximately 11,600m² of resurfacing, using more than 1,600 tonnes of material, so this was a substantial renewal of the junction rather than a limited improvement. The project was funded through developer contributions and also delivered a wider package of works, including traffic signal improvements, sign replacement, vegetation clearance to improve visibility, ironwork repairs, gully cleaning, new road markings and the necessary traffic management throughout the works.

The works were undertaken at night. While this does add to the cost of delivery, it very significantly reduces disruption to the travelling public and local road users. In addition to improving traffic flow towards Shaw and the A4 Thatcham, the scheme has renewed the condition of the junction and will support its continued safe use for many years to come.

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:

"It needed resurfacing and it's done a good job, however, the extra money of the widening bits just didn't make a difference. I have driven around it loads of times and just it's still just as congested as it ever was".

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

I think you'll find the same amount of cars are probably still there, but we have increased that extra capacity on the eastern branch going towards Thatcham and Shaw to ensure that the rest of that sequence of lanes can move as freely as possible.

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

Item (B)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

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

"Now that the Short Breaks survey has concluded, what is the Council doing to audit the value for money of our most highly funded providers?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

The Short Breaks survey has now closed, and we received 63 responses from families. The feedback highlighted ongoing concerns about the availability of services and difficulties accessing support. Families told us they would like more holiday activities, weekend clubs, overnight breaks and opportunities to help children and young people develop independence.

We are using this feedback to help improve the Short Breaks offer. This includes working with existing providers to expand services, bringing new providers into West Berkshire, and involving families in shaping future support.

We recognise that improvements are needed and are taking a number of steps to strengthen the Short Breaks offer.

We are also:

- Meeting regularly with providers to better understand the support they offer.
- Bringing providers, parent groups, voluntary organisations and specialist services together through a steering group to help shape future provision.
- Visiting providers to identify opportunities for service development and growth.
- Testing new providers with families to help increase choice and capacity.
- Expanding the range of services available through new providers.
- Working closely with the Children with Disabilities Service to help design and improve the Short Breaks offer.
- Holding drop-in sessions with families and professionals so they can help shape future services.

Through our work with families, providers and partners, we are committed to improving and expanding the Short Breaks offer. We recognise that developing new services and making lasting improvements takes time, and this type of transformation work can take a number of years to deliver.

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

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 asked the following supplementary question:

"What specific penalties are you going to put in place today for providers who take council money but keep their doors locked to our children?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

I would have to investigate that. I am not aware of that happening, but I will find out and come back to you.

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

Item (C)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(C) 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". How will the Council and its consultants developing the Masterplan progress this collaboration with stakeholders, and especially with the relevant town and parish councils, and what is the timeframe for this collaboration?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Collaborative work commenced earlier this year with the public and stakeholder engagement events held in April and May. This was to understand local residents' and stakeholders' thoughts on the main elements the Masterplan and to shape the technical work.

The feedback from these events is incredibly valuable is being used to inform the parameters for the main technical work on landscape, highways and education which will also need to follow established professional methodologies. There is ongoing development of the highways and education work parameters which has not yet concluded, but parameters will be shared once this work is concluded.

The next engagement event will be a Town and Parish Council information evening proposed for early October, which I know you have been invited to.

The invitation has been sent out to the relevant parish and town councils and also members.

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

Item (D)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Paul Morgan:

"Can the Council please provide a forecast of the general funds (reserves) position for the end of Quarter 2 (30 September 2026) and a view on what, if any additional EFS, may be required in this 206/27 FY?"

The Leader of the Council answered on behalf of Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources:

The Q2 outturn will be available post closure of Q2 (Q2 close is on 30 September 2026).

What we will do then once we get the Q2 financial performance report (which should be at least a couple of months later when all the books are closed and the accounts are brought to a position of what is the Q2 position) then that report will guide us and that will be presented Executive in the way it is always done. So, in a way your question is a little bit premature, Mr Morgan, and we are not in a position to answer.

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:

"I am disappointed you haven't answered the question. I just specifically said forecast, Councillor Brooks, I didn't ask for the accurate figure. I'd be very surprised if your accounting team doesn't have a forecast for what the reserves will be because you must know what the trends are and what's happening. But I will be writing to Shannon. I've got a couple of questions specifically about that. So, I will write to her. But I'm disappointed because forecast was what I requested and you haven't provided that."

The Leader of the Council answered:

In the financial performance report, quarter one, there is a forecast that is in the public domain and being taken this evening.

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

Item (E)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation by Ben Holden-Crowther:

"What has been the financial and operational impact on the Council following the indefinite suspension (and possible abandonment) of the Ridgeway Council reorganisation, both in terms of total expenditure and officer hours allocated to preparatory work?"

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

The Council does not operate a system of time recording that would enable us to accurately quantify the number of officer hours that have been devoted to Local Government Reorganisation work, and therefore we are unable to provide a reliable figure for officer time spent on preparatory activity.

Whilst the Government has announced a pause of LGR activities, it is important to recognise that the work undertaken to date has not been without value. The evidence gathered, service reviews undertaken, financial analysis completed, and relationships developed with neighbouring authorities will continue to inform future strategic planning and transformation activity.

The Council remains committed to engaging positively with the Government on Local Government Reorganisation and will continue to ensure that West Berkshire's interests are effectively represented while maintaining its focus on delivering high-quality services to residents.

In terms of financial impact, West Berkshire Council's direct contribution to the Ridgeway Local Government Reorganisation programme to date is in the region of £50,000.

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?"*

Ben Holden-Crowther asked the following supplementary question:

"Was it a mistake to invest so much time and money into Ridgeway before it had actually been approved by Parliament? Why were lessons not learned from other

failed local government reconfigurations, like the failure of the Thames Valley Strategic Authority, which I understand was vetoed by the Liberal Democrats over at Oxfordshire County Council".

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

This council has been very clear since the beginning of the LGR process that we feel that the proposed Ridgeway Council represents good value for money. It was the best option we felt in terms of safeguarding future services to our residents. And you know, the very nature of this process is such that we would always be subject to the whims of whatever government decides at the time. Until a few weeks ago, we had the green light to move forward with that. I'm hopeful that it will resurrect again and future announcements from central government are positive, but I absolutely think that the time and effort invested on this project so far has been totally worthwhile.

