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| To: | Council |
| Date: | 29 January 2018 |
| 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 and 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.
4. This report is republished after the Council meeting to include supplementary questions and responses as part of the minutes pack.
5. Unfamiliar terms may be briefly explained in footnotes.

# Questions and responses

# Board member for A Clean and Green Oxford

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Tanner – air quality

The removal of the taxi rank from Cornmarket to its previous site in Queen Street/ Carfax is welcome. But can the Board Member advise of the current air quality measurements in Queen Street, St Aldates, Cornmarket and the Carfax end of the High, in all of which locations there are diffusion tubes?

## **Response**

All our air quality data is publicly available on the following website:

<https://oxfordshire.air-quality.info/>

We also publish an annual air quality status report which can be downloaded on our website which provides all our latest ratified data.

The annual mean NO2 in 2016 was measured as follows:

Queen Street/Bonn Square - 37 µg/m3

Queen Street – 36 µg/m3

St Aldates - 49 µg/m3

Cornmarket - 30 µg/m3

High Street/Turl Street - 36 µg/m3

**Supplementary Question**

The overall figures here are from 2016 and one observation on Saturday night showed high readings. What can be done to have more accurate and up to date monitoring figures to allow action to be taken quickly?

**Written Response**

Longer term trends are more useful than individual measurements, and the longer term trends do show a steady fall in average air pollution.

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Tanner – recycling rates 1

## In the League Tables for recycling rates compiled by LetsRecycle.com from municipal waste data derived from WasteDataFlow, Oxford City Council was placed 96th out of 352 responsible local authorities with a score of 49% of household waste sent for reuse, recycling or composting during the financial year 2016/17. While this represents a considerable improvement on the previous five years where Oxford City Council was placed between 143rd and 148th place with scores of between 44.4 and 45.8%, other authorities in our region have done notably better, with South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire District Councils consistently appearing in the top twenty with scores of between 57.42 and 68.7%. Could the councillor comment on these figures and the variation in performance between neighbouring councils?

## Source: <https://www.letsrecycle.com/councils/league-tables/>

## **Response**

The other districts in Oxfordshire still do recycle more of their household waste than we do in Oxford and should be congratulated. But while Oxford City’s recycling rate is increasing the recycling rates in the other districts is in some cases falling back. Oxford residents now recycle almost half of all household waste. But this could be as high as 80% so there is no room for complacency.

Oxford City is still among the best for household waste among comparable urban authorities. See the attached table:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Authority** | **Recycling %** |
| 2016-17 | Welwyn Hatfield Council | 53.00% |
| 2016-17 | Oxford City Council | 49.00% |
| 2016-17 | Cheltenham Borough Council | 47.30% |
| 2016-17 | Cambridge City and South Cambs Councils | 46.10% |
| 2016-17 | Colchester Borough Council | 45.80% |
| 2016-17 | Watford Borough Council | 42.90% |
| 2016-17 | Northampton Borough Council | 41.50% |
| 2016-17 | Exeter City Council | 31.60% |
| 2016-17 | Preston City Council | 31.40% |
| 2016-17 | Crawley Borough Council | 27.40% |

**Supplementary Question**

Is a fair comparison of our recycling rates with other urban districts or with our neighbouring districts in Oxfordshire?

**Response**

We also encourage comparison with Oxfordshire districts but comparison with urban districts is useful. Maintaining the good recycling rate in a city with a high turnover and transient population is challenging and we are pleased to have such a consistently high recycling rate.

# From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Tanner – recycling rates

## Does the portfolio holder share our concerns at the reported drop in recycling rates across Oxfordshire? What can the Council do to help reverse this trend?

**Written Response**

While recycling rates overall in Oxfordshire are tending to fall back, household recycling rates in Oxford City are bucking that trend and continuing to rise. To be fair the other districts are still recycling at a higher rate than we are here in Oxford.

“The City Council continues to work with the other districts and the County Council to boost recycling, notably through the Oxfordshire Environmental Partnership. We are also determined to further increase the recycling rate here in Oxford through the Blue Bin Recycling League, food waste collections and public education.”

# Board member for Community Safety

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hayes - local policing

## In December 2017 it was reported that the councillor had “surveyed his fellow councillors” in relation to a proposal to support policing in areas of the city affected by drug dealing, and based his conclusions on the reaction of “most councillors” [Oxford Mail, December 22, 2017].

## Could the councillor provide a list of which of his fellow councillors he consulted, why this did not include any councillors from the main opposition group, how the results can therefore be said to represent the views of “most councillors”, and how he decided which wards were appropriate to be included in his consultation and which not?

**Written Response**

The proposal for supporting policing forms part of the Budget process.

In this role, I routinely receive updates about community safety concerns and issues across the city from a range of public agency partners, and those updates shape all that we do. Similarly, I’m grateful to some non-Labour councillors, including some sitting alongside Cllr Gant, who routinely get in touch to raise concerns. All of the information that they share with me shapes all that we do.

The public and councillors on all sides are currently taking part in the Budget process and will have further opportunities to consider this proposal. The 2018/19 budget has been produced in challenging times for Oxford. Nearly a decade of Coalition and Conservative spending cuts has created significant challenges for this Council, including how to maintain community safety.

**Supplementary Question**

Were all councillors surveyed?

**Response**

All councillors were asked if they had any specific concerns about community safety.

# From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Hayes – safe space

Has the portfolio holder had time to reconsider the Green Group suggestion of holding a consultation on the provision of a safe place for those struggling to manage an addiction to take drugs?

**Written Response**

When I was last asked about the council consulting on a safe injecting space, I said that any decision would have to be based on evidence. I outlined some of the questions which need answering before that decision could be taken. I set out some additional questions that we need to think through.

It’s important to be as clear as possible on this issue. The debate is divided. Some will unhelpfully throw around emotive terms like ‘shooting galleries’ while others will have their heart in the right place but rush to demand a service without gathering all the facts. We need a sensible approach.

I want to begin with a clarification. When Cllr Thomas asks if I’ve had time to ‘reconsider’ the matter, I understand this to mean that he felt my last statement on this matter was a definitive negative to consultation. I want to make it clear that I did not give a negative answer and confirm that I am still considering the matter.

It’s important to lay out the context that we’re making decisions in.

