

To: Council
Date: 8 February 2016
Title of Report: Questions on Notice from members of Council and responses from the Board Members and Leader

Introduction

1. Questions submitted by members of Council to the Board members, Leader of the Council, by the deadline in the Constitution are listed below in the order they will be taken at the meeting.
2. Responses are included where available.
3. Questioners can ask one supplementary question of the councillor answering the original question.

Questions and responses (updated after the meeting to include supplementary questions and responses)

Board member for Climate Change and Cleaner, Greener Oxford

1. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Tanner

Would Cllr Tanner agree that the wording of the council's standard letter to property owners telling them to clean graffiti off their property might be seen as unnecessarily aggressive, and could potentially cause upset or distress to an elderly or vulnerable resident? Would he agree that ward councillors should be copied in by email as a matter of course when such letters are sent out? Would he also agree that the letter should suggest that recipients might like to contact their ward councillors?

Written response

Councillor Gant brought this to the attention of the Streetscene Services Manager last week and we have reviewed the letters sent to property owners. As a result we have changed the wording from "We expect you to remove the graffiti" to "We would like you to remove the graffiti". This change has been put into effect immediately.

I think copying in both ward councillors and also suggesting the property owner could contact their ward councillor seems an unnecessary administrative burden for the Streetscene team. Attached is a copy of the current standard letter. *(Separately at the end of this document)*

2. From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Tanner

In light of the Portfolio Holder's commitment, in response to an earlier question, to increasing pollinator-friendly plants in the city, can the portfolio holder provide an update regarding the plans for planting this spring?

Written response

We have considered the planting species used in our bedding displays to ensure that we are utilising a greater number of bee friendly species. These include species such as Feverfew, Thyme, Cosmos, Alyssum, Salvia & French Marigolds.

In addition we have identified areas within parks to establish wild flower meadows. The wild flowers and the management practices used will also encourage pollinators (including bees). This work is being done in conjunction with Friends of the Earth, BBOWT and a local Ecologist.

Finally it should be noted that we have planted bee friendly plants and shrubs in the new parking bays which form part of our Great Estates Programme.

Supplementary question

Can we include homes for pollinators?

Response

Yes, this can be discussed.

3. From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Tanner

Can the portfolio holder update the council about the progress made to comply with the Compact of Mayors and the Covenant of Mayors, both of which the council has signed up to in the last two years? How has the council made use of the resources available to signatories?

Written response

Oxford City Council signed up to the Covenant of Mayors in September 2014. The focus of officer time has been spent on the Covenant of Mayors process which is to produce a Sustainable Energy Action Plan in 2016.

Working with consultants, officers are developing this plan in liaison with a very wide range of stakeholders, including Councillor Brandt. As a member of the Carbon and Natural Resources Members Board she has been invited to participate in the development of this work. Officers will focus resource on the Covenant first and then examine what further benefits may be realised with the Compact of Mayors.

4. From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Tanner

I am sure that many residents will have heard that the Council successfully bid for Government OLEV (office for low emission vehicles) funding to trial the installation of on-street electric vehicle charging points. Will the Portfolio Holder join me in thanking those officers involved in developing the bid and could he also set out the process for choosing the trial sites and how members could get involved?

Written response

Yes. I would like to put on record my thanks to officers who led the development of this bid with partners.

Officers are looking for residents who drive, or would like to drive an electric or plug-in hybrid vehicle, but who struggle with charging as they park on streets. A desktop survey and street surveys will also identify other potential streets where off street parking and charging is not available. The City Council will make efforts to install on-

street charging solutions on streets nominated by residents if they are deemed suitable after the detailed surveys by County Council and SSE.

Members can be involved by identifying residents who may wish to take part in the trials, and encouraging them to contact the City Council at us via airquality@oxford.gov.uk

Board member for Crime, Community Safety and Licensing

5. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Sinclair

Can the Portfolio Holder update us on the implementation of the controversial PSPO?

Written response

The City Centre Public Spaces Protection Order went live on Monday February 1st. Signage is in place in key areas and the order is available on the council's website.

Officers have an information sheet to give to people who have questions about the order.

Supplementary question

What guidance has been given on how close someone has to be sitting to a cashpoint to be classed as aggressively begging?

Response

we will leave it to the judgement of officers.

Board member for Culture and Communities

6. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Simm

Given that ward members for Rose Hill felt obliged to contribute 78% of their joint ward budget towards the cost of hiring rooms at the new community centre so that activities in support of the Silver Threads Club and associated fundraising could continue, does the Board Member consider that closer co-operation is needed between officers to ensure that room hire charges in socially deprived areas are affordable by community groups of residents who live there?

Written response

There are very substantial local and targeted concessions at Rose Hill to make the new community hub accessible to the entire community, and of course some of the running costs are financed by investment council budgets – the centre is not currently self-financing. Some groups who were getting free use, or using smaller, lower cost spaces have been supported to enable them to more easily make the transition to the new centre. In relation to the spend from ward councillors, this was agreed not because of the lack of affordability of the centre, but in recognition of the valuable role they, and the Rose Hill Community Association, play in supporting the local community.

Supplementary question

Do you think there will be an increase in requests for assistance with funding?

Response

No, ward members are showing their support for these groups but it is not likely to need to continue.

7. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Simm

Is the Board member satisfied that council made good use of public money by providing facilities for a GP surgery at RHCC without ascertaining if a GP practice would be willing to move in?

Were the facilities at the new RHCC based on an aspirational wish list or a proper analysis of need and existing provision? In particular, was any account taken of the effect that providing publicly-subsidised activities would have on other organisations which already provide those activities, for example small local charities which rely on hiring out rooms?

Written response

On the question of a GP surgery: Initially, prior to the NHS reorganisation gifted to us by the Tory-Lib Dem coalition, the Primary Care Trust had indicated it would be willing to commission a new GP surgery. When, after these reforms, the health authorities decided this was no longer possible, the decision was taken to include a health facility which could be used flexibly either for GP or other health services. From that point on, we have been working with the Clinical Commissioning Group to improve health services in Rose Hill, most of which will be provided locally for the first time. As of April a range of preventative services will be delivered from the new community hub, and we will be pressing for the range of services to be expanded. None of this would have been possible if the health part of the building had not been constructed.

The new community centre was developed through detailed and extensive consultation to ensure it would meet the needs of the community. There are very few community accessible rooms in Rose Hill so I do not believe the centre will have a negative impact on other facilities, and indeed the meeting rooms in the new centre largely replace those provided at the existing community centre. We are also consulting on our Community Centre Strategy that shows how we will work to develop an accessible community facility offer across the city.

8. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Simm

When will the latest plans for the East Oxford Community Centre be revealed?

Written response

We have more work to do on the feasibility study; once this is complete we can then plan our next steps.

Supplementary question

What is the timetable for publication?

Response

As soon as practicable, and we will keep you informed.

Board Member for Customer Services and Corporate Services

9. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Brown

Last July I asked if there could be more member involvement and cross-party discussion on HR matters in the Council. Following a discussion in September I understood that proposals would be brought forward fairly soon. Nothing appears to have happened. Would the portfolio holder please start discussions with the unions and with members as to how this might be achieved, to enable better member oversight of HR decisions? Would the model of the old Joint Committee be one to follow?

Written response

I have had discussions with officers and members following my discussion with Councillor Fooks on this issue, and I don't feel there is any need to put in place any more mechanisms for members to talk to the unions than are already in place. I have listed them below. It is important that members do have that opportunity, but it is also important that we recognise that responsibility for staffing matters is delegated to the Head of Paid Service and thereafter there is a scheme of delegation in place to officers.

- Members are involved in the appointment process for Chief Executive and Directors.
- Council considers all new and amended employment policies.
- Scrutiny has the opportunity to review operational issues
- Group Leaders also have the opportunity to meet separately with trade union officials and the Head of Business Improvement who has operational responsibility for HR.
- Where there are specific issues of significance, items are brought to the cross party working group (for example the 2013 – 2018 pay deal).

Supplementary question

Would you welcome input from other group's members?

Response

All group leaders are able to talk to the trade union representatives and the Head of Service.

Board member for Housing

10. From Councillor Smith to Councillor Rowley

I understand that as many as 50% of the council owned garages in Blackbird Leys & Northfield Brook are vacant.

Does the CEB member agree with me that the council should consider demolishing some blocks of garages with a view to providing free car parking spaces for local residents and where appropriate freeing up land for housing development?

As a first step towards realising this aim will the council undertake an audit of garages in Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook to identify possible sites for such development?

Written response

Thank you for your helpful suggestion.

The Council garage vacancy rate on Blackbird Leys is 37%, compared to 21% across the City. Both figures are too high, and we are looking at how they can be reduced.

We have already successfully redeveloped some under-used garage sites for new Council housing, while others have become open-air residents' parking areas. What can be done on each remaining under-used garage site will be determined by local needs, the size, shape and location of the site, and of course the effect of Government policy on our finances. Some of the garages on Blackbird Leys could be affected by our regeneration plans for the central area of the Estate.

I have asked officers to review all our under-used garage sites with a view to either improvement and increased letting or demolition and redevelopment to provide much-needed housing.

Supplementary question

Can we take this opportunity for redevelopment and, given the high percentage of vacancies, can Blackbird Leys have priority?

Response

Yes, and yes although there are other areas with high vacancy rates.

11. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley

I have previously asked about the implications for Oxford City Council of the Supreme Court's decision to overturn a decision by Westminster Council to house residents out of the borough, (Nzolameso v The City of Westminster) released on 2 April 2015, given that the City are following the same practice. I was told that officers would respond once they had time to digest the ruling. Have they been able to reach a view?

Written response

Officers are still formulating a full view. An internal report was produced last year and this has now been reviewed by Counsel engaged by the Council. Officers will now review that advice and bring forward any changes, should any be considered necessary.

Supplementary question

When will the advice be made public?

Response

We will have to fully consider what is a complex matter and will not commit to publishing anything before this is complete.

Board member for Leisure, Sport and Events

12. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Lygo

We welcome the use of our City streets for cultural and sporting activities, but the closing of main artery roads, including St Giles, on a Sunday causes frequent disruption to our Residents' lives. Would the City now prepare a draft policy in consultation with Residents, for the number of events (including months, days of the week, and timings) when the centre of Oxford is to be disrupted?