The Leader of the Council commented:

I've been in meetings with the leaders of Oxfordshire and Berkshire and it is not right to say that Liberal Democrats vetoed anything. I don't have the ability to veto anything. There is discussion ongoing about the shape of that mayoral strategic authority and what will be the constituent parts. We've talked to MHCLG about Buckinghamshire perhaps being included in that, the old Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Bob area. There's Swindon who would like to be part of that Thames Valley mayoral strategic authority. Discussions are ongoing, Mr Holden Crowther and I am told there is a meeting being set up with the Minister to discuss exactly this. So, I hope that's helped clarify the matter and some of the points you seem to think.

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

Item (F)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(F) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Alan Pearce:

"At the full Council meeting on 16 July 2026 the Leader of the Council confirmed that a revised delivery plan for the 2023-2027 Council Strategy will be published, which will include the amendment proposed by Councillor Abbs, to include the enhanced stadium facility at FRS, that was removed from the "Refresh" document. When will this be available?"

The Leader of the Council answered:

The Delivery Plan is composed of the measures approved by Council in July, including the one proposed by Councillor Adrian Abbs and approved at the session. The design and performance team have now completed the work, and the document is available on the West Berkshire Council's website.

It's only gone on in the last couple of days, so you may have possibly missed 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?"*

Alan Pearce asked the following supplementary question:

"Can you tell me why it was removed and who made that decision to remove it?".

The Leader of the Council answered:

I don't think it was removed. It wasn't uploaded until the delivery plan was absolutely clear and complete.

Martyn Sargeant, Service Director, Strategy and Governance asked:

When you say removed, are you referring to the measure or the document?

Alan Pearce responded:

Well, the document. Councillor Abbs asked why it was removed and the refresh document.

The Leader of the Council responded:

No, it wasn't refreshed. I was disappointed that it couldn't be in tandem with a refresh strategy, but we've pulled up quickly thereafter. I am happy to say that I've always virtually insisted that when we publish a strategy, a refresh like this, the delivery plan is refreshed as well. And we're a little bit behind on that, but we're now up to date. So, it was not removed, it just didn't come in tandem with it and now it's there.

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

Item (G)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(G) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by John Gotelee:

"Please could the council give an update as to what steps have been taken to repair and return the Faraday rd rain gardens to their original purpose?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

The damaged kerbs at the Faraday Road rain gardens do not affect their function or purpose. Water is still draining through them as intended, and the rain gardens continue to operate as designed.

The kerb damage is also not considered to present a safety issue. Repairs will therefore be programmed alongside other highway defects and considering district-wide maintenance and road safety priorities.

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:

"The original purpose of the of the rain gardens was partly to enhance the area and make it more acceptable to people. Since it's been put in, it hasn't been weeded once. The kerbs keep getting broken because of flawed design. So, would you agree with me that it's an absolute mess and disgrace? "

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

No, as I said, they're functioning as they need to. I'm not aware of what the maintenance regime is in terms of weeding, but I will certainly continue to follow it up and highlight those issues.

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

Item (H)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

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

"My closest major provider for complex needs in Newbury remains out of reach due to a rigid and outdated booking system, a £23 per hour price barrier and unreliable service, so who is the Council's funding actually supporting?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

As part of our review of Short Breaks services, we are looking at how we can make support easier to access and better meet the needs of families.

We are already working with new providers to bring more services into West Berkshire and are supporting existing providers to expand what they offer. We are also exploring ways to make booking services simpler and more flexible for families, including options that would allow families to book sessions themselves.

In addition, we are meeting with other local councils to learn from their experiences, understand what works well in other areas, and identify approaches that could help improve the Short Breaks offer in West Berkshire.

We are working with providers to expand services across West Berkshire, improving access and choice so more children and young people with SEND can access Short Breaks closer to home.

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 asked the following supplementary question:

"How does the council justify funding a major Newbury provider whose building is open on Sundays for private birthday parties and political meetings while the families and disabled children that they're meant to be supporting are turned away?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

I think that's linked to your earlier supplementary question, and I will look at that. But I do know who you're talking about. But I do understand they use that as part of their fundraising so that they can actually increase their offer on other days and it's not

always possible for them to have staff available on weekend days. But I will take that forward and find out. I'll follow it up.

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

Item (I)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

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

"Condition 16 of the planning approval for the flood attenuation scheme at the Memorial Field in Thatcham (23/02187/FULMAJ) requires that "Within three months of the completion of the hereby approved development a replacement enclosed dog walking area of a similar quality and size to the existing shall be provided in accordance with details that are first submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Details shall include the location, size and boundary treatments for the enclosure." What are the past or expected future dates of the completion of the development, the agreement by the Planning Authority of the details of the replacement area and the provision of the replacement area becoming available for use by the public, and where will it be located?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Mr Pike, thank you for your question.

I am aware that the enclosed dog exercise area has been delivered to the north of the cricket pitch which fulfils the planning condition. Unfortunately, the hot, dry conditions experienced over the summer months, has affected the recovery of this area and it has not been possible to safely open this for public use. Further reseeding will therefore be required. However, grass coverage has improved significantly, and the area has recently been cut for the first time, demonstrating that the restoration work is progressing and the site is beginning to recover. I will ask officers to provide an update on when they anticipate this can be re-opened fully.

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:

"Thank you for that answer, which I think addresses the 4th element of my question. But the question did ask for three specific dates and as my supplementary, I'd be grateful if you could provide those dates".

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

I will do.

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

Item (J)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

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

"Floodlights are currently being installed at Faraday Road Football ground. What is the total cost for this and how is it being funded?"

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

Thank you very much, Mr Morgan, for your question.

The floodlights, as you probably know, have now been installed at the Faraday Rd Football Ground and Newbury Town Football Club will be playing their first home game under floodlights since being evicted from the ground in 2018. It's going to be held on Wednesday the 7th of October and everyone is welcome so hopefully they will have a good attendance.

The floodlighting and fencing construction will not be completed until the end of October. At that point the final costs will be available, and they'll be available for distribution to the public. The current works are being funded out of the capital programme.

