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

Item (A)	Executive Meeting on 18 December 2025
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(A) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services by Councillor Clive Taylor:

“Can the Portfolio Holder please explain why no progress has been made with the school rebuilding plan for Calcot Schools and provide a date on which the project will commence.”

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services answered:

As the Leader confirmed only a few months ago in this chamber, the project remains firmly on our forward plan. We recognise that this project is important to families and children within the area.

However, the proposed land grab by the Labour-led Reading Borough Council has created significant uncertainty. This is a major investment, and it would be wholly unjust for West Berkshire residents to shoulder the financial burden of a school that could ultimately fall under Reading's jurisdiction.

Therefore, I must ask: if these boundary changes proceed, will Reading Borough Council commit to covering the borrowing costs required to deliver this school? Without such a guarantee, it would be irresponsible to place this expense on our taxpayers.

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 Clive Taylor asked the following supplementary question:

“I will take that question to Reading Council and come back to you with an answer. Could I suggest that we have a meeting with the school headteacher, Chairman of the Governors, myself, and would welcome our Leader, if he could attend as well, because you indicated that you would do so earlier this year just to get everything out on the table.

We have had a discussion fairly recently on this and I'm concerned there are other factors at play here as well. But I think let's sit down with the school and see if we can determine exactly where we are with this because this project was originally approved in principle something like 4 years ago”.

The Leader of the Council answered:

You've heard our commitment to do it. Certainly, I think we would go to the school at their invite absolutely no problem whatsoever. We go to lots of schools. We were at Thatcham Park only less than two weeks ago.

In the event that our good residents of Tilehurst have to go under the auspices of Reading Borough Council, and many of them don't want to, there would be a sort of an asset and borrowing swap, including loans and liabilities.

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It would have to happen also with Oxford County Council and that is all the stuff that is washed up if and when local government review takes place, as Berkshire County Council were, and we are still paying some mortgages of Oxford County Council, 27 years later.

I did say this to Councillor Terry last Friday when I was at a meeting of the Southeast strategic leaders. So it's out there already and I'll be looking for the Chief Executive to work with other Chief Executives to look at how that would work in the event local government reorganisation comes about. But we need to start getting an angle on this and if the debt from the school's development, which we could perhaps crack on with the design, but with the assurance that if the land grab goes ahead, the liability goes with it. I think that's absolutely logical.

But I look forward to coming to the school.

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Item (B)	Executive Meeting on 18 December 2025
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(B) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing by Councillor Dominic Boeck:

“What do you consider a reasonable interval between a site visit in respect of a Member’s call-in of a planning application and that application coming before the relevant planning committee?”

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

What is a reasonable interval will depend on the circumstances of each individual case, such as the complexity of the application and whether the application is contentious, whether things have changed on the ground and whether there have been any changes to members of the committee or updated information from statutory consultees.

All of these elements will have a bearing on the time scales between a site visit and the committee in which the application is heard. Ultimately, the planning committee must satisfy themselves they have sufficient information to make a decision on the application, and the officers will support the committee with this.

Whilst there is no legal requirement for committee members to visit a site, a committee site visit is normally arranged so that Members have a full appreciation for the proposed development in context. Typically, a committee site visit is undertaken the week preceding the committee's meeting. Occasionally a site visit may be undertaken but the application is deferred to a later meeting. In these circumstances, it will be a matter for the committee's chairman, in consultation with the lead officer, to decide whether a further committee site visit will be appropriate.

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 ask a question around policy rather than relate a question to a specific application. So, I hope I don’t get shut down like I did just now by Councillor Brooks. An example is a recent call-in that I made on two related applications in June. The site visit took place on the 1 October. The call-ins were listed in the agenda, but the following week they were pulled. They have been pulled from two subsequent meetings of the of the Eastern Area Planning Committee and I wrote on the 3 December to the Service Director to try to find out what is happening with these applications and wrote to you as well, Councillor Gaines. I still have had no response. Is this acceptable to you as the Portfolio Holder for Planning?”

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The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing answered:

I will not be privy necessarily to exactly why an application has been delayed from the site visit or the call-in to the actual committee. There is obviously a reason for it. There may be several reasons for it, but as I have explained earlier on, it will depend on the circumstances, and each individual case needs to be taken on its own merit.

