

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

(1) **Question to the Board Member, Housing and Estate Regeneration (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Sam Hollick**

Discharging of homelessness duty

What is the number of households that have been relocated outside of Oxford as a result of the Council discharging a homelessness duty?

Response: To the end of May 2014, the Council used the Localism Powers to discharge our statutory homeless duty to 5 clients, who accepted private rented sector accommodation outside of Oxford City.

The Council tries to find suitable and affordable private rented sector accommodation as close to Oxford as possible, and recognises challenges around this in relation to employment, schooling, and specialist health and support needs. However, the buoyancy of the local property market at present, means that most landlords are only renting to persons that are in work, with good tenancy histories, and are charging at least £100pcm over the LHA rate. As such, it is extremely hard to secure access to such accommodation in Oxfordshire anymore. We have had success at finding suitable property at LHA rates in the next nearest rental markets of the West Midlands, Swindon, South Wales and Gloucestershire/ Worcestershire.

The substantive issue here however, is the chronic lack of decent, affordable homes in Oxford, which can really only be addressed through the supply of more housing, which the Council are trying to deliver on through the development of Barton Park; the Council's own building programme of 113 units; working with registered providers to bring forward sites; and looking to future developments at the Northern Gateway and the West End.

(2) **Question to the Board Member, Housing and Estate Regeneration (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor David Thomas**

Lord Mayor's Deposit Scheme

Would the Board Member agree with me that the Lord Mayor's Deposit Scheme provided an important lifeline to those struggling to access rented accommodation in Oxford?

Response: Yes – It has provided, and continues to provide, additional assistance to single persons and couples that are not in priority need, and who would not be assisted under statutory homeless provision.

(3) Question to the Board Member, Housing and Estate Regeneration (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Jean Fooks

Rough sleepers – hostel beds

I have been told that the City Council is failing to give rough sleepers who have been in hospital priority for hostel beds when they are discharged. The situation came to light when a homeless person was discharged from a local mental health unit. Do you agree that this is a heartless and uncaring policy which will only increase the likelihood of people in these circumstances returning to the streets with the consequent deterioration in their health?

Response: The City Council, in conjunction with the County Council, which has the lead commissioning role for the adult homeless pathway, and with other stakeholders, launched the No Second Night Out (NSNO) initiative in July 2012. This expressly moved to a position whereby only clients verified as rough sleeping could access the homeless pathway. This followed best practice coming out from London and other major cities, as well as advice from Government and leading charities working in this sector. The purpose was to prioritise any new rough sleepers for a bed in the NSNO assessment centre, allowing them to leave the streets at the earliest available opportunity. This has resulted in persons who are not rough sleeping not being prioritised for access. The reality being that there are not sufficient beds, or move-on opportunities, for all the persons that could benefit from these services. In this environment I believe we have got our priorities right.

As you are aware, this is an area on which the County are currently consulting with regard to a 38% budget cut in this area.

One year after implementation of the NSNO initiative, a review was undertaken with some 20 stakeholders. This did indeed identify some areas where improvements around access were suggested, including hospital and prison leavers. As such, revisions were made to the pathway to allow for exemptions to be made in certain situations for 'non-verified' rough sleepers who are "at real and immediate risk of sleeping rough". It should be noted though, that this is a supported pathway, which means that individuals need to have support needs. If their only need is accommodation it is inappropriate for them to come into this pathway. There is another funded supported pathway for people with mental health issues.

The Council is improving its joint work with health, having hosted a recent round table meeting of various parties, and produced an Action Plan. There is a current Hospital discharge protocol in place that requires health authorities, as a minimum, to consider housing and notify the relevant council 48 hours prior to any discharge, and the Council is working to try and ensure this is adhered to, and works as well as possible for vulnerable clients.

(4) Question to the Board Member, Culture and Communities (Councillor Christine Simm) from Councillor Craig Simmons.

East Oxford Community Association

What grounds is the Council using to evict the East Oxford Community Association from the East Oxford Community Centre?

Response: Oxford City Council decided to withdraw the East Oxford Community Association's licence to occupy the East Oxford Community Centre premises on the Cowley Road as the Council had serious concerns about the management of the community centre for some time.

Despite many attempts to regularise the management practices and an agreed action plan, the association committee failed to rectify matters and improve the overall management of the Centre.