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:

"You must know how much is going to cost you. If you've given someone the order to actually instal the equipment, Councillor Foot, you must know that. I'm very surprised you are withholding that information. The second part specifically asked how it's been funded. What element of the capital is it coming from? CIL money? Is it coming from reserves? Where's it coming from? Again, you haven't answered my question. My supplementary question to you is, can you please provide a full breakdown of the total costs involved with the installation of the floodlights please? And by full breakdown, I mean the actual lights themselves, the mast themselves, the cabling, electrical, the control systems, the installation. I also understand that you've actually again surprisingly gone through Alliance Leisure to actually provide this for you. So again, as part of that breakdown of cost, can you provide a cost of how much their programme management for the installation of this works will be?*"*

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

The Leader of the Council commented:

Mr Morgan, I do have to intervene. I have had advice here that this could be commercially sensitive information, and so we're going to be very cautious about how we answer this. We provided an order to a contractor. They have the right to consider that to be confidential. You are rather premature with your questions. I know you are frustrated, but you're rather asking them a little bit ahead of us being able to answer them in the public domain.

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

It's just to say that the project hasn't finished yet. I think it's perfectly reasonable to wait until the project has finished and then those costs will be made available as they always are in due course.

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

Item (K)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(K) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance,Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison by Ben Holden-Crowther:

"In relation to content on the Council's social media platforms, I was assured at the last Full Council meeting that "should anything need to be removed, I will make sure that is done". Can the Portfolio Holder confirm that this has now taken place?"

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

I have been assured that the relevant social media content has been removed and I am pleased to confirm that that has been done.

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?"*

Ben Holden-Crowther asked the following supplementary question:

"I think you've deleted about 90% of the content on that account, including, somewhat unbelievably, clips from the film Home Alone and videos overlaid with the soundtrack from Titanic, which is unbelievable, but true.

In spite of that 70 days since your previous promise, there's still copyright infringing material on there. If you can't even operate the social media account, how can residents have confidence that you'll act with professionalism and competence in more important areas?

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

I believe that the content is monitored through the communications manager here at West Berkshire Council. I will take your comments on board, and I'll go back and have a conversation with the officer in question. If you do have any examples that you are able to share with me that that you believe are infringing on copyright, I will be pleased to receive them in my inbox and I can review those items specifically with that officer.

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

Item (L)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(L) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside by Alan Pearce:

"Has WBC received the re-application from NTC regarding the Asset of Community Value (ACV) for the Faraday Road Football ground?"

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

Yes, the nomination was initially received on 29 July. Additional information was requested, which was received on 1 September. The nomination will be determined by the Asset of Community Value Listing Panel on 20 October.

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

Item (M)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

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

"Will the Council review its SEND provision contracts and use its upcoming sufficiency reports to force these organisations to open on weekends and maximise their offerings?""

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

Families have told us through the survey and in our ongoing conversations with parents and carers that they really value more activities and support. We've listened to that feedback again and we are working to expand the short breaks offer, including more weekend activities and support where it's needed.

We're now reviewing and commissioning short break services so that families have a wider range of good quality support to choose from. As part of this, providers will be asked to show how they can respond to what families have told us and meet the needs of children and young people with SEND. We will especially welcome providers who can offer services across West Berkshire and help fill the gaps families have identified, especially around weekend clubs, holiday activities and flexible support options. We're also again encouraging new providers to come into West Berkshire while supporting the providers we already have to grow and develop their services.

Our aim is to build a stronger local offer so more families can access the right support closer to home. And I can understand your question is again around this one provider that isn't opening at weekends. We are going to be working with them as well to carry that forward.

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 asked the following supplementary question:

"Will the council officially commit to rewriting its contracts so that no provider receives public funding in the future unless they guarantee full weekend opening, alongside holiday respite that is actually affordable, fully funded by HAF schemes".

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

I can't guarantee that. We cannot force providers to open on specific days. Those contracts will always be negotiated separately. We can try our hardest, but I can't force contract providers to do that unfortunately. And we cannot always have fully funded

events because the HAF programme only goes so far. It's a limited fund unfortunately, but we will do our best to provide as much as we possibly can.

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

Item (N)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

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

"The Masterplan for NE Thatcham that is called for by Policy SP14 of the adopted Local Plan will be developed for the Council by external consultants. On what dates does the agreement for this work envisage that a first draft and the final draft of this Masterplan will be delivered to the Council, and has the Council subsequently agreed any amendment to these dates?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

An initial timetable was developed between the Council and the partnership which was shared with parish and town councils and available on the Council's website. Following the Public Engagement events, it became apparent this needed to be adjusted to fully incorporate the public and stakeholder feedback, as well as further development of the technical work.

The output of the technical work is integral to development of the masterplan and so the Council and the partnership have agreed to wait for the outputs of the technical work before finalising a revised timetable.

It's imperative that we get this right. So, at this time I cannot give timetable dates, but I will assure you and all stakeholders that I will publish timetable dates as soon as I have them, both via our via our website but also in direct communication with yourselves.

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:

"I think the underlying point of the question is that there needs to be sufficient time between when a draft of the Masterplan becomes available and to give people, the stakeholders, the opportunity to comment on it before it's finalised. But obviously you've said you can't give us specific dates. But again, this is something that can be followed up at the meeting at the beginning of October".

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

I will assure you that we will have enough time between the draft and actually getting comments back. I promise you that.

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

Item (O)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(O) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance,Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison by Ben Holden-Crowther:

"Does the Council have a policy relating to the use of AI-generated images? For example, does it label these images when it publishes them, particularly when they purport to be of real people?"

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

Wherever possible, the Council's preference is to use authentic photography that reflects the real people, places and communities of West Berkshire.

The Council may use AI-generated images in limited and exceptional circumstances. A policy covering the use of AI is being developed and this will include guidance on the appropriate use of such images, including the need to clearly identify them as AI-generated.

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

Item (P)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

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

"What collaboration on the Masterplan for the North East Thatcham development has taken place between the North East Thatcham Partnership (or its members) and the Council and/or the consultancies developing the Masterplan or the studies supporting it, and when did this commence?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

Council officers and the NETP have a schedule of meetings, usually on a monthly basis. This allows for the progression of the masterplan project. These have taken place since the adoption of the Local Plan Review. They covered the agreement of the Planning Performance Agreement which was signed in February 2026, the development of the public and stakeholder engagement events, the reviewing of the subsequent collated responses to those events, and currently they are discussing the parameters of the technical work.