There is obviously a very good reason why this application hasn't come to committee yet, and I will ensure that you get an answer to that from the Executive Director.

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Item (C)	Executive Meeting on 18 December 2025
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(C) Question submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways by Councillor Howard Woollaston:

“Having attended a presentation by the Waste Team recently , I understand that the change to 3 weekly black bin collections, which is deeply inconvenient to many of our residents, has resulted in zero savings in vehicles or manpower, In light of this can the Portfolio Holder explain exactly where the anticipated £150,000 annual savings are coming from?”

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

First off, I would like to take this opportunity to thank residents for their flexibility and positive approach to this change. I absolutely recognise that moving to three weekly bin collections has been a significant change and may feel inconvenient for some residents.

I am a resident here as well and I know that getting used to that new process can be a challenge. However, the data so far shows that most households are coping well and the change is delivering positive results. But I do acknowledge it is early days.

So some examples because it does relate to your question more substantively is that food waste recycling participation has increased from 49% in March to 65% in November with tonnage collected up 25% and that's 196 tonne increase in October and November compared to the same months last year.

Black bin waste is down 18%, which is 821 tonnes less compared to the same period last year.

Plastic bottles, pots, tubs, trays and food and drink cans have increased by 17%. That's an extra 61 tonnes on the same period last year.

Paper and card recycling has increased by 6% which is an extra 62 tonnes.

At the household waste recycling centre, there has only been a small increase in black bin waste which has been delivered of around 20 tonnes for those couple of months, which is relatively small compared to the 821 reduction.

As assurance, officers completed a survey in November that shows that only 3% of properties have had their bin lid open or presented an excess bag at the collection day, which is no more than when we were on two weekly cycle. So, I do have a strong assurance there that this process is, is settling in well. But again, as I say, it's early days. I would absolutely say to residents, if you have got concerns, please do reach out to our waste team.

So that links into your question around where the cost savings coming from. I think I have discussed this previously, but the anticipated savings around of £150,000 per year this year part saving do not come from reductions in vehicles or resource. They will be achieved from lower disposal costs due to reduced landfill and energy recovery. So, for example, we will have to pay less tax on that 821 tonnes. There will also be

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increased income from recyclables materials as recycling rates improve. As said, we have seen significantly positive results in our recycling at this point. So, income will go up, tax will go down, therefore generating a saving. But again, I just want to reiterate that we are extremely thankful for the way that residents have embraced this change so far. And again, please do get in contact if you have got concerns.

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

Councillor Howard Woollaston asked the following supplementary question:

“I have already read the press release and seen the article in the Newbury Weekly News, which is what you just basically repeated.

Surely the improvement in food waste and other improvements in the waste that can be recovered could have also been achieved by public education. The issue here is where's the £150,000 saving? I don't think you have clearly explained that.

Despite the wide consultation the vast majority of people did not want to go to three weekly collection, and you have ignored that completely. It is inconveniencing many of our residents, and I would like to ask you, can we please return to the old system because I cannot see what the overall benefit is to the Council”.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways answered:

There was a significant consultation, and I believe 52% said they could make that change with support. I think we have demonstrated on a number of occasions how and where we offer that support.

We had over 1,100 contacts with residents in the lead up to this change at drop in sessions around the district. We also visited a number of schools to inform and educate around recycling. I do feel that I've articulated where that savings coming from and that is the income generated by the increase in recycling rates which we've demonstrated here this evening. I also feel that the reduction in that black bin waste has been demonstrated this evening.

I would also highlight and draw your attention to the Labour Government's upcoming legislation that they wish to introduce which is the expansion of the emissions trading scheme. If we had carried on doing what we were doing, we were the in the top 10% worst waste producing authorities in the country, we would have an extra £1.4 million estimated tax bill to have to pay.

Tonight we have heard about the significant financial challenges this council face, and I guess my question would be is would we be happy to carry on paying £1.4 million in managing waste, which we've got plenty of other excellent streams available to do that, or help support the most vulnerable in our society.

So in answer to your question, no I don't believe we will go back to that old two weekly collection.

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Many councils have got in contact with me to ask how we have done it, how we are delivering, and the results we are seeing. I think many, many more councils will start to move towards a three weekly bin collection or reduced capacity in some form to drive up the recycling rates and protect those absolutely essential and vital services like Adult Social Care and Children's Services, where I believe £1.4 million will be better off spent.
