

To: Council
Date: 26 November 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 has been 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 Culture and City Centre

1. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Clarkson – BID for Oxford

Is the Board Member in favour of a Business Improvement District (BID) for Oxford city centre? How will the failure of the Abingdon Business Improvement District be avoided here?

Response

The appetite for a BID is not certain, given the added expense some businesses are facing from business rates reviews and more challenging trading conditions created by changing consumption patterns. We are in a dynamic situation and need to be clear a BID is workable. We are however continuing to explore the possibility.

A BID must be wanted by the business community if it is to go forward for a referendum and the business community in turn must be actively engaged if it is to be successfully delivered against shared priorities. At this stage, we are simply trying to understand short, medium and long-term city centre priorities, post Westgate opening by looking at past and future surveys and research. We can then understand where our information gaps are and will undertake this work with the support of the City Centre Task Force. City centre stakeholders are being encouraged to work with us here.

We will of course aim to learn from other BIDS in any future work.

2. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Clarkson – Covered Market

Does the Portfolio Holder an update on the number of empty shop units in the City Centre and Covered Market?

Response

- The following recent survey was undertaken by officers, which is based on circa 400 frontages. It's worth noting that this compares favourably against Centre for Cities data published in June 2018 with a reported English City average of 16%:

Retail Survey 2017 - Primary frontages	Retail Survey 2018 – Primary frontages	Retail Survey 2017 – secondary frontages	Retail Survey 2018 – secondary frontages
Vacancies 8.4%	Vacancies 8.8%	Vacancies 6.8%	Vacancies 10.3%

- Covered Market – Currently only 4 empty units:
 - Ex. Haymans – splitting in process to create 3 units, works due to finish just before Christmas. 2 tenants already signed up to open in the new year with interest for the 3rd unit .
 - Ex. McCarthys –Planning approved, re-development next year.
 - Ex. Lyndseys - in discussions with OPT about a joint refurbishment project next year
 - Ex. H&D House – Oxford Soap Company now open. Fedele of Oxford completed new lease, in process of fit out due to open later this month.

3. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Clarkson – Festival of Lights

The Festival of Lights procession this year required the High Street to be closed to all traffic, including public transport. This, in turn, caused traffic chaos and made it more difficult to access the Festival, especially for those unable to walk far. Can the Portfolio Holder agree to review the arrangements to see whether improvements can be made?

Response

The Christmas Lights Festival procession was not planned to include the High Street or closure to the High Street. Oxford Union had booked Steve Bannon as guest speaker on the day of the procession and, it being a closed event, the festival organisers were only aware about it the day before. The talk was due to start at 4pm and Steve Bannon was due to leave at 5.30pm well in time for any protests to be completed before the start of the procession at 6.30pm. Council senior managers were in touch with the police and union throughout the day but it became clear by 5.50pm that the protests, which were still ongoing, would not stop in time for the procession and would be frightening for young children to pass. In order to ensure the enjoyment of the young people and their families and protect the Council's reputation, a joint decision was taken by the Police and Council Gold, Silver and Bronze event management to divert the procession and apply for an emergency road closure. The diversion to the High Street was welcomed as it enabled better viewing opportunities than Cornmarket would have done for those people who were already in the city. The parade walked as

slowly as reasonable given the temperatures and age of the children and took more than an hour to complete its route to ensure that those who were stuck in traffic had as much time to join as possible.

4. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Clarkson – Accessibility audit

At the council meeting on October 1, the Leader told me that the Accessibility audit of Council buildings was expected to be completed and available “by November”. Is it?

Response

The access audit has been undertaken and it has been reviewed by the workgroup. The Facilities Management team are now writing a report on this and the next steps which will be available in the New Year.

5. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Clarkson – Wroclaw and Padua twinning

Why has Wroclaw been announced as a full new twin city for Oxford while Padua is only described as a "link"?

Response

A full twin city agreement has been negotiated and signed between Wroclaw and Oxford, but as yet there has only been a memorandum of understanding expressing a desire to reach a twinning agreement signed between Padua [Padova] and Oxford.

Supplementary question

Do we have a date when Padua will become a fully twinned city?

Response

We do not have a date as yet but I will update you once it is confirmed.

6. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Clarkson – Ramallah twinning

Following the Council's vote to support twinning with Ramallah what steps is the Council taking to pursue this?

