

Item 16:

Member Questions to be answered at the Executive meeting on 21 May 2026

Members of the Executive to answer questions submitted by Councillors in accordance with the Executive Procedure Rules contained in the Council's Constitution.

A. Question submitted by Councillor Dominic Boeck to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services:

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

B. Question submitted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Governance, Commercialisation and Disabled Community Liaison:

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

C. Question submitted by Councillor Howard Woollaston to the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement, Economic Development and Regeneration and Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation:

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

D. Question submitted by Councillor Dominic Boeck to the Portfolio Holder for Children and Family Services:

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

E. Question submitted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon to the Leader of the Council:

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

F. Question submitted by Councillor Howard Woollaston to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources:

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

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G. Question submitted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources:

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

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

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

I. Question submitted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources:

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

J. Question submitted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon to the Leader of the Council:

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

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

"In a TV interview on 1 April, you (Cllr Pemberton) said the following regarding the pedestrianisation trial:

"It is a trial and not something we've looked at previously for pedestrianisation over this period of time, but generally speaking I think the response that we're getting now is positive".

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

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

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

"In an answer to a public question at Executive on 19 March, you (Cllr Pemberton) said: "The data also suggests that there was also a significant

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increase from visitors outside Newbury and Thatcham. So, 36 per cent of that spend was from visitors coming into the town and spending more on retail.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

O. Question submitted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside:

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

P. Question submitted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon to the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Sport and Countryside:

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

Q. Question submitted by Councillor Ross Mackinnon to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways:

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