I am pleased to be able to report that the association is working proactively with the Council to bring about a smooth and managed transfer which is in the best interests of the association and the communities of East Oxford.

(5) Question to the Board Member, Cleaner, Greener Oxford, Climate Change and Transport (Councillor John Tanner) from Councillor Jean Fooks.

Mobility support for elderly people

Has the administration simply forgotten that it promised to help elderly and disabled people to get round the city, with more transport provision such as Dial-a-Ride, to improve their quality of life with the £50,000 still sitting in 'Contingency'?

Response: Transport for elderly and disabled people is a responsibility for the County Council. I understand the County Council is reviewing transport provision in the city and seeking better co-ordination of its different transport services.

Oxford City Council will continue to urge the County Council to provide proper transport services for the elderly and disabled including an improved Dial-a-Ride service. If the County Council requests financial assistance from the City to deliver that service we will consider that request on its merits.

(6) Question to the Board Member, Cleaner, Green Oxford, Climate Change and Transport (Councillor John Tanner) from Councillor David Thomas

Flooding alleviation in Oxfordshire

When can Councillors expect to see there the tender documents for the feasibility study into flooding alleviation in Oxfordshire?

Response: Oxfordshire County Council is the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and as such, it has a legal duty under the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 to “develop, maintain, apply and monitor” a flood risk management strategy. The authority has produced a draft Local Flood Risk Management Strategy for Oxfordshire and this is now out to consultation until 19th September 2014. This can be found at:

<https://consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/floodriskmgmt/consultationHome>

The draft strategy envisages a range of measure to help control flooding and a key proposal is the construction of the Western Conveyance. This flood relief channel was proposed initially by the Environment Agency following an earlier option assessment. The Environment Agency has earmarked funding towards the cost of the scheme as has the Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee. Further funding has also been very recently announced by central government as part of the Oxfordshire Growth Deal; this will be made available to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), which is working to facilitate further fundraising – to ensure the flood relief costs can be met in full. There is sufficient funding now however, for work to start in earnest. Our biggest success so far is helping to get funding the western conveyance.

The City Council regards flood protection as a matter of priority and leads the Oxford Area Flood Partnership (OAFP), which works closely with the LLFA and the Environment Agency in particular. The Council is also a partner within the LEP, therefore it will be involved in the key processes that will lead to the finalised flood relief scheme.

In this context it is understood that the Council as a partner, will see any tender documents that will be made available for comment prior to sign-off by the commissioning body. Whilst at this time the project plan has yet to be firmed up, it is anticipated that early documentation will be available by late autumn / early winter.

- (7) **Question to the Board Member, Cleaner, Greener Oxford, Climate Change and Transport (Councillor John Tanner) from Councillor Craig Simmons.**

Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

Is the Council planning to develop a Climate Change Adaptation Strategy?

Response: There are no plans within current resource to develop a specific climate change adaptation strategy. However the City Council is currently developing an Emergency Plan which will cover incidents linked to climate change such as heat waves, excess cold and flooding. The Council already has in place a series of Business Continuity plans, which address how the Council's own key services will be maintained or rapidly reinstated in a severe event, including that which could be caused by climate change.

We recognise that such events may well become more frequent in future due to climate change and are working with partners to reduce the impact of such events. The current main impacts of climate change in Oxford that require adaptation, are the more frequent and severe flooding events that the city is experiencing.

The City Council leads the Oxford Area Flood Partnership (OAFP) and works closely with both the Lead Local Flood Authority, the Environment Agency and other partners to address flooding problems. Some of the actions within the flood plans involve adaptation, especially in relation to improving resilience and recovery, for example. These adaptation plans remain under review and will be developed as necessary; they will of course be informed by best practice elsewhere.

- (8) **Question to the Deputy Leader, Finance, Asset Management and Public Health (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor Jean Fooks.**

Town Hall Flat

The flat in the Town hall was marketed a long time ago and a tenant accepted. It has still not been released for occupation so no rental income is coming to the Council. Why were all works such as fire safety measures not completed before it was even put on the market?