Everybody elected to this Council shares the same desire to minimise drug use and drug-related related harm in the city. Members on all sides want to protect the vulnerable and support them through their treatment and recovery journeys. We all share hope that the efforts of this council, recovery services, and other partners are successful at supporting vulnerable people.

I welcome Cllr Thomas’ comments on BBC Radio Oxford, dated 24/01/2018, that the Council is doing a lot of good work in tackling drug use and dealing. Obviously, we need to build on this good work.

Supply is growing because drug dealers are coming into Oxford for one clear purpose: to exploit the most vulnerable in the city and supply their addiction. Public authorities are working hard to protect those vulnerable people against austerity and now the dangers of drug use and dealing.

Demand is there because more vulnerable people are becoming susceptible to exploitation by drug dealers. Nearly a decade of austerity has made more people vulnerable. The recovery services and public agencies who work closely together need more resourcing to support vulnerable people. A long-term fix to the structural problems we face is an end to austerity.

The Council is reviewing several aspects of the problems associated with illegal drug markets and drug use in Oxford. This review sits within overarching work to build policies and services around prevention, treatment, health promotion and community safety. All of the possible options will be addressed in a structured and comprehensive way, involving all stakeholders and experts.

Expertise in this field lies with Public Health and drug services, and their view is crucial. This Council is not the decision-making body on this issue, although we are a significant decision-maker on these issues. We would want to be guided by the views of organisations such as Turning Point—they have made clear some concerns that a safe injecting space is a disproportionate response because there is a high level of treatment service provision relative to the size of the drug-using population.

In order to be taken up, any recommendation has to improve the situation for vulnerable people and their communities. In order to assess what we see working well, what are the areas of concern, and how can we build on what’s going well and tackle concerns, we need a baseline of facts.

Here are a few of the questions that we need to be thinking through. They supplement the questions that I shared with Cllr Thomas when he asked a question on this matter last time in Full Council.

* What would be the overarching reason for creating a safe space?
* The areas around the world considering this idea identify the prevention of overdoses as the main reason for providing a safe injecting service. Would the prevention of overdoses be the overarching reason for a facility in Oxford? Are the strategies of the council and our partners sufficient to prevent drug related deaths, or do we need a safe space?
* To what extent does our treatment system meet the treatment and recovery needs of drug-using citizens? Do we need a safe space because other approaches aren’t working?
* How would the provision of a safe space fit into a person’s treatment and recovery plans? Would it be a pathway to treatment or a hindrance by sustaining their addiction?
* How would a treatment plan centred on safe injecting spaces connect to a recovery plan? Recovery is about a person’s gaining positive insights into their strengths, setting goals, and working towards achieving them with support services and caring professionals, so what role does injections in a safe space play here?
* How many staff need to be hired to provide support and assistance with medical, housing, and legal advice, and what skills-set would they need?
* Some cities considering the idea cite harm reduction, or the idea of making drug use safer. Oxford has needle exchanges—is it not working or insufficient for making drug use safe? Where does responsibility lie for the discarding of needles? Is it a minority who need to responsibly discard but currently are irresponsibly discarding?
* Some cities considering the idea cite the reduction of discarded needle. Is a safe injecting space the most effective way of reducing the number of discarded needles, compared with other approaches?
* Are we doing enough to protect young people and to enable them to make informed and supported decisions around their own drug use and involvement in drugs markets? What role does a safe space play in addressing this need?
* How much money would a safe injecting space cost in terms of start-up costs (for instance, procuring a building, setting up a monitored injecting space equipped with clean needles and disposal facilities and a space for users to recuperate and rest)?
* How much would it cost to sustain a facility (for instance, recruiting and retaining sufficiently trained staff to care for individuals, recruiting and retaining staff to register with a facility, and securing clean needles, etc.,)?
* Who would meet the costs of setting up and sustaining the facility? How would this be set up in a way which doesn’t deplete money going into other services? Is it better to focus our limited resources on treatment?
* Glasgow may be opening the first safe injecting space in the UK this year – their estimated drug using population is 13,600, with 157 drug related deaths in 2015.  Is a safe injecting space the best and most proportionate response for a city the size of Oxford?
* The Home Office has yet to grant a licence for a safe injecting space in the UK. Glasgow’s licence has not been approved to date. How likely is it that Oxford would be considered appropriate/necessary for a license?
* In a BBC Radio interview dated 24/01/2018, Cllr Thomas said that the provision of a safe space would help to reduce crime. Is there reliable evidence to confirm this?

I provide the following information from a review of a Supervised Consumption Facility (SCF) in Vancouver, Canada, to highlight the divergent views on this issue and the need for facts:

“Specifically, neighborhood crime rates were measured before the opening of a SCF in Vancouver, Canada, and then every month for the first year of its existence. After a full year of data collection, there was no significant increase or decrease in crime or disorder following the opening of the SCF”

I am not posing questions to delay action. These questions haven’t been asked publicly so far and it is important to answer them fully and publicly to develop effective prevention, treatment, health, and safety policies and services. The process of answering these questions is taking place.

# Board Member for Finance and Asset Management

# Councillor Price answered supplementary questions in the absence of Councillor Turner.

# From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Turner – pension fund

In previous years, the Council has made provision in its budget for topping up the Council’s pension fund, why has this now stopped?

**Written Response**

The last triennial superannuation review which came into effect from 1ST April 2017 did not increase the Council’s employer’s contribution of 20.6% as there were optimistic projections about increased investment returns. There would therefore be no case for increasing contributions during the period of this review (i.e. until 2020).  Beyond that point, the Council receives regular reports from the Pension Fund Administrator on the performance of the pension fund and will take appropriate action in subsequent reviews of the MTFP if such reports indicate that the employer’s contribution rate is likely to increase at the next pension review in 2020/21.  With rises in base rates, however, it may again be that investment interest is forecast to increase, mitigating any need for an increase.

**Supplementary Question**

Should the decision have been different, and was this decision wise?

**Response**

There was a review carried out each year and the decision not to top up this year, given the investment market position and income, was sensible. However this may change at the next annual review.

# From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Turner – business rates

Can the Leader please provide an update of the latest estimate of the amount of revenue that will be delayed in reaching the council as a result of failures by third parties to have, as yet, assessed business rate liabilities in the Westgate Centre?