Written response

We always consider the level of disruption with all event planning and work hard to balance the community benefits that come from well-managed, vibrant events against

any disruption that they might cause. This is already included within our event management plans and discussed in the meetings of the multi-agency Safety Advisory Group. Protocols are already in place to regulate events in Broad Street and Bonn Square and we are meeting with representatives of the Westgate Alliance to discuss events in the new spaces that will be created as a result of the Westgate development. I do not believe we need to create a new events-specific policy.

Supplementary question

Should there be a standing committee of councillors in wards affected by these events so they can discuss the issues?

Response

Relevant ward councillors will be contacted individually and they have the opportunity to discuss concerns with officers and the Board member.

13. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Lygo

We have been told in public addresses by members of the public that groups using Temple Cowley Leisure Centre were automatically offered transfer to the new facilities at Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre, initially at little or no extra cost. Please can the Board member supply a list of all groups using the Temple Cowley Leisure Centre during the twelve month period before it was closed, and a list showing how many of those groups continue to use BBL leisure centre from 1/2/16?

Written response

City of Oxford Swimming – moved to the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre

St. Christopher's School – moved to the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre

Oxford Swans Disability – moved to the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre

John Henry Newman School – moved to the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre

Church Cowley School – moved to the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre

John Watson School – moved to the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre

St Francis School – moved to Barton Leisure Centre

Our Lady's School - space offered at the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre (not yet taken up)

Rose Hill School.- space offered at the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre (not yet taken up)

14. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Lygo

The half-marathon staged in Oxford last October gave many people the chance to run through the city, but caused major inconvenience and in some cases loss of earnings, to a number of residents and businesses. Can the portfolio holder explain why he has gone ahead with booking a similar event this year, without meeting with councillors whose residents were affected by the event, in order to discuss the best route and date to ensure there is no repetition of this nuisance?

Written response

Around 7,000 people took part in the half marathon and the event was hugely popular with the participants. The half marathon is held on public highways which come under the jurisdiction of the County Council. I have called a meeting of a working group on

11th February to discuss details of the route. I hope that the working group will be able to come up with plans for the next event which will take into account the concerns raised by residents and businesses. Both the City and County Councils want the half marathon to become a world-class event which is enjoyed by participants and onlookers alike.

Supplementary question

Why have we had no information about the 2016 event?

Response

Initial information will be given at the working group meeting.

15. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Lygo

What is the cost to the council per user of the gym at the Rose Hill community centre? How does this compare with the cost to the council of subsidising each gym visit in facilities run by fusion leisure, which will shortly reach zero?

People within reach of Rose Hill now have access to a high quality gym at a lower rate than residents elsewhere in the city. Those living within certain postcodes are subsidised further. How would the board member justify this to residents elsewhere in the city?

Written response

The centre has only had the formal opening on the 30th January so it is too early to supply this data.

Local community rates help to connect local residents with the facilities within their communities. Rose Hill also offers discounted rates for community groups from across the city.

Supplementary question

When will information about costs be available to members?

Response

It was too early to supply this but it would be made available in due course.

Board member for Planning, Transport and Regulatory Service

16. From Councillor Darke to Councillor Hollingsworth

Will the portfolio holder work with Leader in order to write to the Government in protest against their amendment to the Housing & Planning Bill proposing that alternative providers be used by developers to prepare reports and recommendations on planning applications? The amendment is ill conceived and potentially dangerous by: misunderstanding the decision process which must take account the interests of neighbours / communities and not only the interests of developers; risking the viability of local planning authority services by allowing alternative providers to taking away fee income and workload planning capability from the local planning authority; undermining the probity and professional competence of the local planning service; demoting the value and status of the local development framework and local planning policies.

Written response

The short answer is yes, gladly. These proposals open up a race to the bottom in terms of quality of decision-making, where external providers – with no knowledge or experience of the local area – will be able to undercut Local Authority planning departments. The risks of poor quality or unacceptable reports being put in front of planning committees is obvious, and the risk that short-cuts are taken in public engagement and consultation is not so much a risk as a racing certainty. Previous experience with other public services suggests that what will happen is that the private sector will cherry pick the cheapest and simplest work, leaving local planning departments under-resourced to handle complex and difficult cases.

The fact that the Government tabled these proposals without warning or consultation just before Christmas does not suggest to me that they have been carefully developed or considered. Shadow planning minister Roberta Blackman-Woods, a former member of this Council, has said that even the Government must see that the “potential for this mechanism to generate a degree of corruption and totally inappropriate conflicts of interest is probably endless”. I could not agree more.

17. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Hollingsworth

Members of the public who attended a recent Planning Review Committee meeting reported that they were confused about the wording of an extra condition attached to the planning permission which was introduced during the debate, and they were worried that the members may not have fully understood this either when they came to vote. Lack of clarity around wording of conditions has also happened at area planning committee meetings. Does the Board Member believe we can improve current practice to make this process more transparent and understandable for everyone?

Written response

My personal experience as a member of the WAPC is that members are clear about the issues on which they are voting, and that Chairs and officers take great pains to ensure that members are so. Members of the PRC are all experienced members and are able seek clarification from officers on any matter in front of them if they need to; moreover officers are, in my experience, rightly ready to support members in understanding what are often highly complex legal issues. Thus in my experience there is not a lack of clarity in the wording of decisions; members of planning committees do not arrive at their decisions lightly, and do so weighing up complex evidence and advice.