Several meetings have taken place between Council officers, the NETP, and the relevant consultants on landscape, highways and education to discuss the parameters of the work to be undertaken.

These happen as and when required and started earlier this year, once the PPA was signed, initially to assist with the material for the public and stakeholder engagement, and subsequently on working to agree the parameters of the technical work.

It is worth mentioning that the NETP is made up of individual companies so some of these discussions will be confidential and business sensitive.

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

Item (A)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Tony Vickers:

"There are about 50 sections of minor rural road in my ward that have "UNNAMED" as their name in the National Street Gazetteer, which causes confusion among delivery drivers and even occasionally with emergency services. I know other rural wards have the same issue with older roads and their Members also don't accept that "what.three.words" and "OneNetwork" are sufficient for all purposes and all road users. Will the Executive Member agree that, now the Government has scrapped the century-old law which made it very difficult to change road names and left it up to Highway Authorities to decide whether - and if so how - to do it, that this Council should devise a bottom-up process that allows parishes to conduct local consultations and then request that a proper name be given to these 'NoName Roads' in due course?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Councillor Vickers, thank you for raising this important point. Whilst requests regarding this issue received by officers are relatively few, I recognise that unnamed rural roads can cause practical difficulties for residents, visitors, delivery drivers and, in some circumstances, emergency services.

The Council is keen to work constructively with parish councils and ward members to understand where these issues are most significant and whether there is a proportionate and workable way forward.

Any process for naming existing roads would need to be carefully considered, including the legal framework, consultation requirements, potential impact on residents' addresses, and the need to involve Royal Mail, emergency services and statutory undertakers. It would also be important to ensure that any approach is consistent, transparent and supported locally.

I can confirm that this item will be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the Highways Improvement Group. That will provide an opportunity to consider the practical issues raised, the relative priority of this piece of work, the role that parish councils could play in identifying local priorities and consulting residents, and what further work may be needed before any formal process is developed.

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

Item (B)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

"Concerning the withdrawal of service 2 from the Monks Lane section of its former route: Will the Portfolio Holder set out what public consultation, engagement with affected residents, or notification of ward members was carried out before this change was agreed, and under what delegated authority the decision was taken?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Cllr Abbs, thank you for your question.

You are probably aware that public transport in West Berkshire operates through an Enhanced Partnership, which is a formal arrangement between the Council, as the Local Transport Authority, and local bus operators. Its purpose is to help us work together to improve local bus services. The Partnership Plan and Scheme, our Bus Services Improvement Plan, progress reports and notes of Forum meetings are all publicly available.

One of the key responsibilities of the Enhanced Partnership is to deliver agreed service improvements, including better punctuality and reliability. For that reason, operators in West Berkshire have been reviewing timetables to improve reliability, while the Council has also delivered congestion hotspot works, including clearways, to support more reliable services across the district.

A request came through that partnership which was received to adjust the timetables for the contracted Newbury and District services 2,3,4,6,8 and 9. No objections or further comments were received. The necessary Section 151 Officer approvals were then obtained for the contract variations.

Before the changes came into effect, information about them was displayed for several weeks on the Council's website, on the buses themselves and at Newbury Library.

But I would just like to emphasise that we are listening to residents and the ward members and we will continue to keep this change under review over the coming months.

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 Adrian Abbs asked the following supplementary question:

"I didn't hear any mention of any public consultation whatsoever. So, part of the supplementary will be to confirm that although you did a long rambling speech there, you didn't actually mention any public consultation. Is that correct?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

You are quite correct. What I will correct to is making sure that all ward members are consulted going forward because that is remiss and I'm happy to take that one away and make sure that we do that moving forward.

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

Item (C)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor David Marsh:

"Sandleford Park East holds outline permission for around 1,000 homes, served by two vehicular accesses off Monks Lane, with a new roundabout and infrastructure works scheduled as the first phase. The council's own infrastructure requirements for the site include improvements to the bus service. How does withdrawing scheduled bus provision from Monks Lane sit with the council's commitments to modal shift and to securing bus improvements at Sandleford, and will the portfolio holder commit to reinstating the Monks Lane section as part of the transport package for that development?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Councillor Marsh, thank you for your question. I want to be clear that the Council remains committed to encouraging modal shift and improving public transport provision as the Sandleford developments come forward. That commitment has not changed. At the same time, we need bus services to be reliable, punctual and sustainable. The change to service 2 was made because delays on that route were affecting both that service and other linked Newbury local bus services.

For Sandleford Park East, Sandleford Park West and Watermill Bridge, public transport contributions are expected to be secured through section 106 agreements. These are intended to help establish a new bus service, or improve an existing one, as the developments progress. For Sandleford Park East specifically, the contribution is due in nine annual instalments, with the first payment triggered by occupation of the first 50 dwellings.

Once those contributions are available, they are expected to increase bus movements in South Newbury. The precise route and timetable will need to be agreed with developers and operators, taking account of the development programme, demand, operational practicality and affordability.

But as I've said in the previous question, the changes made in September will be reviewed over the coming months and any further Monks Lane provision will be viewed as part of the transport package for the Sandleford developments.

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 David Marsh asked the following supplementary question:

"I think the, the Sandleford stuff sounds fairly encouraging and we've been engaging in discussions with Bloor Homes about these issues. I still don't understand why you have cut this service in this way now when you've just said it's going to be looked at as part of this wider service needs to supply Sandleford and the other developments. The punctuality thing is not really working, Stuart, it's not more punctual. You've just cut the service, and it doesn't make any sense really."

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

I think it's a key thing to remember is that no one's put a spade in the ground at Sandleford yet. I think it's a bit hard to bake in any future provision when we don't know when that's going to be built yet.

I think it's really important to remember that we also have to answer to the transport commissioner and work with them and they can oppose sanctions against local authorities and bus operators when they don't try to at least do something different. As I've said, we will continue to keep it under review and we will review the data that comes forth at the end of September in terms of what that punctuality looks like and what possible options that there are to change and improve that service.