**Written Response**

Eleven out of 91 business premises that are open in the Westgate Centre have been included in the rating assessment and the team are pursuing payment of business rates on these properties. The Valuation Office are working on providing a rateable value for the remaining properties that are occupied and have given assurance that these properties together with any remaining properties that will be occupied at the Westgate will be in the rating list before the 31/3/2018. Business rates are payable from the date the property is occupied and the charge will be backdated to this date once the Rateable Value has been provided to the Council. It is difficult to estimate the amount of unbilled business rates in the absence of the Rateable Value – the point is that we cannot know the value until the valuation has taken place! Total business rates for the whole centre, based on similar shopping centres, has been budgeted at around £11million. The assurance that the properties will be including in the rating list by the end of March is very welcome, and reflects the significant work undertaken by officers to engage the VOA, for which we are all, I am sure, grateful.

**Supplementary Question**

Is it not shameful that we have to wait 6 months to see any business rates income from the Westgate?

**Response**

The Local Government Association have been pursuing at a national level the under-resourcing of the Valuation Office by central government and the consequent losses of business rates for local authorities. The Valuation Office was now massively understaffed and unable to deliver a timely service and the impact of this was falling on local not central government.

# Board member for Housing

# From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley –temporary storage facilities

## I receive regular reports from rough sleepers that their belongings are being removed by the council without the issuing of receipts, and in circumstances where it is unclear if permission for the removal has been given. Trying to effectively manage rough sleepers’ belongings is causing tension and frustration for both rough sleepers and our hard working and dedicated officers.

## Can I ask the Portfolio Holder to look urgently into the matter of providing day-time storage and drying facilities for rough-sleepers as well as the protocol and procedures for removing rough-sleepers’ belongings?

**Written Response**

The Council’s current position is not to provide storage for the belongings of those sleeping rough as this supports continuation of a life on the street which is detrimental to those concerned. The Council’s priority is to encourage people to engage with services to either access the homelessness pathway or reconnect to other areas in order to gain sustainable accommodation and support services, and all funding resources are being directed at that.

We will not remove any goods that are obviously either in use or temporarily left, such as a trolley or pile of personal items left on the pavement. We will remove litter in the immediate vicinity of the above. This may include cans, bottles, packaging or other items of litter.

We will routinely remove any items that appear dumped or abandoned. If items are left against a litter bin then they will be disposed of as litter. If individual items are strewn around the street and are not being ‘cared for’ then they will be classed as litter. If we should come across items that are left out and ruined such as soaked and soiled bedding then this would be disposed of as litter also; however, if these appear to be associated with a rough sleeper we will always seek to find and speak with the individual first.

**Supplementary Question**

Will you reconsider the policy as it is ill-advised?

**Response**

We will keep this under review, but the policy remains as stated. If the homelessness partnership wishes us to take a different approach we will listen to and act on their expert advice.

# From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Rowley – EOCC housing

In the budget papers, it is proposed to spend more than £10m on providing housing on the East Oxford Community Centre, Film Oxford and East Oxford Games Hall sites (land owned by the City Council). It is acknowledged that there is space for around 30 housing units. That equates to more than £330,000 to build each housing unit. This is well above what would be expected. How has the cost been calculated and is it accurate?

**Written Response**

The £10.6m budget includes a payment for the land (sites) equivalent to open market value (£2.6m) to adhere to the Council’s requirement to achieve best value from property assets, as well as the costs of delivering the housing (construction costs, plus associated due diligence/ surveys/fee/contingency costs etc) £8m. The construction cost applied reflects the relatively constrained urban context of the site and the rising costs of construction. Costs are indicative and would be refined as the scheme design develops.

**Supplementary Question**

If the cost of the land comes back to the council, why is that not shown as either income or a netter-off amount in the budget?

**Response**

This is because the different parts of the transaction (loan, payments, income) sit in different parts of the council’s accounts. The overall treatment in the accounts does reflect the income from the land coming back.

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Rowley – tower block refurbishment costs

## On January 15 2018 it was announced that the Council’s refurbishment of its tower blocks had run over budget by £650K. Could the Councillor confirm that this is in addition to the earlier over-runs already announced and budgeted for, and explain why the project has gone over budget again, and why the initial costings have turned out to be so inaccurate? Further, it was announced that the Council would be seeking to recover some of these costs from “third parties”. Could the From Councillor confirm who these “third parties” are, whether they include leaseholders, and how the Council’s efforts to recover those costs are proceeding?

**Written Response**

This is in addition to the revised budget which had been increased to accommodate the replacement of the cladding at Windrush and Evenlode Towers. The additional costs relate to unachieved value engineering, extensions of time with costs that are yet to be agreed on, relating to delays to the contract due to land ownership resolution, access to properties and the replacement cladding. These delays had not been previously foreseen. I cannot confirm the third parties at this stage but can confirm that it isn’t leaseholders. It is too soon to comment on progress.

**Supplementary Question**

Could councillors have an itemised breakdown of costs separating the upgrading/ refurbishment costs from the replacement cladding costs.

**Response**

Assuming no other delays we can give a final cost of the refurbishment and replacement cladding we can provide an itemised cost breakdown as the project nears completion.

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Rowley – replacement cladding on tower blocks

## Separate from its own refurbishment programme, could the From Councillor tell us if he has any further information about who will end up paying for the replacement of cladding on Evenlode and Windrush Towers made necessary by changes flowing from the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower tragedy?

**Written Response**

As previously advised, Governments expectation is that Local Authorities should be meeting the cost. The Council is still awaiting a response from the Government to a request that consideration be given for the costs to be met by Government. The interim report from the independent review of the building regulations have concluded that they are not fit for purpose and given the regulations are the responsibility of Government, the Council’s position on this is considered reasonable. The Council has already made clear that it will not be passing on the costs to the residents of the blocks.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Rowley – small hostel provision

## As it is now accepted that homeless people are best helped by being supported in small groups, not in large hostels, what is the current shortfall in bed provision in small units compared with the beds that have been lost from the closure of hostels?

**Written Response**

The City Council is working to ensure that sufficient services are commissioned and available to meet the needs of persons rough sleeping in the city, and with a connection to Oxford City. When the County Council recommissioned the support services delivered from Lucy Faithfull House, 61 beds in this hostel were closed and 62 beds in dispersed provision were reprovided.