It is always important to keep issues such as support for decision making under review, of course, and the new Head of Planning and Regulatory Services will meet with committee chairs, vice chairs and opposition members shortly to review how the committees are being supported by officers and will pick up any issues then.

Supplementary question

Response

.

.

18. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Hollingsworth

A group of local residents has expressed concern that the outcome of Planning Review Committee decisions is always to uphold the officer recommendation, so we collated publicly available information on the website of all PRC decisions made since Jan 2012 to test this assumption. Given that the information below is correct, they don't believe it is worth-while for members of the public to spend time and sometimes money on preparing evidence to show a contrary view on applications when decisions are almost certain to go against them at PRC – what is the Board Member's view?

Planning review committee outcomes Jan 2012 – Jan 2016

Planning review committee outcomes Jan 2012 – Jan 2016

| Date | App no. | Brief details | Area decision | Officer rec. | PRC outcome |
|----------|--------------|----------------------------------|----------------|--------------|------------------------|
| 27/01/16 | 15/00858/FUL | Latimer/London Rd student blocks | Refuse (EAPC) | Approve stc | Approve stc |
| 29/04/15 | 14/02940/OUT | Littlemore Park | Refuse (EAPC) | Approve stc | Approve stc |
| 29/04/15 | 14/01348/FUL | Aristotle Lane | Approve (WAPC) | Approve stc | Approve stc |
| 26/01/15 | 14/01495/FUL | Williams St. | Approve (EAPC) | Approve stc | Refuse (appeal upheld) |
| 29/10/14 | 14/01012/FUL | 117 Fairacres Rd | Approve (WAPC) | Approve stc | Approve stc |
| 09/07/14 | 13/02629/FUL | 157 Green Ridges | Refuse (EAPC) | Approve stc | Approve stc |
| 30/10/13 | 13/01929/FUL | 81 Edgeway Road | Refuse (EAPC) | Approve stc | Approve stc |
| 26/06/13 | 12/03278/FUL | Cowley Community Centre | Refuse (EAPC) | Approve stc | Approve stc |
| 28/09/12 | 12/01369/FUL | St Clements Car Park | Refuse (WAPC) | Approve stc | Approve stc |
| 25/07/12 | 11/02446/FUL | Cantay House | Approve (WAPC) | Refuse | Refuse |
| 26/06/12 | 12/00495/FUL | Magdalen College | Refuse (WAPC) | Approve stc | Approve stc |
| | | | | | |

stc – subject to conditions

Written response

The PRC is an important part of the committee system, where it operates to ensure that decisions made by the two Area Planning Committees can be called in and reviewed. As the list provided by the questioner shows, in ten out of 11 cases called in the officer recommendation was to accept. All planning decisions, whether delegated, taken at Committee or taken at PRC, need to take into account the professional advice of officers in arriving at a decision.

In the case of a decision referred to PRC, the most common reason for referral is that the original decision may not have been 'safe', in the sense that the decision was not in

accordance with local and national planning policies, and was thus liable to fail at appeal. The PRC has to consider the application on its merits, and thus is it statistically likely that given the substantial majority (7 out of 11) of cases have been called in following a refusal contrary to officer recommendation, decisions by the PRC are more likely to lean towards giving greater weight to the professional advice of officers.

It is normal practice to have a separate committee to assess decisions before the decision is finally confirmed. This approach accords with national best practice and is an approach that helps to assess the risks to the council from decisions that may end up at planning appeal. Given the quasi-legal nature of planning decisions it is important that there is a review approach in our decision making process.

Supplementary question

Given that the two committees both have experienced councillors but come to different decisions, are there any reviews of the reasons for these to see if there are training points which can help make more consistent decisions? Can these be used in future training for members?

Response

I will discuss how to do this outside the meeting.

19. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Hollingsworth

Despite repeated requests and apparent agreement to provide it, members still do not have clear information on how the spending of the Community Infrastructure Levy will be open to community wishes. Please can all members be given this information, with an indication of the amount of CIL available in their wards?

Written response

The Community Infrastructure Levy is divided into three pots of money, as follows: 15%, rising to 25% in areas with an approved neighbourhood plan, can be spent on locally agreed priorities (in areas with a parish council this sum is paid to that council); 5% is set aside for administration and implementation; the remainder is spent on City-wide priorities. This last pot is already allocated to various projects within the capital programme which forms part of the Consultation Budget; these projects can be identified by the CIL marker in the relevant narrative description.

There is a common misconception that the Regulation 123 list kept by the Council is a list of projects which can be funded by CIL; this is not the case. The r.123 list is in fact a list of things that CANNOT be funded by s.106 agreements tied to particular planning applications. Thus while it is therefore likely that CIL moneys collected for city-wide use will be used on schemes on the list, because they can't be funded by s.106 agreements, putting a scheme on the r.123 list can actually make it less rather than more likely that that scheme will be funded.

The neighbourhood portion of the levy can however be spent on a slightly wider range of things than the rest of the levy, provided that it meets the requirement to 'support the development of the area' (see Regulation 59C for details).

We intend to present a report to April CEB which will seek to agree the geographical boundaries of the neighbourhood areas. This would take into account Parish boundaries, and the boundaries of the Neighbourhood Forums which are preparing Neighbourhood Plans; in some cases these boundaries do not match those of the City Council ward boundaries, meaning that sums will need to be allocated at a postcode level in some wards. The rest of Oxford will be split into areas that reflect the

development expected to take place. The report will also set out the process for involving the local communities in the decision on how the 15% of CIL within those geographical areas would be spent.