Response

The Palestinian Ambassador is planning to visit Oxford in December to discuss the next steps with relevant councillors.

Board member for Customer Focused Services

7. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Chapman - Trees

How many 'failed' trees -- dead, vandalised, knocked down by accident -- have been replaced annually by the City Council over the last five years?

Response

We only fell (remove) Council trees that are found to be dead, dying, diseased or causing damage to nearby structures when surveyed. The exception to this is if there is approved Planning consent which includes the removal of Council owned trees.

	No of trees/groups felled per year (calendar year)	No of trees planted per year (calendar year)
2018	89 to 20/11/2018)	105 (To be planted this winter)
2017	145	117
2016	147	217
2015	125	60
2014	73	162
Total	579	661

Not included in the above numbers are hundreds of whips (small saplings) planted across our Parks and Open Spaces in conjunction with Community Groups and Charities. Overall, including these whips we plant more trees than we fell. Within 2018/19 financial year we have a planting budget of £15k.

New trees that fail

In addition to keeping records of newly planted trees, of these we record failures. On average we lose up to 5% of newly planted trees although this year we believe this will double due to the long, hot and dry summer. We do not record numbers planted as when they start to mature we need to thin out these planted areas to allow the stronger trees to survive. Once the remaining whips grow to a size of 75mm diameter we add them to our Tree Management Database and the routine survey.

8. From Councillor Garden to Councillor Chapman – EU citizens employed by the Council

Oxford University will reimburse employees and their families for permanent residence, settled or pre-settled status applications.

1. How many EU nationals are employed by the council and its companies?
2. What steps is the City Council taking to protect the rights and freedoms of this city's council staff?

Response

1. The City Council and Oxford Direct Services employs some 34 EU nationals, based on information supplied by staff during the recruitment process.
2. Following the confirmation of the result of the EU referendum in 2016, the Council issued a briefing to all staff which confirmed its commitment to assist employees who might be impacted, as well as the value it placed on the commitment and professionalism of its diverse workforce. In addition the Council has provided financial assistance to any impacted employee who wished to apply for a document that confirms their right to live in the UK, either as a citizen of a European Economic Area (EEA) country or Switzerland, as well as signposting for staff on where to apply. The cost of this document is £ 65 and by the end of 2017/18 some 8 staff had applied for this financial support. However, no further applications have been received so far in 2018/19.

Supplementary question

As only 8 staff applied for this financial support are you reminding staff of this entitlement?

Response

Yes. I am sure that we are doing so and we will do so again.

Board member for Finance and Asset Management and non-statutory Deputy Leader

9. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Turner – “tar sands” investment

Given that this Council was the first in the UK to formally agree to divest from direct investment in fossil fuel, whilst agreeing to review its indirect investments (July 2014), and that this City has previously declared itself to be ‘tar sands free’ City (June 2013), will the Portfolio Holder write to Barclays, this Council’s bank, adding its voice to those protesting at the bank’s refusal to stop funding pipelines to take oil from Canada’s tar sands to market in the USA and Asia.

Note: Not only is tar sands a particularly energy inefficient and polluting fossil fuel to extract, but the pipelines have been in the news as they went over sovereign tribal lands. After HSBC’s change in policy, Barclays is now the only remaining UK bank funding these projects.

Response

The Council holds current accounts with Barclays who are the Council’s bankers following a tender exercise in 2014. The accounts are used for day to day transactions, however the vast majority of investments are with other counterparties. Recently Barclays have made some green deposit notice accounts available which the Council has taken advantage of and has invested in these in October 2018. In relation to these accounts, Barclays are working in association with Sustainalytics to achieve a positive environmental impact. Their green framework covers the following environmental areas:

- Energy efficiency projects and renewable energy
- Sustainable food agriculture and forestry
- Waste management
- Greenhouse gas emission reduction
- Sustainable water

We are concerned about the reported involvement of Barclays’ involvement with funding pipelines associated with tar sands and I am pleased to confirm that we have written to Barclays expressing our concerns and to request an explanation of the position and their stance on this matter.

10. From Councillor Munkonge to Councillor Turner – Fraud Investigation Service

Could the portfolio holder provide an update on the work of the fraud investigation service?

Response

The Investigation Service continues to go from strength to strength, having delivered some outstanding achievements in the current financial year.

In September, the team hosted its third Annual Fraud Conference at the Town Hall attracting over 200 people to the event. Industry experts presented detail on current and emerging fraud threats facing the public sector and a trade stand exhibition was in place for delegates to engage with.