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

Item (D)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(D) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

"How does WBC discharge their responsibility for public safety during works undertaken by Thames Water?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Primary responsibility for the safety of road users at street works sites rests with the utility company or their contractor. They are legally required to provide proper signing, lighting, and guarding under the Safety at Street Works and Road Works code of practice.

As the Highway Authority, WBC are responsible for coordination, inspection and monitoring of these works, and these functions are carried out by the Council's Street works team. Where safety issues are identified on site, they are reported to the undertaker for the necessary remedial action to be taken.

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:

"I'm going to refer to the ongoing works in Beenham Village. There was a very fraught period of a couple of weeks where there were severe safety issues. Residents were distressed, motorists and parents of pupils that had been in primary school were all fearful of some kind of incident and the problem really arose from poor implementation and then follow-ups with the contractor, with Thames Water and with highways engineers who visited the site.

I am a little bit experienced in operations and I understand duty of care, and I am absolutely certain that in the event of the serious incident, West Berkshire would have to explain how they had discharged their duty of care. So had there been an incident who would have carried the care?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

I'm not a legal expert, but I would imagine it would probably be either the person doing the work because that's their responsibility to act safely on the highway and possibly West Berkshire Council if they haven't done their bit in monitoring that. I don't have an exact answer, but I'm happy to get one for you from Mr Winstanley who's behind me and I can send it over tomorrow.

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

Item (E)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(E) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Howard Woollaston:

"I understand that the Council has spent £1M on an improvement to the Robin Hood roundabout. I have spoken to numerous residents and have failed to find one who can see any discernible difference apart from new tarmac and road markings, some of which are smudged by the way, but complained at the traffic congestion caused. I am told that there is a very short stretch which has allowed an extra lane. Could the Policy Holder explain what the justification is, because I struggle to find it. Particularly at a time when the Council is borrowing massive sums from Government to keep it solvent ? Was the work tendered?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

The junction was last resurfaced in 2008 and had become very worn. Without this scheme, more frequent and costly patching would have been needed simply to keep it in a safe condition.

The works included approximately 11,600m² of resurfacing, using more than 1,600 tonnes of material, so this was a substantial renewal of the junction rather than a limited improvement. The project was funded through developer contributions and also delivered a wider package of works, including traffic signal improvements, sign replacement, vegetation clearance to improve visibility, ironwork repairs, gully cleaning, new road markings and the necessary traffic management throughout the works.

The works were undertaken at night. While this does add approximately 25-30% to the cost of delivery, it very significantly reduces disruption to the travelling public and local road users. In addition to improving traffic flow towards Shaw and the A4 Thatcham, the scheme has renewed the condition of the junction and will support its continued safe use for many years to come.

I can confirm that the works were placed through the Council's Term contract which is a competitively tendered fully compliant procurement route.

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

Item (F)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(F) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

"Before the Government's latest announcement, did the administration have a fully developed and costed financial plan capable of returning West Berkshire Council to sustainable finances if Ridgeway did not proceed?"

The Leader of the Council answered on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources:

We developed, produced, and supported a medium term financial strategy which was adopted in February 2026 as West Berkshire Council that didn't take any cognisance of the local government review. It was business as usual and that MTFS is what we're still working to.

So to then anticipate and say what would it have been if LGR didn't happen, I think is moot. It's currently under refresh work occurring over the summer on the financial position and you'll see it come through in the budget round. And again, it is business as usual.

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 MTFS to which you refer is reliant on EFS for the next four years. If we are reliant on EFS we are not planning to return to sustainable finances because there is no guarantee that it is going to continue into the future.

Given the continuing reliance on EFS, every year you take £30-40 million of EFS, the MRP goes up. In the financial performance report that we looked at earlier, the MRP is going to go up to £8 million over the next six or seven years. That's money that now needs to be found by savings. So, it's ironic that the EFS reduces your ability to provide services and increases your reliance on yet more EFS. How are you going to get the council out of this debt spiral?"

The Leader of the Council answered:

I hope you'll join me perhaps in lobbying government because MRP in this example, is also moot, frankly. If I consider MRP to be a sinking fund, I don't need a sinking fund for money that didn't build something that I have to replace in 20, 30 or 40 years time.

MRP on EFS is 20 years and you end up with a huge balance sheet item of MRP that you can't use. It's a nonsense.

We are lobbying MHCLG to say really this is money that we do not need to set aside. You call it MRP and I understand it, but I call it a sinking fund that says, if we built a sports centre and we need to replace it, we would have to put some money away. But this isn't money we have to replace, it is money going on the revenue account. So that alone is a farce, frankly, and would make a big difference to the revenue account if we didn't have to do that.

Look, you asked a question in this Chamber of Councillor Cottingham when he was here and you said is the EFS now part of the council's budgeting in the future? And he said yes, less you remind me if I say anything, anything else.

Look, local government is not financed sufficiently now for the dual pressures of Adult Social Care and Children and Family Services forcing us into EFS. Reserves are being spent just to keep the lights on, you know where we are. But your central premise was did we take allowance of anything in LGR? No, we've got an MTFS that says we've got to find a way forward over several years to get through EFS to a position where can we get off that demand, and that is what we're doing now. Hope that helps.

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

Item (G)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(G) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Adrian Abbs:

"Concerning the withdrawal of service 2 from the Monks Lane section of its former route: Will the Portfolio Holder publish the patronage and punctuality data relied upon in designating the Monks Lane section as "poorly used", and confirm what alternative options were appraised — such as retaining the Monks Lane leg at reduced frequency, retiming, or a peak-only extension — before the section was withdrawn entirely?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Yes. We will provide the patronage and punctuality data that informed the decision. The key punctuality figure is that around 20% of journeys on the contracted Newbury and District services 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 9 were not running on time. Average punctuality fell from 85.67% in January to March 2024 to 75.20% in October to December 2024. Route 2 was particularly relevant because delays affected the wider linked Newbury network.

On patronage, route 2 recorded 11,747 boardings between May 2026 and mid-July 2026. Monks Lane-related stops accounted for 4.9%, of boardings. Excluding the college, the remaining Monks Lane stops accounted for 1.4% of total route 2 patronage.

