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

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Question (A)	Council Meeting on 28 November 2024
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(A) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Public Safety and Community Engagement by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

“Incidents of anti-social behaviour continue to terrify residents in Aldermaston ward and to have highly detrimental effects on the viability of local businesses. At the last meeting of the Executive Committee on 7 November, the portfolio holder for Public Protection, Cllr. Jason Pemberton, said he will help anyone affected by this behaviour and Council Leader, Cllr. Jeff Brooks, promised to meet me with Cllr. Pemberton, to discuss these matters. Will they both tell Council what progress they have made against their promises?”

The Portfolio Holder for Executive Portfolio Holder: Public Safety and Community Engagement answered:

I met with Thames Valley Police (TVP) and officers from the Build Communities Together Team and Public Protection Partnership, as well as the Service Director on 15 November 2024:

- I am progressing actions in relation to planning and licensing.
- TVP have conducted a review of the ongoing problem-solving occurrence in the Parish and the summary was then circulated to Aldermaston Parish Council, amongst others, and Councillor Dominic Boeck was included in this circulation.
- A meeting has been arranged with Councillor Jeff Brooks, Councillor Boeck, and myself for 29 November 2024.

It is vital that incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) are reported to the police when they are happening with as much information and detail as possible to give the police the best opportunity to investigate further. If incidents are not reported, the police will not be aware.

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 Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you for arranging the meeting, but I hope that delay does not reflect your priorities. What work has been done since the Parish Council raised their ASB case review in July 2023, and why was the Parish Council not informed that the review had been abandoned?”



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The Portfolio Holder for Executive Portfolio Holder: Public Safety and Community Engagement answered:

Thank you for the supplementary question. As ward member, you are entitled to contact the Building Communities Together Team who would have provided an update on the reasons why the ASB case review was not granted. Also, I do not accept the premise of the question that nothing has been done to address the issues in the Parish. TVP have set up a problem-solving framework, issued a community survey, spoken to local residents, and consulted with multiple teams across the Council and the Parish Council. The ASB request that you mention in July 2023 was two months after the election and the new administration had taken control of the Council. As the ASB issues in the area pre-existed this time, what progress did you make.



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Question (B)

Council Meeting on 28 November 2024

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

“At the District Parish Conference on 29 October, parish council members were invited to consider paying for higher service levels in highways gully cleansing and sign cleaning than the proposed, cost saving levels. A member of Aldermaston Parish Council asked whether WBC will consider paying for appropriate service levels on the busy A340 that passes through Aldermaston Village and Wharf, rather than expect residents to pick up the tab. Cllr. Jeff Brooks promised to look into the matter; what conclusions has he made?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Thank you for your question. Roadside gullies along the A340 through Aldermaston are currently subject to an annual cleanse in line with similar roads across the district, an approach set by the previous Conservative administration. With regard to road signs, since our road sign cleaning programme began earlier this year, introduced by this administration, 240 signs have been cleaned along the rural A340 near Aldermaston and a total of 550 signs across rural areas of West Berkshire. Road signs are also cleaned on a reactive basis when reported via the ‘reportaproblem’ online tool or after an inspection by the highways team.

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 Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you. The specific question related to why Aldermaston Parish Council should pay to have the signs cleaned more regularly and the gullies cleared more frequently if it is the general public who use the A340 who benefit, not the Parish residents”.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Thank you for the supplementary. The signs are cleaned more now than they were under your administration. Gullies are also cleaned in line with the policies in your administration – we made no service cuts and manage this on a risk-based approach.

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Question (C)	Council Meeting on 28 November 2024
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(C) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

“What effect has the recent changes to community bus services had on rural isolation?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

Thank you for the question. The new Thatcham Connect on-demand bus service, together with timetabled services Community Connect B and Community Connect C commenced on 4 November replacing services 41 and 44. This has been so successful to date that we have had to add a further service. This service also visits rural villages that have never been able to be services by regular bus services.

The Thatcham Connect Models is based on a similar model to the rural Downlands Connect and Community Connect A services that launched earlier in the year. Since the launch of the Downloads Connect Services, we have seen a 9 per cent increased in usage in the same time period that the 5, 5A, and 5C buses ran serving both new and old passengers.

In both cases of Thatcham and Downlands Connect Services, reactions have been positive and existing as well as new users have benefited from the additional flexibility for our rural communities.

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 Dominic Boeck asked the following supplementary question:

“In cases where the service is not working satisfactorily and meeting the needs of, especially elderly residents, what improvements can you make”.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

As said, we have received very positive feedback. However, if you have received negative feedback I am always happy to see what service improvements we can make. However, without that information and data I cannot answer that tonight. Please do bring this to me and I will happily work it through with Officers.

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Question (D)

Council Meeting on 28 November 2024

(D) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Councillor Chris Read:

"I have been written to by the largest employers in my ward of Bucklebury, Brockhurst School and Elstree School regarding the policy of tax on education.

I also met a parent today who stated that with two children in public schools in the area this will put their annual fees bill up by £12,000 per annum – on money that has already been taxed by PAYE and National Insurance. They, like many other parents, are looking to Ireland or English-speaking private schools in Spain for public school education, whilst many will have no option but to request places in schools in West Berkshire or join the queue of parents spending money on private tutoring to hothouse them into the Reading boys and girls grammar schools.

The UK will be one of the few countries in the world to tax private education when it introduces a 20% VAT on fees in January 2025.

West Berkshire has many public schools; what impact will the potential closure of private schools have on the education system and, if known, employment within West Berkshire District and are any steps to mitigate being taken?"

The Leader of the Council and Executive Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Communications answered:

Thank you for the question, which I am taking in place of Councillor Heather Codling who is on a course this week.

The impact of the decisions that parents will take as a result of the imposition of VAT on Independent school fees is yet to be fully understood. The policy that the Labour Government are implementing, I think, is entirely wrong and entirely anti aspirational, which tends to be the character of Labour Governments. All of the schools in the district are very good: maintained schools, academies, and private schools.

Currently, in West Berkshire it is anticipated that there will be a sufficient surplus of places to accommodate any additional demand. This position will continue to be monitored so that any further actions that may be required can be identified at the earliest possible opportunity. In relation to the impact on employment, the education system locally faces challenges in recruiting sufficient suitably qualified staff. As such there are opportunities in the wider education sector that any staff displaced may wish to consider, but it is more than sad that that may be a consequence of the policy. The wider impacts of this national policy will become clearer over a period of years and the Council will continue to respond to these positively. For a Government that talks about economic growth, it seems to be doing everything in its power to avoid it, and this is just another measure.



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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 Chris Read asked the following supplementary question:

“I am extremely concerned about the future of the two largest employers in my ward, and I ask if the leadership will 1) write to our two MPs on the matter of tax on education and 2) visit the two largest employers in my ward on this matter”.

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

I would be delighted to do so. you know I have been visiting schools and I will certainly do thank and look forward to seeing them. We will certainly write to our two MPs. Thank you.