The City Council is working to ensure that this provision continues. The County Council also currently commissions 52 supported bed spaces at Simon House for countywide use. This is being decommissioned from March 2018. The City Council has already agreed to fund at least 25 beds as new city provision (agreed by CEB in Sept 17) based on the proportion of beds used by the City not referred from other districts. These will be arranged in small cluster flats that avoid some of the concerns of a large hostel environment, and are more flexible, yet also allowing for 24/7 support to be viably funded. The City Council also invests significant funding in the ‘Housing First’ model, using self-contained accommodation, and this and other projects will be further detailed in the annual report to CEB in March concerning the allocation of the Council’s funding, of over £1.5m, for this area.

Our needs assessment has identified a need for at least 150 bed spaces for City clients in the adult homeless pathway. We are on target to achieve 167 bed spaces for City clients, plus 15 new move-on units for more independent living, 10 new spaces in the winter rolling shelter, and the existing spaces in sit-up (10+) and severe weather provision as needed (30+) - the last two being somewhat flexible based on need.

**Supplementary Question**

Of the 56 spaces at Simon House, there were 22 beds provided for those with a direct connection to Oxford, and 27 beds for those from the wider county. What has happened to those 27 beds? Is no-one funding these?

**Response**

We are seeking commitments from other district councils to provide funding for beds for rough sleepers with a local connection there. It may be more expedient to provide these within those districts. But we are trying to ensure funding and community support is in place for those from outside the city.

# From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley - SWEP accommodation

We have heard first-hand accounts of people being turned away from SWEP accommodation due to insufficient capacity. Can the portfolio holder comment on this?

**Written Response**

No-one has been turned away from the SWEP accommodation provision due to insufficient capacity.

Occasionally, people may be barred from SWEP because they have arrived outside opening hours, or on safeguarding grounds because of previous incidents in hostels that place staff or/ and other users at risk.

When SWEP opens, this is communicated by various means, including directly to rough sleepers by the Street Outreach Team. All agencies in the homelessness network are also informed. It is very well established and understood that clients must present at O’Hanlon house between 9-9.30pm each day and they will be assigned a space at one of the providers from there.

**Supplementary Question**

Will you review the problems with accessing SWEP accommodation and in particular with an overly restrictive registration period of 9.00-9.30pm?

**Response**

The homelessness partnership will be reviewing and making recommendations to improve the processes for SWEP, and changes both providers and users agree will be useful will be implemented. I will not repeat allegations unsupported by evidence as these cause more difficulties for our vulnerable rough sleepers.

# From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley - Homeless Reduction Act 2017

What are the practical implications of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 regarding our local connection rules, and can we expect an increase in long-term rough sleepers being granted local connection status and hence able to access services?

**Written Response**

The CEB report of Dec 17 gave a full briefing on the Homeless Reduction Act 2017 and its expected impacts on the Council. Under the new duties, the Council will continue to give advice and assistance to anyone at risk of homelessness in order to try to prevent or relieve this. The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 does not change local connection rules.

As now, rough sleepers, whether long term or not, can access day services, commissioned and funded by the City Council. If they have a local connection, they will also be helped to access the Adult Homeless Pathway, if they do not, then the Street Outreach team will explore accommodation options with them, including helping to reconnect them to other areas in order to gain sustainable accommodation and support services.

# From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley – affordable homes

Excluding the Barton development, can the portfolio holder please clarify the percentage of the remaining planned homes to be delivered by the Housing Company that will be affordable?

**Written Response**

The current development programme plans for 162 homes, of which 75% are proposed to be affordable homes.

# From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley – right to buy

Can the portfolio holder reassure councillors that right-to-buy will be prohibited on homes built by our Housing Company?

**Written Response**

There is no Right to Buy in place for homes built by the housing company, nor do we plan to introduce one. This of course does not preclude the Government requiring this in the future.

**Supplementary Question**

What has changed and why since the Housing Company was set up?

**Response**

Nothing has changed: the position was and remains as stated above.

# Board member for Leisure, Parks and Sport

# From Councillor Goff to Councillor Smith - Five Mile Drive pavilion

## In 2013 CEB agreed to allocate 4.5m to provide or improve pavilions at a number of playing fields and pitches across Oxford, including Five Mile Drive. Could the Board member provide a detailed breakdown of how that budget was allocated? Could she specifically confirm why the sum allocated was spent on the sites on the list with the exclusion of Five Mile Drive, in direct contravention of the policy agreed by CEB in 2013 and publicly announced in the October 2013 edition of “Your Oxford”?

## Further to the question above, could the councillor also inform council of any additional funding in the form of match funding, grants, etc, used to complete the improvements at the sites on the 2013 list that were improved? In particular, were any of the local football clubs or other users asked to contribute to the capital costs of installing pavilion facilities (as distinct from paying rent or other running costs)?

**Written Response**

The Council’s investment into the City’s pavilions has made a significant difference to the experience of our sports clubs and undoubtedly encouraged more people to take part in sport in the city.

It was highlighted within the 2013 CEB report that the Council budget needed to be supplemented by external funding. An external funding target of £477K was highlighted within the report. Over the five years of the modernisation programme we have worked very hard to bring in external funding of over £650K, well over the £477k target. The CEB report also made clear that the provisional costs against each site were approximate, did not include inflation and that they were based against condition surveys from 2007. The report started the costs needed to be worked up through a formal tender process before we could achieve final costs.

Over the five-year period costs have increased due to various factors, mainly increases in materials and labour costs. Within the CEB report the financial risks was documented and mitigations such as value engineering, gaining more external funding and ultimately shortening the program were all detailed.

We have made a significant investment in Cutteslowe Park which is very close to Five Mile Drive. The first pavilion to have a major refurbishment within the program was Cutteslowe Park (Top Pavilion) and we have also undertaken a major refurbishment of Cutteslowe Park (Lower Pavilion), with the lower pavilion being the priority for Summertown Stars at the time over Five Mile Drive. When we started the programme Five Mile Drive was used much less than it is today and was not seen as a priority.

We have though been working closely with Summertown Stars regarding potential options at Five Mile Drive (detailed in the last reply to a council question on the same subject). We have also been talking to the club about other possible options that we are hopeful will help.

**Supplementary Question**

The offer of a portacabin for Summertown Stars is helpful but hasn’t been made known to the club or ward councillors. We need a community centre. How do I explain the lack of this to my constituents?