In October, the team won an award for Excellence in Counter Fraud at the Institute for Revenues, Ratings and Valuations, Annual Performance Awards. This is the third consecutive year that the team have been recognised by the institute with Winner awards in both 2016 and 2017. The team has also just been shortlisted in 2019's LGC Awards for "Team of the Year".

The team has developed and renewed partnership working arrangements with multiple organisations, and now provides the Counter-Fraud response for South and Vale District Councils, Cherwell & South Northants Councils, Warwick District Council and most recently, has formalised arrangements to assist Oxfordshire County Council in tackling fraud.

As in previous years, the team is delivering excellent results and outcomes for the City Council. A recent empty homes review is expected to realise over £400k in government subsidy, 8 social housing properties which were being misused have been brought back into use, £370k of additional revenue for the authority has been realised and £720k of fraud losses have been prevented.

One of the factors behind the success and effectiveness is the team's innovative use of technology. Bespoke data matching software has been used by the team to prevent and detect fraud and irregularity. Officers worked to develop smart data matching algorithms and applied these to effect a proactive risk-based approach in a variety of exercises.

The successful empty homes review exercise, which utilises this technology, has also been used with partner organisations. In September 2017, the service was delivered to Reading Borough Council, the results of which delivered over £600k in government subsidy to the authority. Again in 2018, the data match and review service has been delivered to Slough Borough Council, with a similar outcome expected.

11. From Councillor Garden to Councillor Turner – Shared Prosperity Fund

The recently published report by Professor Philip Alston for the UN mentions that local governments had no or little information about the Shared Prosperity Fund set up by the government to replace EU funding were we to leave the European Union. Research has suggested that leaving the European Union would result in a £8.4 billion UK-wide funding gap for local councils.

- What arrangement has this Council made with the government's Shared Prosperity Fund about replacing this lost income?

- How will the poor and vulnerable members of our community be protected from the impact from this loss of income?

Response

We have been aware of this fund for a while now and have been waiting for the government to publish its formal consultation that is scheduled for some time during 2018. In the meantime the government has confirmed that it will guarantee existing EU funding arrangements until the 31/12/2020 by which time the details for the future prosperity fund will be known. The guaranteed funding arrangement has already been used to extend our ESiF community grants programme until 31/03/2019 and we are currently waiting for the Big Lottery Fund in conjunction with OxLep to provide details about any extension funding available for our project working with entrenched NEETs.

The existing fund has been widely criticised for its bureaucratic nature and the shared prosperity fund has been promised to “be cheap to administer, low in bureaucracy and targeted where it is needed most”. To date a position paper of 8 pages has been published but as mentioned above the promised consultation has not yet been made available.

We anticipate that the shared prosperity fund will be distributed through OxLep and will continue to engage with them through representation and ongoing communication. This will ensure that we are well placed and capable of applying and potentially leveraging any funding available to support vulnerable members of our community in line with our corporate priorities.

We are also working through OxLEP to deliver a Local Industrial Strategy, which might offer a route to prioritising access to such funds. However, to date there has been very little detail on how the fund will work but we continue to monitor the situation on an ongoing basis.

We are keen to ensure funds around skills and social inclusion and wider economic and industrial development are harnessed wherever possible. We will maintain our commitment to minimise the impact on communities that need access to funding for training and employability wherever possible.

Board member for Healthy Oxford

12. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Upton – Five Mile Drive Pavilion

In answer to my question at council on October 1 about progress on the Five Mile Drive pavilion, the Board Member referred to “the 50K originally assigned to this project”. Of course the budget originally publicly committed by the council was the sum allocated in 2013, which was then spent by the council on other facilities around the city, including £1.1m at Headington Quarry, simply ignoring Five Mile Drive even though it was on the council's own list of projects included in the budget allocation. The existing pavilion was subsequently left to quite literally fall down, and Summertown Stars were threatened with expulsion from the league for not providing basic facilities for its young players and visitors. Although renewed progress is very welcome, it has been painfully slow on the part of the council.

Can the Board Member please provide us again with an update?

Can she also confirm the cost to the taxpayer of providing a temporary polling station for the by election on 6 December 2018, costs which, like all such installations over recent years, would have been avoided if the council had honoured its original commitment?