At present approximately £35k of CIL has been raised and passed on to Parish Councils, and a further £285k raised in unparished areas of the city. There is wide variance at a ward level, with no CIL having been raised in St Margaret's and Iffley Fields wards and £186k raised in Carfax ward. As noted above, because some parish and neighbourhood forum boundaries do not match ward boundaries, the precise areas and figures will differ from ward boundary breakdowns, and will be reported in full as recommendations in the CEB report.

Supplementary question

Can we have the detail of this?

Response

The report to the City Executive Board's April meeting should provide this.

20. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Hollingsworth

Will the portfolio holder ensure that the promised leaflet to inform residents of what is and is not allowed in a Conservation Area is drafted, approved and publicised as soon as possible?

Written response

Yes. The Heritage team is aiming to produce guidance which will be published on the Council's website within 3 months. This will be in a format that can be printed off as a guidance leaflet as well.

21. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Hollingsworth

At the County Council Cabinet meeting on January 26th, Cabinet approved the delegation to the Director of Environment and Economy to exercise Compulsory Purchase Powers if needed for the purchase of land for a number of schemes. Among these schemes was land at Worcester Street, 'required for a bus turning area to enable the pedestrianisation of Queen Street and longer term bus routeing changes as part of the City Centre Transport Strategy'.

Does this mean that the potential for a major revitalisation of this area with the reinstatement of the canal terminal and ancillary buildings will be put in jeopardy?

Written response

While the County Council have taken this step, and the County Council and the landowner are in discussion, we have no reason to believe that this will jeopardise the current plans for the wider regeneration of the area.

Supplementary question

Can this be kept under review?

Response

Yes.

22. From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Hollingsworth

Can the portfolio holder update as to the response (if any was received) from Uniform, regarding their PublicAccess system used by the council in the planning portal to capture comments? Will they agree to review the list of titles offered and either remove the need to provide a title completely (which this council seems to agree would be the best outcome) or at least change it to a more egalitarian set of choices which also respects gender diversity? (the options currently being Lord, Lady, Doctor, Mr, Mrs, Ms, Miss and Rev).

Written response

Discussions with Uniform are still on-going: the Head of Services will provide an update to Councillor Brandt (and to all other Councillors who wish to be kept informed) separately.

23. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Hollingsworth

It is now over 1 year since Temple Cowley Pools and Gym were closed. Can the Executive Board member tell me why the building is still boarded up?

Written response

Catalyst, as owners of the property, are working up a planning application. As owners of the site they have the right to board up the buildings as a security and site safety measure in the meantime, and that is what they have done.

In December 2014 the Council entered into a long lease (999 years) with Catalyst in regard to this site. Although the Council still holds the reversionary freehold interest which is exercisable after only another 998 years, until that time (December 3013) the Council has no rights over or in the site. For all practical purposes, therefore, Catalyst is the sole controller of the site. The Council has no right to enter the site without Catalyst's permission, or to make use of the site in any way. Catalyst is the sole occupier of the land and the Council is not responsible for any activities carried out at the site. The only right reserved by the Council was in regard to an ability to request Catalyst to demolish any existing structures on the land. This right was reserved primarily to ensure that the site would constitute no health or safety risk to the public.

On Catalyst receiving planning consent for its proposed housing development at the site, the Council will be obliged to transfer its remaining freehold interest to Catalyst.

24. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Hollingsworth

In July 2015 a Green motion was passed which stated "Council notes the lack of clear and consistent advice for property owners wanting to install external wall insulation. Council therefore asks the Executive to prepare guidance, such as that available from Havering Council, to post on the council website." Can the Executive Board member please tell me whether the agreed guidance has been produced?

Written response

The agreed guidance is currently being drafted, led by the Energy Efficiency Projects Officer. The draft guidance has been developed across the Council, consulting with Planning, Environmental Sustainability and Building Control colleagues and will be finalised in the next month. This will then be reported to April CEB.

Supplementary question

What was causing the delay when other councils have such guidance?

Response

Regardless of the reason I will see how this can be speeded up.

25. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Hollingsworth

You have previously stated, in response to a question at a Full Council last year, that officers are 'currently exploring options for providing a map-based solution for known HMOs that will help both applicants and members of the public to obtain a clearer picture on HMOs in any particular area within the City'. Has any progress been made on this?

Written response

Officers have been able to generate two types of map based data on HMOs and this has been provided to a residents association for them to use in their local area. We are still awaiting feedback on how useful they found the information. A map has been added to the Council's website and we are continuing to look at better ways of being able to display the data using corporate IT systems.

26. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Hollingsworth

Will the portfolio take the opportunity offered by the newly formed JV and the necessary review (following the exclusion of the ice rink) of the Oxpens MasterPlan SDP to remove the proposed hotel from the plans to free up more space for much needed affordable housing?

Written response

The ambition for the Oxpens site is a mixed use development as part of the city centre. This includes a range of possible commercial, institutional, leisure and residential uses. The adopted Oxpens Master plan SPD provides a policy framework, which includes the Council's affordable housing policies. The final scheme proposals, when they are submitted, will be judged against the framework and the Local Plan policies. While uses that fall outside the framework and local plan policies would need to be justified on their merits, there is no requirement for a specific suggested use within the range of potential uses to appear in any proposed scheme.