**Response**

We will be making the offer of a portacabin including changing rooms, toilets and a general purpose room to the club very soon and consider this to be an adequate provision at the moment.

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Smith - “Primary Stars” partnership

## On December 12 2017 Oxford City Council announced the “Primary Stars” partnership with Oxford United Football Community Trust providing training at five city primary schools, all in Blackbird Leys and Rose Hill. Can the Councillor tell us who, under the terms of the partnership, decided which schools in the city were allocated to the scheme? Could she also give us an undertaking that when the scheme is expanded all ward councillors will be consulted and kept informed, so that the scheme can genuinely function as a partnership between the Trust and the council as a whole, meeting the needs of young people in all parts of the city?

**Written Response**

The brief from the Premier League was to work with schools in areas of deprivation and given the timing of the update and constraints within the brief, the trust decided to initially target those schools in close proximity to Oxford United’s home at the Kassam stadium including schools on the Leys and Rose Hill. The City Council role in the partnership is to try to maximise the opportunities in the city (although it is open to the County) and to provide training for coaches and school teachers. However we are keen to maximise the opportunity for the City as much as we can under the criteria and will ensure relevant stakeholders are kept up to date.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Smith - Burgess Field

Can the Board member advise why major changes to the landscape of Burgess Field e.g. the cutting down of well-grown trees and the placing of an extraordinary memorial bench in a prominent location, was made without consultation either with ward members or the public?

**Written Response**

Julian Cooper the Supervisor responsible for all Countryside sites met Councillor Wade on 23rd August 2017 to discuss concerns raised. During this meeting the Councillor voiced concerns regarding a newly installed green oak memorial bench that had been installed on site. The Supervisor reassured that no new benches would be placed on site without consultation with the elected members. Since this meeting no new furniture has been installed. The work to the trees is aimed at ensuring that that the valued landscape and tree cover that provides a valuable habitat is maintained. The trees that have been removed are Ash which are highly susceptible to Ash dieback which is a virulent disease that runs the real risk of killing a large percentage of the trees on site. As a result a decision was taken to remove a percentage of the Ash and replace with a range of disease resistant trees. This sees 3500 trees planted within the existing wooded area and along the edges. The trees have been chosen for the valuable nectar they will provide for a wide range of pollinators. The Parks Service have been contacted regarding the possible setting up of a friends group. We have a proud track record of working with the community and will naturally be fully supportive of this group. We will actively support mutual aims to maintain the special value of the site and work with all to improve the site for the ecology and public access.

**Supplementary Question**

A Friends of Burgess Field group is indeed being set up to help. Will the Board Member work with the group and confirm that when major changes are proposed on this site ward members will be notified and consulted?

**Response**

I welcome the formation of the group and please let me know when it is established so that I can meet them. We will try to ensure notification is given for future works.

# From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Smith - online booking for sports facilities

The council has launched its new online booking system for sports pitches and pavilions.

• Were all local football clubs and other users consulted about the system before it was implemented?

• Will clubs who have previously had (and needed) exclusive access to pitches and pavilions on match-days be required to book and pay for each match individually? How will this work in practice when fixtures are very regularly postponed or moved from one venue to another at short notice because of weather?

• How will the system cope with this unpredictability in avoiding clashes with children’s parties or other uses?

**Written Response**

The pitch booking system was procured in June last year and since then teams have received numerous communications regarding it. Prior to this, the main driver for purchasing an online system was the clubs. They were unhappy with the amount of double bookings occurring and also the lack of transparency in our old system. Since June we have had testing sessions, a launch event and 121 training sessions available to all teams with many taking advantage this. Some clubs have raised concerns, however, colleagues have met with them and these concerns seem to have been alleviated. As with all systems there may be some teething issues and we invite the clubs to work with us to resolve any problems.

• *Will clubs who have previously had (and needed) exclusive access to pitches and pavilions on match-days be required to book and pay for each match individually? How will this work in practice when fixtures are very regularly postponed or moved from one venue to another at short notice because of weather?*

The new booking system improves the efficiency and accuracy of administering bookings. It has not changed how we manage the facilities. At the start of the process we identified 25 teams that were regular uses of our facilities. The developers of the system developed a priority access function. This means teams have access to their usual pitches before the start of the season so they have time to place all of their bookings at once on the system. If the bookings are made all at once a team will pay once for all their games. If matches are moved or postponed the team would still need to contact our Parks Support staff to let them know. This policy hasn't and won't change and is still the same in our sports booking agreement.

• *How will the system cope with this unpredictability in avoiding clashes with children’s parties or other uses?*

During development we added a feature where by the tea room of a pavilion (the location of a proposed children’s party) is automatically booked out if a sports team book the pavilion. This eliminates the possibility of a clash.

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Smith – online booking for pavilions

In the new online booking system Cutteslowe Lower Pavilion is advertised as being available for children’s parties. How practical is this when there is no access to the pavilion by car?

**Written Response**

All pavilions, including the Lower Pavilion, have always been available for uses other than sport. Limited vehicle access is permitted to our pavilions and needs to be pre-arranged at the time of booking (e.g. for deliveries/disabled access). However, we agree that the general attendees of a party would not be able to park at the Lower Pavilion. Therefore we will instruct the developer to add a note to say no parking is permitted near the Lower Pavilion with the exception of pre-arranged deliveries/disabled access. Parking can be found at the A40 or Harbord Road Car Parks.

# Board member for Planning and Regulatory Services

# From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hollingsworth - Seacourt Park & Ride

The Council has acknowledged that the proposed Seacourt Park & Ride car park extension is liable to flooding despite compensatory SUDS being part of the proposal. On those occasions when flooding is a possibility it is acknowledged that the car park will have to be closed, and I note that precautionary fencing has been designed to prevent cars being floated off into the flood channel. Bearing in mind the Loddon Bridge (Wokingham) car park flooding incident of 2009 which led to compensation claims against that borough of over half a million pounds and the subsequent permanent closure of the car park, what discussions have been had with the City Council's insurers regarding the Council's liability in the event of flash flooding or a failure of the Council's warning mechanisms such that cars are damaged or written off?

What is their advice regarding the impact on our insurance premiums, and have any premium increases been built into and specified in the administration's budget?