Response

The original budget of £50,000 was added to the capital program in April 2018. This initiated officer time and feasibility work to assess the viability of delivering a solution that would meet the needs of Summertown Stars AFC as one of the key regular users of the site as well as for use by the community as a polling station.

A number of options with differing capital costs were proposed and reviewed both by Summertown Stars AFC and Oxford City Council's electoral services team. As an interim measure and to ensure no impact to Summertown Stars AFC, temporary toilet facilities were installed for the start of the football season in September.

A preferred option of a robust unit that would cost c£82,000 and which would meet those needs of the football club and OCC electoral services team was presented on the 18 October 2018 with the club agreeing to proceed on 29 October 2018. To ensure the viability of the project an additional £20k was found along with a £12k contribution from Summertown Stars AFC. Once this was agreed then the legal agreement needed to be finalised with the club.

Now that we have that agreement, a business case has been submitted for review to the City Council's development board for internal approval in December. Oxford Direct Services have indicated there would be a 12-week period between the order being placed and the new unit being operational.

We continue to provide temporary toilet facilities at Five Mile Drive for use by the football club who have also secured storage facilities at the site. We will continue to involve the football club at every key stage of the projects delivery as well as local members.

The cost of the provision of a temporary building and associated items at Five Mile Drive Recreation Ground for the by-election on 6 December is £3025.

Board member for Housing (Building better homes)

13. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Rowley – deferred City Executive Board (CEB) item

The Agenda for the CEB meeting of 16 October contained an item regarding plans for the award of a contract to construct a number of housing units to be installed on council-owned sites in the city, using an off-site manufacturer. At the meeting the item was withdrawn and deferred, but did not appear at the CEB meeting on 14 November. Could the Board Member provide an update and account for the delay?

Response

The original report was delayed to allow negotiations to conclude on the arrangements for a comprehensive build contract to provide the entirety of the works on all 3 sites as opposed to separate contracts for the structures being constructed in the factory and the ground-works required to prepare the sites for the homes to be installed. We are

also still awaiting a decision on the planning application for the bungalow at Broad Oak which would be more cost-effective to include in the overall work package than to contract separately for a single unit. The report is now scheduled for January on the Forward Plan but could move to February in the light of the need to obtain planning permission. Detailed discussions are continuing with the chosen provider, F1 Modular, to ensure that the homes represent value for money for the Council. This will be the Council's first sites to use off site manufacture and we are making absolutely sure we get it right.

14. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Rowley – Elsfield Hall plans

In July 2014 planning permission was given [ref 13/03454/CT3] for 17 housing units, all "affordable", at Elsfield Hall, 15-17 Elsfield Way, on previously developed land. The applicant was Oxford City Council. Given the urgency of the housing crisis in Oxford, could the Board member explain why this good-sized, available site has not been built? Presumably the permission has now lapsed- will the council be re-applying to develop the site?

Response

The site was not built out to the original permission due to policy changes made by the Government which impacted negatively on the Council's HRA business plan rendering such development schemes undeliverable. The scheme has been revisited by the Council's housing company OCHL which believes a denser scheme of 26 flats is possible and this scheme is due to be submitted to Planning in conjunction with 9 houses at Cumberlege Close to provide 50% affordable housing by the end of this year for a start on site in Spring 2019.

Supplementary question

Would the Councillor agree with me that the Council's development of the site could and should have moved faster?

Response

I agree that it is regrettable that it hasn't been built out already. But I don't agree that the Council could have moved faster. There were three major changes to government policy on housing funding which resulted in delays in the Housing Revenue Fund building projects of which this was one. We are now back on track.

Board member for Planning and Transport

15. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth – Oxford North new jobs

Given the high levels of employment in Oxford and the projected increase in commuting into the City, which will lead to further transport chaos, what evidence is there of the need to create 4,500 new jobs as part of the proposed Oxford North development (as opposed to using the land for housing)?

Response

The evidence establishing the need for both employment space and housing on the Oxford North site was identified and extensively debated, and examined at public enquiry, as part of the Oxford Northern Gateway Area Action Plan. Extensive work on the current Local Plan (2016-36) has produced clear evidence of need for both housing and employment space: the relevant documents can be found on the Council's website as part of the Local Plan evidence base, and have been extensively debated by the Council over the last three years.

16. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth – Oxford North affordable housing

The Oxford North development proposals include 480 residential dwellings. What guarantees are there that there will be a significant number of the genuinely affordable housing this City so desperately needs included in this development?