Response: The flat has now been let and the tenant taken occupation. A full survey of what was required had been taken prior to the marketing of the flat and the requirements considered, further works were subsequently identified following inspection by our insurers and an independent fire officer. It was also decided that no works should be carried out, and therefore incur cost, until such time as a tenant, and the associated rental income, had been identified to ensure that the letting would work, given the complexity of the accommodation and its surroundings.

(9) Question to the Deputy Leader, Finance, Asset Management and Public Health (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor Jean Fooks.

Mortgage help for teachers

The City Council set up a scheme to assist senior teachers with mortgages to purchase property in the city. How many teachers at what levels have taken advantage of the help available since the scheme began?

Response: None yet. The contract with Catalyst has been negotiated and we can complete once the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) has agreed the content of the consumer credit agreement which Catalyst are proposing to use. Approval was needed because the requirement that teachers must repay equity loans if they leave school employment in Oxford, which is a key feature for the Council, was not covered in Catalyst's existing agreement.

This application was made in February but was caught by the transfer of responsibility from the Office of Fair Trading to the FCA at the beginning of April. It has now been approved so after this unfortunate period of hiatus caused by the antics of the Coalition Government agencies, we can now get on with supporting senior teachers as we intended.

(10) Question to the Deputy Leader, Finance, Asset Management and Public Health (Councillor Ed turner) from Councillor Ruthi Brandt

Cost of Treasury Management Strategy

Can the Board Member tell us how much the Council is paying for Treasury Management Strategy advice from Capita Asset Services, and does this advice include long term views such as bail-in risks and climate related investment risks?

Response: The Council is paying an amount of £10,000 per annum for its Treasury Management Strategy advice from Capita (formerly Sector) following the award of a contract through open tender in July of last year. The advice includes information on the credit ratings of financial institutions meeting the Councils minimum credit rating for investing, together with regular updates on changes to these credit ratings and recommendations on periods for which investments may be made with individual institutions. Bail-in risks and climate related investment risks are part of the information taken into consideration when advising the Council. Capita also assisted in the evaluation of potential property funds to invest in recently. Cllr Fry and I were involved in the evaluation of tenders for this work, of which two were received at the time of appointment.

(11) Question to the Deputy Leader, Finance, Asset Management and Public Health (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor David Thomas

Calls to Oxford's Domestic Violence Helpline

Does the Board Member share with me a sense of horror that monthly call numbers to Oxford's Domestic Violence Helpline increased by over 40% between 2009 and 2012, rising from 172 to 357, and that last month alone on one occasion it received six calls in less than an hour?

Response: The increase in calls to the Helpline, run by Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service (A2Dominion) is viewed positively, although clearly the extent of domestic abuse which it evidences is deeply concerning. Interpersonal violence is by its very nature a hidden crime. Over the last 8 years, nationally and locally there has been a drive to raise awareness and encourage victims to speak out and get appropriate support. We would like people to disclose before it escalates into physical and sexual violence and have focused on early intervention including providing a helpline. By coming forward earlier it reduces the harm, not only to the victim but any children, and improves their life chances. In Oxford there has been an increase in reporting such incidents to the police since 2005. In 2006 there were 2385 reports to the police in Oxford; 1250 (52%) were non-crime and 1135 (48%) were crime. In 2012 there were 3237 reports to the police; 2416 (75%) were non-crime and 821 (25%) were crime. The helpline has seen a similar increase in reporting and coming forward to seek help earlier. The prevalence has not changed but the confidence to come forward and how we tackle and manage domestic abuse has. Not everyone wants to go to the police and therefore it is important that there are other avenues for disclosure and support. The helpline is vital for victims, female and male, as they have a safe place to talk, get safety planning advice, are risk assessed and given appropriate support such as an outreach worker, support group or a community perpetrator programme. In addition professionals use it for advice and information to assist them in supporting their clients and to manage the risk.

The County Council have proposed a 40% cut to Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service funding, as part of its wider cut to "Supporting People" budgets. It will have a direct impact on the helpline. If the cuts go ahead then A2Dominion will have no choice but to either significantly reduce the time when the helpline is open or close it all together. The victims and children will suffer without the appropriate support and this will impact on all agencies both in the short and long term. We intend to respond critically to the County Council's proposed budget reductions in this area of work.