Overall, Monks Lane represented around 14% of the stopping pattern, but generated around 5% of boardings. Alternative options, including reduced frequency, retiming and a peak-only extension, were considered but not taken forward given the punctuality impact across the wider network and the low recorded use of the Monks Lane section.

I will say it again however, that we are listening and I do remain committed to reviewing the changes made in September over the coming months.

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 Adrian Abbs asked the following supplementary question:

"Who actually looked at this data and when before the decision? Was this an individual decision that was signed off by yourself? Did it go to Executive and where's the final decision made to cancel it based on the data? I'd like to really understand who took the responsibility for stopping it. Was it yourself?".

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

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

It's the enhanced partnership, as a partnership between the local transport authority and the bus service providers and that includes all of our bus service providers, both in-house and external.

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

Item (H)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(H) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor David Marsh:

"How much do you estimate it will cost residents of my ward in time and money if they follow your advice, should they wish to use public transport to visit the doctor's surgery and pharmacy in Monks Lane, the retail park, and the Tesco triangle, which until recently they could do in one short journey on the No 2 bus? This advice being that they should first get the No 2 in the opposite direction, into town, then wait for a No 8 bus at the Wharf, then get the No 8 back in the direction they came from, to finally reach their destination; and presumably do the whole thing again in reverse should they wish to return home."

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Councillor Marsh, thank you for your question. I recognise the concern that changes to the No. 2 route have made some journeys less direct for residents who previously used that service to reach Monks Lane, the retail park, Tesco and local health facilities.

Journey times will vary depending on the time of day and onward connections, so residents should use the published timetables and live tracking for services 2 and 8 when planning journeys. In terms of cost, single fares remain capped at £3 until the end of 2026, and multi-journey Urban Connect tickets provide better value for regular users. Concessionary pass holders can travel free after 9.30am on weekdays and all day at weekends.

Residents may also use the Northwest Downlands Community Connect on-demand service for journeys between the Wash Common area, Monks Lane and other local destinations. There is also the handy bus that can be used as well. We will continue working with operators to improve services and reliable, good-value public transport.

But I will say it again that we are listening and we remain committed to reviewing the changes made in September over the coming months.

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 David Marsh asked the following supplementary question:

"It's obviously absurd, although it has been suggested by you and others to those campaigning against this change. Caan I just say you heard what the residents think, and you know what the ward members think. Newbury Town Council, unanimously both parties represented on that council passed a resolution opposing this. I think you

must surely realise that this was a mistake. It was a great service and it is hopeless that it is stopped. It is like getting a train from London to Newbury that stops in Aldermaston and then goes back to London again. Can you expedite this process that you are talking about of reviewing it and reconsidering it because it is a mistake."

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Like I said earlier on in one of the questions, we are waiting to see what the data says around the punctuality and the patronage of that service to make any decisions. To the point around listening to residents I would remind and highlight that we do absolutely listen to residents. That is what has led to us introducing evening and weekend services on the number 2, which serves Wash Common. Numbers 8 and 9 all now have Friday, Saturday, and Sunday services and into the evening. We have also listened to residents, and another member of your group around introducing a Sunday service on the X34. So, that continues to demonstrate our commitment to listening and introducing services where we can.

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

Item (I)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(I) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

"How are works conducted by differing agencies that require authorisation from WBC co-ordinated to ensure minimum disruption to highways traffic and access to and from highways?"

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

The Council recognises that roadworks can cause disruption, so we use our permit scheme to coordinate works by utility companies and other agencies as effectively as possible.

Before planned works go ahead, we review permit applications to consider the expected duration, traffic management arrangements, access requirements and whether other works are taking place nearby. Where possible, we seek to avoid clashes, keep diversion routes available and maintain access for residents, businesses and road users.

Council officers also inspect works to check compliance with relevant safety and technical requirements, and we hold regular coordination meetings with works promoters so activity can be planned in advance. Emergency and urgent works are more difficult to manage because companies are not required to give notice, but we challenge unreasonable durations and can apply daily charges where works overrun.

We are also seeking approval to introduce Lane Rental charges, encouraging works on the busiest roads to be completed more quickly or at quieter times.

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:

"You know the residents in the village have been through the wringer a bit lately. There is one road that goes through the village and in August, Veolia contrived to close one end of the road, while Thames Water closed the other end of the road, thereby isolating Beenham village. I am sure you have not got the detail of that, but what do you think might have gone wrong in that scenario?".

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

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Without knowing the specifics, I cannot argue, but I, my guess would be there would be some form of emergency works. But if you were able to share the dates and times, then I am absolutely happy to share with officers to take a look so that we can learn from the mistakes made.

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

Item (J)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(J) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

"Were any difficult financial decisions put off because the administration expected Ridgeway to happen?"

The Leader of the Council answered on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources:

No, I do not believe there were. You could quite rightly say we expected Ridgeway to happen. We were told Ridgeway would go ahead in the middle of July. We got whispers and optimistic whispers before that. But it did not mean that we put off difficult decisions because they are hard to put off.

We undertake all decisions in a timely manner because they need to be taken. We started to consider future financial decisions, rather than pressing day-to-day ones for the Ridgeway area. There was work started to happen on that.

Bear in mind the Council would have been subject, and might still be subject, to Section 24 restrictions. We were starting to think about in those terms where we couldn't simply make spending plans without approval, buy in and support from the other councils who would be in the Ridgeway area. So that started to focus us, but on the whole area frankly, rather than just the West Berkshire area in the medium term.

So no, prudent decisions were still being made and will still be made.

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

Item (K)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(K) Question submitted to the Leader of the Council by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

"What involvement has Council had with the Berkshire Prosperity Board since it was formed over two years ago?"

The Leader of the Council answered:

I attend the Berkshire Prosperity Board. It provides the framework for the six Berkshire councils to work together on economic growth, infrastructure, housing, skills and health inequalities to support Berkshire residents and businesses. There are established Berkshire-wide workstreams to drive improvements working with partners and businesses and providing a stronger platform for Government engagement.