Response

This is the subject of a live planning application, and so detailed comment would be inappropriate and likely to be prejudicial to the Council's ability to take the decision itself. Like all planning applications, this one will be judged against all the Council's planning policies, including those related to the proportion of affordable housing expected from a site.

17. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth – Oxford North Infrastructure and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

Given the balance of employment and housing planned for the site [Oxford North], does the Portfolio Holder think this project worthy of almost £20m of the Council's Housing Infrastructure and CIL funding?

Response

The report to the CEB explained the careful balance required on this issue, and the importance of the provisional allocation of funds from the Government's Housing Infrastructure Fund and from the CIL generated from the scheme itself. The CEB, of which I am a part, voted unanimously in favour of the proposed provisional allocations, however, this was without prejudice to the consideration of the merits of the planning application in the council's capacity as local planning authority.

18. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth – Oxfordshire Growth Board housing

At the event on 16 October 2018 [18 October?], Oxfordshire Growth Board met with developers and providers of social housing to discuss plans for the County. What is the City Council doing to ensure that any housing built to serve Oxford is genuinely affordable, social housing and makes up a significant portion of any new developments?

Response

The City Council has been and continues to work very closely with our neighbouring district Councils to ensure that housing provided to meet unmet need in Oxford is genuinely affordable. It is of course up to those Councils to set their own policies for the precise percentages of different tenures, but all of Oxfordshire's district councils already require a high percentage of affordable housing from large developments when compared to the national average. The City Council is also working with our neighbouring district councils to obtain appropriate nomination rights from the City Council housing list for social housing for the city's unmet need built outside the city.

Board member for Safer, Greener Oxford

19. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hayes – Zero Emission Zone progress

What progress is being made on plans to make Oxford City Centre a zero emission zone – the first stage of which is meant to be implemented by 2020? What consultations have happened since the initial public consultation, which ended a year ago?

Response

Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council are working together on plans to introduce a zero emission zone in Oxford from 2020. Officers have undertaken considerable work since the public consultation last year to fully understand the impact of the zone and are currently working on proposals which consider the feedback provided. During the last 12 months consultative meetings have been undertaken with directly impacted stakeholders and groups representing impacted stakeholders to help inform proposals. I expect the next steps to be announced in the New Year.

Supplementary question

What is the process for Councillors to get engaged in this?

Response

There will be lots of opportunities for councillors to get involved in the new year. There will be all member briefings for both city and county councillors.

20. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hayes – Zero Emission Zone costs

Could the Board Member provide a figure of costs to the council of studies, admin and other work undertaken in relation to the proposed zero emission zone?

Response

The City Council has spent £14,988 on the Zero Emission Zone feasibility study.

21. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Hayes – Pollution monitoring

Is the Council satisfied that it has adequate monitoring equipment to monitor PM 10 and PM 2.5 particulate pollution in the city and if not what sets will it take to improve the situation.

Response

The City Council monitors PM10 and PM2.5 at two locations in the city centre, one of these sites is part of the Governments Automatic Urban and Rural Network, while the other is fully compliant with government quality assurance processes. The monitoring equipment in the two locations is the only government approved equipment for monitoring of PM10 and PM2.5 and we are therefore confident the equipment is adequate and suitable.

Supplementary question

The answer focuses on the equipment. Does this mean that it is the Council's view that there is no need for monitoring in additional locations?

Response

We focussed on the equipment to make it clear that it is adequate and suitable. We would like to see more monitoring but we don't get government funding support to do that. We continue to lobby government for further funding for this and other pollution issues.

Board member for Supporting Local Communities - None

Deputy Leader of the Council; Board member for Leisure and Tackling Homelessness and Improving the Private Rented Sector

22. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Smith – Severe Weather Emergency Protocol

Is the administration satisfied that the current arrangements for triggering the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol are appropriate?

Is there a case for implementing the protocol each night that the temperature is expected to drop below freezing?

Response

This winter the City Council is using Rough Sleeping Initiative Funds to provide an additional 41 bed spaces, on top of the 167 we already fund. During January, February and March we will also be referring rough sleepers into the Oxford Winter Night Shelter which has expanded from 10 beds to 20 for 2019, this is run by Oxford churches and this administration gives thanks for their huge contribution. Our work concentrates on giving rough sleepers the option to come inside and access support whatever the temperature, but extra efforts are made during SWEP as there are acute health risks for rough sleepers during prolonged periods of extreme weather.