## **Written Response**

The Council’s insurers, Zurich Municipal, have advised the Council that there are General Conditions applicable to the Council’s insurance policy and one of these is reasonable care - that the insured party will comply with all regulations imposed by any competent authority and take all reasonable precautions to prevent or minimise accident, loss or damage.

The recommendation from Zurich Municipal is that Oxford City Council must ensure full and accurate records of discussions and decisions are kept and an appropriate risk assessment is completed with full consideration of all the risks identified.

The Council has very carefully scrutinised the application through the planning process, with both the Environment Agency and the emergency planning authorities consulted throughout the project’s development. The Council has carried out the appropriate risk assessment as required by the insurer, as a clear understanding of the risks and has a plan to mitigate those risks. The full and accurate set of records required has been kept.

Zurich Municipal have not therefore increased the Council’s insurance premiums.

**Supplementary Question**

In an average year, how many days would the car park would be flooded and how were owners to be notified in the event of a surprise flood, and what was the insurance risk?

**Response**

These questions were addressed and answered in documents available online with the planning application.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth – city centre coach parking

Can the Board Member advise whether a policy for better management of coach parking in the City Centre, in particular St Giles, is now been drafted with input from Oxon CC and Experience Oxfordshire? When will the draft be available for comment?

## **Written Response**

Policies relating to tourist coaches form part of the emerging Local Plan, and a changed approach was suggested in the Preferred Options consultation undertaken last year. The results of that consultation, together with the research jointly commissioned by the City and County Councils on movement and open spaces in the City Centre, will continue to inform evolving policy options. Once the policy framework is in place we can work on detailed options for managing tourist coaches, together with the County Council who will have to manage and enforce parking on the street with their traffic enforcement officers.

There is no doubt in my mind that the situation in St Giles in the last few summers has been unacceptable. Coaches parked three abreast, blocking the cycle track and the main carriageway, with their engines running for long periods immediately outside people’s workplaces, is too high a price to pay to facilitate what are often fleeting visits to take a few photographs which make little or no contribution to the city’s economy.

The objective of the Local Plan’s emerging policies is to discourage these very short term visits in favour of longer term ones. We should be proud that so many tourists want to visit our city, but we shouldn’t be afraid to say that we would be happier with fewer, but longer, tourist visits which will make a genuine contribution to the wider economy of Oxford.

**Supplementary Question**

When would detailed policy options be available?

**Response**

Broad proposals would be set out in the draft Local Plan for consultation over the summer. If an easy solution was realistically possible it would have been implemented by now: one challenge was to make the city more attractive for longer stays rather than a quick stop.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth/ Cllr Tanner - delivery services using cargo bikes

## It has been estimated that zero-emission delivery services using cargo bikes, in particular a hub site, may save an estimated 65 tons of CO2 p.a. Can the Board Member advise what assistance the City Council makes available to potential service providers, given that this use would further its strategic objectives?

## **Written Response**

The City Council is currently in discussion with a potential provider of such a service to see whether suitable sites can be identified. The Council’s economic development and environmental sustainability teams are always supportive of significant new initiatives such as this.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Hollingsworth/ Cllr Tanner – notification of roadworks

## There has been a noticeable increase in the number of problems reported about poor communications with residents and also poor performance of utilities contractors in respect of planned and completed works in Headington. Is there anything more the Board Member can do to ensure that power and/or responsibility for addressing these issues will pass to a senior manager in the Latco after the proposed restructure?

## **Written Response**

Works on the highway by utility contractors take place under the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, as amended by the Traffic Management Act 2004. Highway authorities have a duty to maintain their roads under Part IV of the Highways Act 1980, as amended; any roadworks that they undertake are subject to this legislation. Street works carried out by public utilities and cable companies are undertaken by virtue of a statutory right or a licence granted under the 1991 Act and do not need the prior consent of the street authority. In Headington the street authority is Oxfordshire County Council.

In most cases – emergencies are the usual exception - utility contractors inform the County Council which can then, if time and resources allow, notify residents if the contractor or utility company has not already done so. That there are still problems with utilities companies was demonstrated this month when a 10-week closure of the A420 on the edge of Swindon was not notified to Oxfordshire County Council, despite the obvious disruption such a closure would cause to the county and its residents.

Where the City Council carries out works for the County Council as the latter’s contractor the City Council will notify residents where appropriate depending on the scale of the work and the likely impact that it will have.

**Supplementary Question**

How will the City Council’s work on behalf of the County Council and its ‘S42’ powers help with managing roadworks by utility companies?

**Response**

It was not clear that the new arrangements would give any more control or management of these works. However there were ongoing discussions about the agency work and we will do our best to ensure that we have requisite legal and reasonable controls and powers in place.

# Board member for Young People, Schools and Public Health

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Tidball - mortgage scheme for teachers

Could the Board Member tell us what the uptake has been of the subsidised mortgage scheme for teachers, both before and after the qualification criteria were adjusted?

## **Written Response**

The Teachers Loans Scheme criteria were changed in January 2016. No loan applications had been received up to that point but following the scheme changes, eight applications have been received, mostly from secondary school teachers.

Two loans have subsequently advanced to purchase. Other applicants are looking for properties to purchase.

The areas where teachers can buy were relaxed in March 2017 to give people more choice in the market but no new applications have been received since the beginning of April 2017.

Catalyst jointly fund and administer the scheme and they proactively promote the scheme with the schools.

**Supplementary Question**

Will the scheme be kept under review to make sure it is fit for purpose?

**Response**

Yes it is kept under review and we will look at supporting other ownership options - and also keep pressuring central government as teachers’ salaries have decreased in real terms over the last few years.

# Deputy Leader of Council, Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown - apprenticeship levy

Could the Board Member give us an update of the Council’s implementation of the apprenticeship levy since its introduction?

## **Written Response**

Apprenticeships pre May 2017

The Council has successfully run apprenticeship programmes since 2012 with salary funding set in the base budget and training costs met by government grant. The programme focuses on recruiting apprentices on a 2 year fixed term basis, enabling them to gain a qualification before they are supported to find new roles either internally or externally. The current programme ends in Aug this year and is not impacted by the levy with training cost continuing to be met through the grant

Levy Funding

The introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy commenced in May 2017 set at 0.5% of the annual pay bill and replaces the previous grant funding for apprenticeship training after that date. The Levy can only be accessed to fund the provision of training aligned to new government recognised apprenticeship standards. These standards have varying funding levels for training, e.g. Chartered Surveyor - £27,000 over 4 years to Business Administration - £2500 over two years.