The Board met this week. I was in Slough on Monday with the Chief Executive. I attended the Board on the 15 June this year, and the 16 March, on the 15 December last year, and the 15 September last year, and the 18 August last year. On the 16 June 2025, Councillor Denise Gaines attended the Board. 17 March 2025, 16 December 2024 I attended, and two meetings before that. 16 September 2024 and 17 June 2024, Councillor Gaines attended. So, we have had either myself or a senior member of the Executive in attendance.

At the Board meeting this week we heard how £9.5 million has been secured for the Connect to Work programme alongside £1.8 million for boot camps to support growth of skills across the Berkshire County area.

The Board enables the collective Berkshire voice to be heard working with partners including Homes England to seek greater opportunities for social affordable homes.

West Berkshire leads the economic development inward investment workstream to drive business investment in Berkshire. I have ensured that West Berkshire has taken a leading role in the creation of the new website for the Board. It will provide residents with a greater visibility of work of the Board and what's being done to improve growth opportunities. We developed the website and signed it off this week. There are some fine tuning of content and the website should go live next week or the week after. That website shows a lot of achievements made.

I provided constructive challenge through that so that that Board strives for the highest level of delivery, advocating for West Berkshire within it. I sit on a subgroup of the Berkshire Prosperity Board called the Berkshire Business Board, where we meet with businesses across Berkshire and discuss with them their challenges and their needs. So there's a pretty healthy activity going on here Councillor Boeck.

The thing that's missing, and it might be your supplementary, but it might not, is reporting back. I used to get frustrated that we had one member of your cabinet at the

time, who would go along to the LEP and we just got an annual report. What I would say to you is when the board meets, minutes will be published and the website will be updated with achievements and activities. So, we will have a better richer information flow.

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:

"Thank you, Leader. Yes, I do have a supplementary and you've nailed it. Thank you for the update. I'm sure that the rest of the membership of the Council will be pleased to hear that.

When you announced the establishment of the BPB in March 2024 and you came along to council and you informed council of the launch of the Prosperity Board, there was a press release and you told us, Leader, that you would keep us updated on the proceedings of the meeting of the Board. This is the first I have heard about the great work you have been doing. So please do better, Leader".

The Leader of the Council answered:

I think it is worth bearing in mind that there wasn't much to feedback in the first year as it got into its work streams. Now we are feeding back some successes. But the point is made and I have given the answer going forward you will get that.

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

Item (L)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(L) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources by Councillor Ross Mackinnon:

"What additional savings, income or other financial measures will West Berkshire need if the financial benefits previously attributed to Ridgeway are delayed by one year, two years, or do not arise during the current MTFS period?"

The Leader of the Council answered on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources:

It may not arise at all. This government does not seem to know what it's doing. I have never known, and I have been watching government since I was some 12 years old, I think I have never seen such U-turns. I have never seen a government that can't follow through on anything. And here we are in a degree of limbo.

But we're getting on with it as if Ridgeway may not come back. So, I said to you earlier, the MTFS is currently under refresh and revised savings and investments are under consideration. They have got to be. They are going into the budget round.

We obviously started to look at the future financial position of Ridgeway Council. We looked at two district councils notwithstanding the Oxford County debt and assets that would come over to Ridgeway. And we looked at some very, very rich and good reserves in the two district councils of Vale and South Oxford.

We started to model how that might be brought to bear, but it's moot at the moment as we sit here. So, we stopped that work. And to be fair, the government said stop. And all we are doing now is if you put a project in suspense, you make sure the documentation is good when you put it into suspense.

But a formal draft budget for the Ridgeway Council had not been developed beyond the initial business case. So, in the business case there was financial support for it. I think it was KPMG or PWC who helped us with the submission to say this was a very viable new council and so West Berkshire Council would have only existed for one further budget of 2027/28.

Any delay will lead to greater savings beyond 2028 as the council would not have needed to put together a budget as it would have ceased to exist. So, what it's done to the MTFS and what we're doing now, we're saying we're here for four years. But the problem is if in two months' time, government, come back and say Ridgeway is on again, we'll have another hundreds and hundreds of hours, as was being explained to you earlier by Councillor Pemberton, of officer time. And at a conservative £100 an hour, hundreds of thousands of pounds have been spent in officer time.

But if you look at it as a unit cost, and you will have done this because we are getting £100 an hour, how many thousands of hours do you need to make a very big impact on cost? And we are potentially doing it again now as we go back to the MTFS for West Berkshire Council for the next 4 years.

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:

"I completely agree with the first part of your answer there; government is a shambles and it's having real effect on not just this council but councils all over the country. I guess I'm going back to something that I touched on in my previous question. But you're right, it might not happen at all. And if that's the case, and you've been quite open actually tonight, to be fair about, EFS is structural, we're going to need it every year until there is reform of financing, which might not happen either. I also agree with you that the concept of the MRP being required on EFS is absurd. So, we lobby government to try and get them to cancel it. But that might not happen, so, you've got a plan for that eventuality. So, what are we going to do to stop that MRP eating up more and more and more of the revenue budget in the years to come? Where are the savings going to come from?

The Leader of the Council answered:

Well, I said to you, we are doing MTFS for four years, but I'm challenging the officers to go beyond that. Not necessarily to publish it, but to model over several years; Where do we end up? Where do we head?, Where does EFS peak?; How does it peak?, What have we done in transformation to manage the demand?

But I'm also looking and I'm sure lots of council leaders are looking for government to legislate to say this can't go on and they need to adjust not only our funding but the way we respond to demand. So, it's a very, very big question you ask here and it's a fair one and it's being wrestled with and it isn't answered as I sit here now. I hope that helps.

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

Item (M)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(M) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Spoirt and Countryside by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

"What plans does the member have for improving access to libraries in Aldermaston ward?"

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

After two years we now have 6 pop-up libraries within the district that have proved very popular with our residents, and of course, Aldermaston could already have been one of those amongst that list.

However, our Libraries Manager will be attending the Parish Council meeting on the 13 October to present all options available to the parish for enhanced library services. I'm afraid I'm away that day otherwise I'd have gone along as well.

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:

"Aldermaston ward is one of the largest in the district geographically. There's a long way to go from Brimpton to Aldermaston to Beenham, and the reduction of many services delivered by West Berkshire Council to our rural communities has been regrettably reduced year on year, including libraries.