(12) Question to the Deputy Leader, Finance, Asset Management and Public Health (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor David Thomas

Oxford Investigation Service

Would the Board Member join me in recognising the sterling work done by the eight-strong Oxford Investigation Service in combating fraud across the City?

Response: Yes I join with the Councillor in congratulating the Fraud Investigation Team for the tremendous work that they have done in combatting fraud across the city. Fraud is ever present in the public sector, from sub-letting our council dwellings, payment of welfare benefits and council tax discounts. The team has been able to detect and put plans in place for recovery of monies overpaid and has played a key role in protecting the public purse. The Councillor will be aware that the government is going to take on part of these functions in due course, and I am certain that this administration will wish to ensure appropriate capacity to investigate potential fraud affection our General Fund is maintained.

(13) Question to the Leader of the Council, Corporate Strategy, Economic Development and Planning (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Ruth Wilkinson.

Diary date changes to meetings

Why was the date to the Members' briefing changed from 15th July, as in the published diary to 16th July when it clashes with the East Area Planning Committee?

Response: The communication of the dates for Members' Briefings to the officer who organises them contained a clerical error for the July meeting date. When this was identified the speakers had already been organised and invitations sent out and replies had been received. In the event, the East Area Planning Committee scheduled for that evening has been cancelled so there is, now, no clash.

(14) Question to the Leader of the Council, Corporate Strategy, Economic Development and Planning (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Ruth Wilkinson.

Community Infrastructure Levy Update

The Community Infrastructure Ley 123 list is supposed to be updated every six months. An updated list was due in April I think. When will this be circulated and what is the process of discussion for projects to be included in the list?

Response: The CIL list has been updated and will be circulated to members in September.

(15) Question to the Leader of the Council, Corporate Strategy, Economic Development and Planning (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Jean Fooks.

West Area Planning Committee – site location of application

West Area Planning Committee had to defer a planning application for the corner of Walton Street and Little Clarendon Street because they were unable to decide which street it was in. This has meant that the deadline for determination was passed and the developer has gone to appeal – with the consequence that the application will be determined by an Inspector not by the Council. Can the Board member explain why this very important aspect of the application was not determined before the application went to Committee?

Response: This application for the change of use of the shop units at the corner of Little Clarendon and Walton Street to a restaurant was reported to West Area Planning Committee (WAPC) in May, within the 8-week statutory decision period, and with an officers' recommendation for approval.

The relevant retail frontages policy and Local Plan Map include the properties at the two ends of Little Clarendon Street, namely on Walton St and Banbury Road, within the Little Clarendon Street shopping area. On this basis officers recommended approval, as the 65% A1 minimum policy threshold would not be breached.

At the May WAPC, members expressed the view that the premises might instead be included in the Walton Street shopping area (which is further north), in which case the threshold would be breached. The application was deferred for further consideration by officers, who duly reported back to the June WAPC. The Committee resolved to interpret the policy as including the premises in the Walton Street area, and therefore decided that it would refuse planning permission. Since the application had in the meantime gone out of time, the applicant had submitted an appeal against non-determination, leading to the position that Cllr Fooks describes.

(16) Question to the Leader of the Council, Corporate Strategy, Economic Development and Planning (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Sam Hollick.

LGA Challenge results

Will the results from the LGA challenge be made available to opposition Councillors?

Response: The informal feedback session at the end of the team's visit provided a generally positive assessment, and a number of helpful proposals for the development of the Council's future policies. A written report is expected within four weeks and will be sent to all members. A

Members Briefing will be arranged in September to consider the group's analysis and suggestions.

- (17) **Question to the Leader of the Council, Corporate Strategy, Economic Development and Planning (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Craig Simmons.**

Kassam Stadium

Can the Board Member update the Council on the status of the Kassam Stadium?

Response: The Council is not privy to the commercial aspirations of the new Oxford United board. As far as the Council's Local Plan is concerned, the stadium site is allocated for leisure purposes and would not be available for a housing development as seems to have been suggested in the context of a putative move to a new stadium in the Green Belt north of the city.

- (18) **Question to the Leader of the Council, Corporate Strategy, Economic Development and Planning (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Craig Simmons.**

Downgraded Council jobs

In the last year, how many Council jobs have been downgraded? And how many downgraded jobs have been filled by the same person who held the original job, meaning an effective salary cut?

Response: None