Supplementary question

Would you agree we should be taking every opportunity to maximise the provision of sustainable and affordable housing, especially given the difficulty employers reportin recruiting because of the high cost of housing?

Response

Everything I have said here would point to that, yes.

27. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Hollingsworth

How does the Councillor explain the discrepancy between the fact that reported number of students living out remains static but number of registered student HMO's is rocketing?

(Note: Saville's estimate in a recent report that 10,000 students live out)

Written response

I am not aware of such report or research being published by Savills, or the basis on which the claims are made as to student numbers. The City Council's own monitoring

of student numbers and accommodation in the Annual Monitoring Report 2014-15 (published November 2015) assesses the student numbers annually for the two universities.

Data provided to the City Council by the universities shows that at 1 December 2014 there were:

- 2,910 University of Oxford students living outside of university-provided accommodation within Oxford; and
- 3,451 Oxford Brookes students living outside of university-provided accommodation, within the City (Annual Monitoring Report 2014-15, paragraphs 3.47-3.53). This was a temporary fluctuation and Brookes put in place measures which have already brought the numbers within targets (3000 students living outside university-provided accommodation) for the 2015/16 academic year.

Any variation between these figures and those mentioned in the question might be because different criteria are used. For example the Savills figures might include students living in their family homes, part time students, or students at other academic institutions.

Supplementary question

The number of students living out – and exempt from Council Tax – is of concern. Could an independent review be commissioned?

Response

During the update of the local plan we may or may not commission such a survey although limiting the number of students living in the private rented sector was a key part of policy. There were a number of factors contributing to the discrepancy including privately provided purpose-built student residences and students of other educational establishments not covered by our policy.

28. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Hollingsworth

What protection will the City Council provide for existing Bed and Breakfasts against the proliferation of hotel proposals for the City?

Written response

Oxford is in need of both good quality hotel and good quality bed and breakfast accommodation, and there is no evidence that the two sectors cannot and should not thrive alongside one another in a city like Oxford.

The Oxford Hotel and Short Stay Accommodation Futures Study assessed the demand and supply of accommodation for both the hotel and bed and breakfast providers, and identified a limited supply of 3 star hotels and only a few 2 star hotels. Whilst there has been some increase in hotel provision since then this has comprised mainly luxury / boutique hotels and a number of 3 star hotels in the City centre, together with some development on the outskirts. The greatest proportion of the city's hotel stock is still located outside the City centre.

The Core Strategy identifies a projected need for up to 15 sites for hotel, hostel and serviced-apartment development in Oxford up to 2026, to fully meet the identified market potential for new provision. Occupancy levels in Oxford are at around 70%, a clear indication that demand for short-stay accommodation remains high. The Economic Development Team has in recent months received about 5 enquiries from hotel operators, highlighting clear developer interest in Oxford as a location.

A recent report prepared by Tourism South East on 'the economic impact of tourism on Oxfordshire', published in August 2015, showed that of the total tourism value of £1.86 billion generated in 2014, 40% of total turnover was received by businesses in Oxford. Having adequate and affordable hotel accommodation brings a substantial and direct benefit in terms of income for local business and employment for local people, benefits that are lost if visitors cannot stay in the City.

The Local Plan provides the over-arching policy context that promotes Sustainable Tourism within Policy CS32, which seeks to encourage longer stays and greater spend in Oxford. The policy supports the amount and diversity of short-stay accommodation by allowing for new development in the City centre and main arterial roads and also by protecting and modernising existing sites, including bed and breakfast accommodation.

The Local Plan 2036 is at the early stage of preparation but further research will be carried out to update the background evidence on tourism and its important role within Oxford's economy. This will provide the context to review the present policies on short-stay accommodation and the role played by Bed and Breakfast accommodation in adding to the diversity of provision within the City.

While I do not believe that well run hotels pose any threat to well run B&Bs, as they are appealing to different and complementary markets, I do support the national campaign headed by national trade body The Bed and Breakfast Association to ensure that rooms let via websites like Air B'n'B are subject to the same sorts of fire safety and environmental health regulation criteria as other hotels and bed and breakfasts. It's vital for the safety of people staying in these rooms, for neighbours living nearby who might be disturbed by traffic or noise, and of course for well-run establishments who are adhering to the rules and want a level playing field to operate on.

Deputy Leader of the Council, Board Member for Finance, Corporate Asset Management and Public Health

29. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Turner

Given that it has been recognised in many fora that the Rose Hill estate is an area that needs its own GP, does the Board Member consider that the generous space allocated at the new community centre for a GP will be used as effectively if instead it houses miscellaneous health-related services sometime in the Spring as listed in a CCG leaflet given to the public at the centre opening?

(List includes counselling/talking space; mind well being (sic); enhanced primary care services for people with long-term conditions; early detection service for heart failure; stop smoking service; some hospitals services being considered are: eyes and women's services (sic))

Written response

As a Liberal Democrat, Councillor Wilkinson will be familiar with the Health and Social Care Act, part of her party's legacy in government. That legislation disbanded the Primary Care Trust, which had agreed to commission a GP surgery, and instead put GP commissioning in the hands of NHS England, which regrettably decided that it would not commission a new surgery at Rose Hill at this time. Of course, that decision

could be reviewed in the future (an option which would not be available had the health facility not been built).