The Council is currently paying a levy of circa £17,000 per month. From April this year Oxford Direct Services will pay their own levy, reducing the Council bill to approximately £8000 per month. However ODS will become a ‘connected company’ under the levy rules and the levy will continue to be managed centrally.

The levy can be accessed for new start apprentices or training of existing employees, (providing a new skill is learnt or a higher level qualification gained). Additional levy rules include; at least 25% of the apprentices working time dedicated to training and they must be in a role that enables them to complete the apprenticeship.

There has been an internal promotional campaign to encourage current employees to take up apprenticeship training for career qualifications. However the uptake is low with the 25% absence for training cited by line managers as a major barrier.

Since the introduction of the levy the Council has registered 9 new apprenticeships, 3 current employees and 6 new starters, studying subjects from Business Administration to Vehicle Technician to BSC Chartered Surveyor. This has enabled the Council to draw down approximately £2190 per month from the levy.

Next Steps

Several approaches are being taken, we are:

* Now scoping out the structure of the next apprenticeship programme due to commence in Sept this year, considering what type of apprenticeships to offer, length of study and how best to meet workforce demands, such as hard to fill roles in planning
* Reviewing all vacant posts to see if an apprenticeship is suitable
* Looking to build internal skills capacity, for example the ICT restructure has identified several skills gaps that can be met through the levy – Project Management and specific ICT capabilities

**Supplementary Question**

Will the balance between what the Council pays in and what it gets out of the Apprenticeship Levy change to be in our favour?

**Response**

We hope so as this is an area we want to develop and HR are working with officers to increase the apprenticeships we offer.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Brown – criteria for emergency fund for Universal Credit claimants

With the expansion of Universal Credit at the end of last year, the City Council put £50,000 aside for emergency help for anyone facing lack of food or money due to the 6-week delay before the benefit would be paid. What criteria were used to release a grant from this fund and how many grants of how much have been awarded so far?

## **Written Response**

Eligibility for the Hardship scheme is provided below. The scheme is discretionary, so officers are able to make awards to people falling outside of these criteria if there is a good reason to do so. Applicants for the scheme must:

* have their main residence in Oxford
* have applied for UC and not received their first payment
* have provided all the information and evidence required to assess their UC claim
* have applied for an advance payment of UC
* demonstrate a need for support
* access or have been referred to the Council’s Springboard Money service to obtain support
* not have previously received support from the scheme

Ten payments have been made from the Hardship scheme totalling £360

**Supplementary Question**

Why are the take up and total payments from the emergency help fund so extraordinarily low?

**Response**

The fund was set up without having any empirical evidence of likely need. Government had listened to lobbying and changed the criteria before our roll-out: addressing some of our concerns, and reducing the need for hardship funding somewhat.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Brown – takeup of emergency fund for Universal Credit claimants

Can the Board Member confirm that the emergency fund for Universal Credit claimants is being well-publicised, given that only £400 has been used at the present time?

## **Written Response**

The Hardship fund has been publicised to stakeholders (including the advice organisations and Oxford Jobcentre) and is managed by the Welfare Reform Team who provide Universal Support services to residents claiming Universal Credit. Support has been provided to 130 residents migrating to Universal Credit. Awards from the hardship scheme could have been made to any of these people, but there hasn’t been a need to do so, apart from the 10 cases mentioned in the response to Q.28. The Welfare Reform Team have also provided foodbank vouchers to 22 of these residents.

The government announced a number of changes to Universal Credit in its November budget which will have significantly reduced potential demand for the Hardship Scheme. These changes include allowing claimants to have a full month’s advance payment instead of half a payment, the abolition of the seven waiting days and, from April, an additional two weeks housing costs will be paid to claimants who were previously on Housing Benefit.

**Supplementary Question**

How can people be passported to the emergency hardship fund rather than receive foodbank vouchers? Is here a protocol in place as they presumably need more than just a voucher?

**Response**

Vouchers are useful and easy when dealing with an immediate low-value and short term need. The key issue is that we have to step in to help people manage: government need to look again at the welfare programme and we need to lobby for a liveable benefits system.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Brown – DHP grant

## Will the Council have used all the DHP government grant to assist people in rent problems by the end of this financial year?

## **Written Response**

Discretionary Housing Payments can be paid to people who are in receipt of Housing Benefit or the Housing Cost Element of Universal Credit, where these payments do not cover the full cost of their rent. It’s not available to anyone who is having difficulty in paying their rent.

Since 2013 the Council’s Discretionary Housing Payment policy has been designed to help recipients make positive changes to their lives, so they are able to afford their rent without discretionary financial support from the Council. This approach has enabled far more people to be supported with DHP payments than would have been otherwise. The aim of the policy is not just to spend the money, but to spend it effectively.

The government DHP grant for 2017/18 is £509,495. As of 22 January 2018, £435,620 had been spent, with a further £45,860 committed for future payments. Expenditure has been reducing throughout the year as the main recipients of DHP payments have been people affected by the lowering of the Benefit Cap, which was implemented from November 2016. The Welfare Reform Team have been working with these customers to help them gain exemptions form the Cap. Out of 386 customers affected by the lower cap, 172 have been helped to gain an exemption. This success has reduced the average spend for DHP’s from £57,000 per month in March 2017 to £35,000 per month for December 2017. Based on this trend it is expected that the annual expenditure of DHP will be in excess of 98% of the government grant.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Brown – benefits assessment accuracy

## Some residents and agencies are voicing concern about the performance of the Council in respect of the accuracy of assessments for benefit. Can the Board Member confirm what proportion of benefits assessments have been shown to be incorrect and how much this has cost the Council so far in this current financial year?

## **Written Response**

In November and December 2016 and April and May 2017 the Benefits team undertook intense training to improve accuracy rates. At the time the average accuracy rate was 78% currently it is running at 85% a significant improvement. Accuracy now forms an integral part of staff appraisals and further training is planned in the coming months. Inaccurate processing not only affects the claimant, favourably or adversely but also has implications for the Council, since subsidy is lost on the total amount of benefit paid in error. The loss of subsidy arising from inaccurate processing for the period April 2017 to December 2017 was £122k compared to the same period in 2016-17 of £161k.