What are you going to do to address this rural isolation? And I think I would have liked to have heard something a bit more substantial than somebody's going to a parish council meeting".

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

I'd like to challenge you, Councillor Boeck, on what your administration did for the 18 years that you were in charge and what we have done in an imaginative way, working within a very constrained financial envelope to actually deliver services directly to parishes.

We ask parishes for contributions, and they can see precisely what services they're getting. So, I would say to you that this administration is actually just doing what you have just described. We are providing those services.

Furthermore, when we do that pop-up library provision, we can provide additional services. We can get council officers to go out when the pop-up library is there and we can provide additional services, which I'm very proud of. I commend the work that our teams have done to actually deliver those. We're very proud of our library service.

Councillor Dominic Boeck commented:

"As of now, the five parishes of Aldermaston Ward have no library facilities".

The Leader of the Council commented:

Hold on, hold on. What did they have when you were in control? I'm very, very proud of the pop-up libraries, the enhanced services, the enhanced hours we work with the parishes.

What did your administration do? You held your begging bowl out and said give us a contribution and you didn't give them anything for it. If they come in now and they give us money, they get something for it. They got nothing from you. All you did was hold your begging bowl out.

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

Item (N)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(N) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

"We see increasing numbers of unauthorised developments starting in rural settings, some of substantial size were they to go ahead. Will the member tell us about her strategy to prevent such developments?"

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

We have seen an increase in unauthorised development in West Berkshire, and I recognise the concern that arises when particularly where developments are of a scale that could have a significant impact and appear to commence before the proper planning process has been followed.

As set out in the Council's Planning Enforcement Plan, we operate a risk-based approach to enforcement, ensuring that the most serious cases affecting the countryside, landscape character, heritage assets, the National Landscape, or neighbouring amenity are prioritised for investigation.

Where necessary, we will use the enforcement powers available to us, including temporary stop notices, planning contravention notices and enforcement notices, where it is expedient and legally justified to do so.

Under national planning legislation, carrying out development without planning permission is not automatically a criminal offence. We must investigate the facts, assess the planning harm, and ensure any action is proportionate, justified, and capable of being upheld if challenged. The law requires that enforcement action is expedient in the public interest, and our decisions must be evidence-based.

Given the finite resources available, our focus is therefore on preventing the most harmful unauthorised developments from becoming established. That means concentrating officer time on significant breaches, including in sensitive rural locations, acting quickly where there is clear planning harm, and hopefully seeking compliance before lengthy and costly legal proceedings, but this sometimes cannot be avoided as you would have seen regarding the Reading Road site and the successful injunction.

I am also pleased that the new National Planning Policy Framework now says that where there is evidence of intentional unauthorised development, that fact should now be given substantial weight in considering whether to grant retrospective planning permission.

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:

"Yes, thank you. You'll know that I have 3 unauthorised settlements, in Aldermaston Ward, and I know what good work enforcement have done, but the consequences of these unauthorised developments, and I am being oblique here, is that residents' lives are being blighted and it's not too strong a suggestion to say that sometimes our national security could be put at risk. You mentioned Reading Road, so I know you take it seriously, but what more can be done? And I don't really mean by West Berkshire directly or by the planning service, but something has to be done nationally to address this problem which is only going to get worse".

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

I absolutely agree that it's not reasonable for people to move into a property and actually set up in that property without permission. Unfortunately, as I've said, it's not a criminal offence at that point. It may become a criminal offence later in the process, but it is a long process.

As you can see from that Reading Road injunction, that has taken I think about 18 months to get to a stage we're at and we have to follow due process. Anything counteracting that due process would actually cause us a real issue, so we have to follow that process. It's unfortunate, but that's the situation.

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

Item (O)	Executive Meeting on 24 September 2026

(O) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

"What is the status of Council's local SEND reform plan?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

The Council is currently awaiting feedback from the Department for Education on the final version of its local SEND Reform Plan. This is expected week commencing 21 September.

However, we are not waiting for that feedback before moving forward as per DfE expectation. A number of key areas of implementation are already underway, with work focused on strengthening support for children and young people with SEND and improving the consistency, accessibility and timeliness of help available to schools, settings and families.

One of the key areas of progress is the expansion of specialist advice and support for Experts at Hand through the Autism Support Team, Cognition and Learning Team, Early Development & Inclusion Team and Educational Psychology service.

Planning for Experts at Hand is progressing with the Integrated Care Board, particularly in relation to Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy input. This is an important part of ensuring that education, health and care partners work together more effectively to provide timely, practical support to schools and settings helping to ensure that schools and settings can access appropriate professional advice at an earlier stage.

We're working closely with the Integrated Care Board to develop the expert at hands further, particularly in relation to speech and language therapy and occupational therapy. This joined up approach between education, health and care is vital if we are to provide families and professionals with support that is practical, timely and effective.

Cluster meetings for schools have now been arranged, and these will provide an important opportunity to engage directly with schools. As local SEND reforms move forward, it is essential that the people delivering support on the ground are involved in shaping practical improvements.

Alongside this, work continues on SEND place planning so that we can increase local specialist capability capacity and improve the sufficiency of provision for children and young people with SEND. This remains a priority because families should have confidence that appropriate support is available as locally as possible.

I'm actually going to change the end of my answer because there has been an update today. AnnMarie Dodds has advised me that colleagues met with the DfE Send advisor today and asked for confirmation of when we will receive feedback as the government or DfE have failed to meet the 21st deadline and like other authorities, we're waiting for that feedback. The advisor was unable to provide any information on time scales or feedback.

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:

"Thank you for that reply, Councillor Codling. We all know, what a fearfully complex picture we are dealing with here. We were both at the Health and Wellbeing Board meeting this morning, and I'm sure that you were as disappointed as I was by partners and the level of their commitment to the recommendations of the Emotional Wellbeing Task Group, which included reference to children with special needs and disabilities. What will you do Councillor to challenge our partners to do better?"

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

I've already had discussions with AnnMarie today and she has already written to the ICB to follow up on that.

Councillor Foot, Councillor Clark and I are planning to speak to the highest person we can find in the ICB that will talk to us, the Chief Executive, whoever it is, and take the case directly to them.