It is my view Rose Hill does need access to primary care, including GP services. That is why I have devoted a great deal of time to lobbying the health authorities for proper health services from the centre, and I will continue to do so. I think the proposals Councillor Wilkinson mentions are a good step in the right direction, but we will be pressing for more. There is the potential to provide a good range of services making a real difference at the centre (and of course any health provision on Rose Hill will be an improvement on the current situation), and I think the ambition of Oxfordshire CCG to provide services aimed at reducing health inequalities in the area is a good one.

One advantage of providing health provision other than through a GP surgery is that it could be available to people who do not wish to change their GP, whereas this option would not have been open to local people if the only provision was a new GP practice. Ideally I would like to see a range of services, including open-access GPs (possibly on referral from people's existing practices), at the centre, and that is what I continue to campaign for. It would have been nice if the Liberal Democrats had joined in our efforts on this when they had ministers in the Department for Health, rather than carping from the sidelines.

30. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Turner

Will the portfolio holder join me in taking the opportunity of the publication of our latest Treasury Management Strategy to celebrate the fact that Oxford City Council was the first to publicly divest (its direct investments only) from fossil fuels as part of a wide ranging new ethical policy?

Written response

I'm happy to celebrate the policy, though since we have never, to my knowledge, held such direct investments, I would not wish to go overboard in my celebration.

31. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Turner

Will the portfolio holder say whether he is committed to now look at our indirect investments (or request Finance Panel to do so) to see what opportunities there are to more widely enforce our ethical investment policy?

Written response

There are no problems enforcing our existing ethical investment policy, which covers direct investments. I am always interested in the comments of the Finance Panel and have no wish to dictate its work programme! My recollection, however, is that indirect investments were within the scope of the Panel's original review and that the Panel received advice on the inherent difficulties (in relation to access to information and appropriate placement of funds) and costs (in loss of interest and in necessary additional officer capacity) in applying the policy to indirect investments, which is why the policy was formulated as it is.

Supplementary question

Thank you for the response, and for giving the Panel leave to pursue this topic.

Response

The Finance Panel is independent and can give or withhold its own licence, but it is important to understand it is unlikely, given what we've heard from other councils, we

can pursue this policy without needing extra staff and taking a serious hit on investment income. If that were the case we would not recommend or get support for it and do not consider it worth pursuing except perhaps when reviewing the budget or policy.

32. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Turner

Who will be held to account for letting the Tower Block Refurbishment run £7m over budget eating into our affordable homes and energy efficiency programmes?

Written response

It surprises me, since the councillor has a background in capital project management, that this is described as going “over budget”. That is not the case – instead, the initial budget allocated for the project was not sufficient to fund the work which, it transpired, would be needed. There are no indications that the finalised project will go over-budget, and appropriate contingencies are in place. If the councillor is asking who will be held to account for a decision to commission work which is more far-reaching than could have been funded by the initial budget, the answers are a) members of the City Executive Board who agree the scheme, and b) members of Council who agree any revised budget allocation. It should be noted that:

- The scope of the works was extended to reflect the latest best practice on fire safety and outcome of tenants’ consultation.
- The contractors increased their costs because of their assessment of construction/complexity risk for Hockmore Tower
- The Council’s independent consultant’s advice identified additional cost inflation over the tender period because of increasing shortages of materials and labour and lack of capacity in the construction market.

We make no apology for wanting to deliver much-needed improvements to our tower-blocks, and it will be a shame if other councillors would rather not progress with this scheme. Finally, the councillor should be aware that the reductions in our energy efficiency and affordable housing programmes are due to government policy, not our desire to improve our tower blocks, and it is disappointing that he is seeking to muddy the waters in this way.

Supplementary question

Given the size of the miscalculation, could the reason be explained?

Response

As the project planning developed and changed the estimated cost for the proposed works changed. Now that the project is finalised and under contract management procedures the costs should not change. Government policy changed the HRA considerably and we have had to make significant changes which will have a serious impact on tenants.

33. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Turner

Have any allowances been made for a drop in commercial rates income from city centre retailers who are likely to see a reduction in trade due to the Westgate Centre?

Written response

It is not clear to me whether the councillor is referring to the level of income from Business Rates received by our council, or whether he is talking about the rates paid by individual businesses.

If the former: yes, our modelling takes into account as precisely as it can do the changes in business rate income (first a decline, then an increase) caused by the Westgate redevelopment.

If the latter: A percentage reduction in traders' rateable values was given by the valuation office for the closure of the Westgate car park, for the Westgate units as well as the surrounding area.

The valuation office will need to address the financial implications for city centre traders due to the closure of Westgate Centre although we are probably unlikely to know the full extent the closure will have until the centre shuts completely this month.

The individual ratepayers can contact the Valuation Office at any time if they feel their rateable value is incorrect due to external factors

Leader of the Council, Board Member for Corporate Strategy and Economic Development

34. From Councillor Hollick to Councillor Price

Can the Portfolio Holder update us on estimated numbers of HMOs in the City and what percentage of these have been registered under the City's HMO Scheme?