Whilst the Team will always strive to eliminate inaccurate processing the errors only represent 0.002% of the total amount of annual benefit paid.

**Supplementary Question**

Accuracy rates are concerning. Is this due to staff turnover or other factors?

**Response**

The threshold for accuracy is set very high and it is not clear if it will be met this year either. There have been a few issues with short-term staff and there is a need to have and then retain well-trained people.

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

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# From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Price – press releases

Following on from several inaccuracies noted in recent releases, who is responsible for fact-checking the Council’s press and social media releases and responses?

## **Written Response**

The City Council Communications team checks the factual accuracy of all press release and social media communications issued. Overall responsibility for this rests with the Corporate Policy, Partnerships and Communications Manager. Officers in the Communications team, working together with officers from across the various council departments, are responsible for checking facts in individual press releases. Press releases are then signed off by senior officers responsible for the relevant area and – as appropriate – Executive Members. Any quotes from Members are cleared with them in advance.

Social media posts on behalf are generally drawn from press release material and other communications already issued by Oxford City Council. Given that social media is generally a briefer form of communicating, not all of the available information will necessarily be included in any individual post. The Communications team does however include links to more detailed statements wherever practical.

There has only been one identified inaccuracy recently. This was a Facebook post issued earlier this month about the timing of the Budget proposal for an extra £200,000 of funding on homelessness. It was initially stated this would be from 2018. As soon as the error was pointed out the officer amended the post to state the additional funding was proposed from 2019. The Corporate Policy, Partnerships and Communications Manager is not aware of any other queries about factual accuracies in recent press release or social media communications.

**Supplementary Question**

Can the protocols in place for press releases and mainstream articles be widened to include social media as this is where the miscommunication, misleading and inaccuracies can occur and where there can be accusations of or actual bias.

**Response**

I will consult with officers to see if this can be done.

# From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Price - support local businesses

## What is the Council doing to support those local businesses impacted by the opening of the expanded Westgate?

## **Written Response**

Over the three months since the new Westgate opened, footfall in the city centre has increased significantly. Last week, the data showed an increase of 19.6% over last year and there have been increases each week since late October. Independent retailers from the Oxford High Street Traders Association report increased footfall that their Christmas season targets were achieved or exceeded.

The City Centre Manager continues to hold her monthly ‘Talk of the Town’ meeting for city centre businesses at which support and advice is provided, and ideas for collaborative marketing and events are discussed.

A new City Centre Partnership will be launched by the Manager early in 2018, with representation from independent businesses across the city centre to voice their needs.

We continue to collaborate with ‘Independent Oxford’ in the promotion of the Indie Compendium and of independent businesses generally, and we are working together on the development of a programme of events and promotions to support of the Independents Retailers Month in July.

Some empty retail units are being used to promote the Covered Market through the use of window ‘dressing’. Our Economic Development team promotes OxLEP’s suite of business support offers, which includes a wide range of advice, mentoring and funding opportunities for energy reduction, growth and innovation.

The City Council has just launched the Oxford Business Guide and a Local Oxford Directory to support business to consumer and business to business trade. Already, 1710 local businesses are signed up to promote their business using the directory and we will continue to encourage businesses to use the platform to promote their offer, and promote their services to residents and visitors.

**Supplementary Question**

Will the details and outcomes of these initiatives be circulated to councillors?

**Response**

Yes: there is a partnership group with different businesses which meets to discuss a wide range of issues, solutions and progress.

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Price - Carillion

## Could the Leader tell us if the City Council and its service delivery are impacted by the collapse of Carillion? Does the Council have any plans to help safeguard any services provided by others under contract to Carillion (for example the County Council)?

## **Written Response**

The City Council's services are not affected by the collapse of Carillion. The County Council are managing their way through the process of disentanglement and we have offered to provide any help that would be useful to the County in maintaining their services.

**Supplementary Question**

Has the County Council responded to our offer of help?

**Response**

The County Council had already pulled out of or reduced contracts with Carillion and taken services in-house. The two councils were discussing a transfer or engineering services.

# From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Price - Brexit impact on local services

## Prospects of a hard Brexit and restrictions on freedom of movement seem to be contributing to a massive decline in new arrivals of nurses from EU27 countries. It has been reported that, in the year following the EU referendum, 9,832 EU27 doctors, nurses and support staff left the UK. This is extremely damaging for an already overstretched NHS, evidenced by, for example, a reduction in the number of chemotherapy cycles offered to terminally ill patients at Churchill hospital this winter.

## Will the councillor be undertaking an assessment on local services in Oxford, especially the health service, of the impact of the UK leaving the Single (internal) Market?

## **Written Response**

The precise implications of whatever new set of arrangements emerges from the mess that the Government is making of the negotiations for leaving the European Union will certainly be assessed when they are known. It seems likely that there will be a set of transitional arrangements that will reduce the immediate impact in 2019-20. And, there are still some of us who think that it remains possible that the UK will not leave the EU.

**Supplementary Question**

What is your view of this?

**Response**

The Council and I have made our position clear and I will continue to point out the potential for damage to the local economy. Talking to businesses brings up questions around the impact, potential restrictions on labour being significantly detrimental.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Price - tourism

## Can the Board Member advise what progress has been made:

## • in building links with other tourist cities to share best practice on tourist management

## • in looking at a joint approach to the introduction of a tourist levy

## • in joint working with OxLEP, Experience Oxfordshire and other organisations involved with tourism.

## **Written Response**

The City Council is a key member of Experience Oxfordshire, the City's Destination Management Organisation, and EO is closely networked nationally with other major heritage cities on tourism issues and policies. Proposals for a tourism tax have been put forward on a number of occasions, by individual authorities (including Oxford) and by the LGA. All have been rejected by government as a 'new taxation burden'.

OXLEP have set up a Visitor Economy Sub Group to take forward proposals emerging from the analysis of the county visitor economy undertaken two years ago with support from the Arts Council. The Group will aim to take any opportunities which emerge from the Industrial Strategy sector deals for additional funding for tourism and heritage projects, and is also working with the Oxfordshire Skills Board on increasing the number of apprenticeships and training opportunities in the sector.

**Supplementary Question**

Will the Council support development of a destination management plan?

**Response**

Yes although this is not just about how to move round the city but also about links between accommodation and attractions. Experience Oxfordshire would be working on this in the next year once their current commitments lessened.