Written response

An updated estimate of 5,240 HMOs based on 2011 census data has been used for the targets for the HMO Licensing Scheme which was renewed for a further 5 years in January and to date 68% of these have been licensed. The Council will continue to take a strong line on enforcement with the new scheme to encourage landlords to comply with the requirement to licence their HMOs.

35. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Price

In passing our ethical investment policy, you kindly agreed to write to Cllr Ian Hudspeth concerning the pensions fund to see what could be done to improve this. Did you ever get a response?

Written response

The reply from the County Council was non committal. It outlined the procedures which are used by the Oxfordshire Pension Fund to review its investment portfolio and distribution across asset classes, and said that our views would be taken into account in future reviews.

36. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Price

Given that OxLEP is embarking on a process of updating the County's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), can you, as our representative on the Growth Board, please tell us:

- a. What input the Growth Board expects to have to this process?

- b. Will it be working with OxLEP to help ensure full public engagement and consultation, including debate at full council meetings?
- c. Will the proposed Plan be debated openly and in public at a Growth Board meeting?
- d. Will the Growth Board be required to approve the final document?

Written response

The LEP Board has already agreed an open process of consultation in refreshing the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan. Two additional strategy documents covering environmental and culture aspects of economic development have already been through an extensive consultation process and will be 'knitted in' to the updated SEP.ow.

A programme of public events has been agreed and provision for on line web based engagement is also being made.

The LEP Board has a significant membership overlap with the Growth Board but the Growth Board Executive will liaise with the LEP Executive to establish an appropriate sequence of engagement and discussion. A steering group for the actual drafting process is being set up. The SEP does not in itself have any formal statutory role in the NPPF and Local Plan process but it is clearly an important background and framing document. Each of the Oxfordshire local authorities will want to have some process for 'sign off' and in our case, I expect that this will involve one or more presentations, a Scrutiny session and reference to the CEB.

The Oxford Strategic Partnership's annual review and report back meeting will be focussing on the SEP refresh later this month.

37. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Price

What is the Council doing to address the massive drop-off in voter registration impacting, in particular, the University Colleges?

Written response

The Council has made great efforts to ensure that under the new system everyone who is entitled to register does so.

Regular briefings on all the activities carried out by our Electoral Services team have been sent to all Members since the beginning of individual electoral registration (IER) in summer 2014. The last briefing was sent to all Members in December 2015 and gave a summary of all the registration activity up to that date.

As noted in the December 2015 briefing, both Oxford Brookes University and Oxford University have agreed to move towards including an electoral registration page in their online registration, to take effect in the new academic year in September 2016.

Since December we have launched another publicity campaign linked to the 'National Voter Registration Drive'. This involved displays being placed in all Oxford University colleges, Brookes, some community centres, Templars Square, Oxford University Press, Homeless Pathways and various other locations in addition to staffed stands in Bonn Square on 3rd February and Broad Street on the 4th February. In addition our social media campaigning continues.

We will be working with the Universities and students' unions in the lead up to the City Council and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May, stressing students' rights around registering in Oxford and the deadlines around that and absent voting.

The Council is also lobbying the government on various elements of IER, in particular relaxing the rules to allow the direct registration of students and other residents of, for example, hostels and old people's homes. The Electoral Services Manager is a member of the Cabinet Office working party on IER and continues to highlight the need for bespoke solutions to the particular difficulties posed by high student numbers within the city.

Supplementary question

Thanks to the registration team for their incredible work on this. What is the role of the universities in this?

Response

The team were encouraging the universities to be more proactive in promoting registration but the details could not be confirmed at this meeting.

38. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Price

Will the Leader be urging the Leader of Labour Party, the County's MPs and all his Parliamentary colleagues to turn up and support the NHS Reinstatement Bill scheduled for its second reading on 11 March 2016. In short, I believe the Bill proposes to fully restore the NHS as an accountable public service by reversing 25 years of marketisation in the NHS, by abolishing the purchaser-provider split, ending contracting and re-establishing public bodies and public services accountable to local communities?

Written response

The title of this private member's Bill is the "National Health Service Bill". It is listed as the second Bill for discussion on March 11th, following the Second Reading of the controversial Foreign National Offenders (Exclusion from the UK) Bill, proposed by the Tory MP, Peter Bone. It therefore seems likely that there will not be sufficient time for the NHS Bill to be discussed and for it to move to a vote. The Labour Party is of course sympathetic to the overall aim of the Bill, which is to make it the duty of the Secretary of State to promote in England a comprehensive health service designed to secure improvement in the physical and mental health of the people of England, and in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness, with the service provided for these purpose to be free of charge, 'except in so far as the making and recovery of charges is expressly provided for, by or under any enactment, whenever passed'. It also seeks the integration of health and social care services – which is already technically government policy. While the objectives are laudable, the Bill, if enacted would involve another great upheaval in the organisation of the NHS, including abolishing the purchaser-provider split, and setting up a series of regional health boards to administer the services. There clearly should be extensive consultation with the public and with NHS employees before embarking on such an upheaval, attractive though many of the features proposed are. I think that PLP colleagues will be supporting the Bill and, if it is put to the vote will vote accordingly. This would allow its detailed provisions to be thoroughly discussed and fed into the wider national debate which is undoubtedly needed on how we best organise and fund the NHS into the long term.

This page is intentionally left blank