The purpose of SWEP is to ensure that accommodation is available in adverse weather conditions - when required and at short notice – for all those who need it. The arrangements agreed with local homelessness organisations for winter 2018/19 will ensure that this is the case, including for rough sleepers who would not otherwise be eligible for the adult homeless pathway because they have no local connection or no right to claim benefits or housing in the UK, and for people who have not previously engaged with services and come inside.

SWEP will trigger on a forecast by the Met Office of 3 consecutive days at zero degrees Celsius or below, however as in previous years, the Council has discretion to open SWEP in other adverse weather conditions, e.g. snow on the ground, extreme wind chill, and together with our partners, will take a common sense approach on decisions as to whether or not to open / continue SWEP.

SWEP is currently run on a model which relies on homelessness professionals who staff core services in the city working overtime to deliver SWEP provision. This model, using overtime and professionals volunteering, means that continued and extensive periods of opening places considerable pressure on staff and services.

I would like to do more to ensure there is a safe and warm place available for all rough sleepers during periods of cold weather and I have asked council officers to use the discretion available to them to trigger SWEP during freezing conditions this winter if resources are available to do so. We are working on plans for next winter which will aim to provide more continuous night shelter provision throughout the season, and operate SWEP for every single freezing night - because opening and closing beds depending on the weather is never going to be an efficient way to run a service nor the best way to help people.

Officers will be working together with local homelessness organisations to monitor the operation of SWEP this winter, including getting feedback from people on their experiences of using SWEP, and will report as requested to CEB on this.

Leader of the Council, Board Member for Economic Development and Partnerships

23. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Brown – Oxford Living Wage

Noting the longstanding decision to set the Oxford Living Wage at 95% of the London Living Wage; how was the 95% original decided?

What process is in place to ensure that this still accurately reflects differences in cost of living and continues to do so?

Response

The Centre for Research in Social Policy has developed a methodology known as the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) for defining what level of income is needed to reach a minimum socially acceptable standard of living in the UK. The MIS informs the calculation of the Real Living Wage and the London Living Wage (and indirectly the Oxford Living Wage - which was originally set at 95% of the London Living Wage). The MIS is based on case studies and precise analysis with members of the public of what items need to be included in a minimum household budget. The analysis is conducted every second year, with an inflation linked element added for the years in between.

In future years, there may be a need to ascertain whether the 95% setting is still an accurate measure.

24. From Councillor Garden to Councillor Brown – Sustainable Communities Act 2007

On the 1 October, the council agreed to invoke the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 and asked the Leader of the Council to write on its behalf to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to obtain up-to-date information in order to best engage with businesses, institutions and communities, as well as to inform its own actions with respect to protecting Oxford, the Council and Council services from the Government's approach.

- Can a copy the letter be made public?
- Can the Leader inform us of the response from the Government on the matter?
- What action has the Council taken to protect Oxford City, the Council and council services from the Government's approach to Brexit?

Response

Given the uncertainty about the terms of Brexit and the impact on business, even as we approach the date for leaving, there is a limit to what the City Council can do to anticipate the outcomes, however, we have taken a number of actions we considered prudent:

- The City Council Corporate Management Team has recently commissioned and considered a report on potential Brexit impacts to identify any actions that may be required. We have also agreed with the other Oxfordshire councils to share intelligence, analysis and preparation plans.
- Steps have been taken to ensure EU citizens employed by the City Council and ODS have been advised of the Government's Settlement Scheme, which offers a permanent right to remain in the UK.
- The City Council continues to be a leading role in the delivery of the Oxfordshire Housing & Growth Deal. This is a significant Government investment programme that is linked to our strategic position anchoring the Oxford Cambridge Corridor and reflects the opportunity it sees in delivering growth in Oxford and Oxfordshire's knowledge-intensive economy to help offset the impact of Brexit.
- The City Council's Economic Development team continues to work with businesses, the universities and other employers across the city to help ensure the Council can be as responsive as possible to their needs.

A copy of the letter is attached at Appendix 1

Supplementary question

Thank you for making the letters public. Could you do the same for any responses that you receive?

Response

Certainly – any response will be circulated to all councillors when received.

25. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – Growth Board Local Plan processes

As the representative of this council on the Growth Board, could the Leader update us on the possible impact of recent comments by Planning Inspectors on Local Plan processes in Vale of White Horse and Cherwell Districts (particularly those in the Vale, where the Inspector appears to be asking for considerably more work on the proposal for housing at Dalton Barracks) on the already tight timescale for timing and alignment of Local Plans laid down in the Growth Deal?

Response

The Growth Deal requires submission of all the districts' Local Plans by the end of March 2019. West Oxfordshire has an adopted Plan so have met this requirement. Cherwell and Vale of White Horse have also met this requirement as their Plans are at examination currently.

Following a preliminary hearing, the Cherwell inspector has agreed that hearings should continue, and the hearings are expected to resume early next year. The Inspector at the Vale of White Horse examination has requested clarity about the number of houses to be allocated at Dalton Barracks, in order to ensure that any Green Belt release that might be agreed to (he has not confirmed whether he would agree to it in principal or not) is fully justified. The Inspector has given the Vale of White Horse three potential ways to overcome his issues with the current allocation of Dalton Barracks. The options would not be particularly significant in terms of timescales. There are likely to be other major modifications, but this is generally expected following any Local Plan examination. If modifications can be made that would make the Plan sound, then the timeline is no different to what could have been predicted.

Work on the JSSP should not be delayed by these reports. In time for the first statutory round of consultation for the JSSP, draft or adopted versions of the all districts' Plans will be available to inform the JSSP. Joint working between the districts and the JSSP team will ensure work continues to align.

Supplementary question

The Dalton Barracks housing numbers are quite significantly different so that could have an impact on timescales and potentially on the whole JSSP process.

Response

The Leader undertook to provide a written response.

26. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – Growth Board staff recruitment

Again as our representative on the Growth Board, could the Leader update us on the Board's progress in recruiting its own staff to support its work, in particular in instances where duties which will be taken on by new staff currently falls on officers of this council?

Response

In light of the additional responsibilities stemming from the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, the Growth Board agreed earlier this year to create three new sub groups and a Scrutiny Panel made up of councillors from all Oxfordshire authorities to broaden and deepen involvement from elected members in the work of the Board and provide effective oversight of the Deal.

Recognising that these new member structures require additional officer support, the constituent authorities of the Growth Board have agreed to share the costs of an additional post of a dedicated Democratic and Member Services Officer to service the Growth Board, its sub groups and the Scrutiny Panel. A recruitment process for this post is underway and the job is currently being advertised.

This is in addition to the existing post of Growth Board Programme Manager. A Scrutiny Officer to support the Scrutiny Panel will be provided by the authority holding the Chair of the Growth Board (currently South Oxfordshire District Council). This arrangement will be in place from January 2019.

In the meantime, officer support for the Growth Board sub groups and Scrutiny Panel has been divided between the Oxfordshire Authorities. In addition to these additional Growth Board secretariat roles, a number of appointments have been made to a small Deal Delivery Core Team to provide Programme Management, work on the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan and support to the authorities in delivering their commitments under the Deal. These various posts to support the work of the Growth Deal and to release pressure on the constituent authorities are funded by capacity funding provided under the Deal specifically for this purpose.

Supplementary question

Would the Leader join me in thanking the officers of this Council who have undertaken additional work to support the Growth Board sub groups and Scrutiny Panel?

Response

I would certainly agree with you on that point.

27. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Brown – Freedom of the City

Can the Leader update Council on the arrangements for the meeting to confer the Freedom of the City on Benny Wenda.

Response

Preparations are starting for the award ceremony to take place (subject to Council voting to agree on the day) on a date to be agreed with Benny Wenda and the Lord Mayor, probably in March 2019. Detailed preparations will take place in the next month or two once a date is agreed, including identifying available funds for this additional civic event.

This allows the civic office to plan a suitable event in a quieter part of the civic year, and gives the recipient time to make preparation for himself and his guests.

28. From Councillor Garden to Councillor Brown – People's Vote

During the July meeting, the council resolved to support a People's Vote on the final Brexit deal, put forward by Cllr Tidball and Turner. The council agreed to formally add its voice to those calling for a public "People's Vote" on the final deal and agreed to liaise with the official 'People's Vote' groups on ways in which it can help promote the campaign. The council also agreed to write to its MPs expressing the resolution and asking them to support a People's Vote, and the Leader was going to make representations and write to this effect.

Can the council please set out what actions have been taken four months after the motion was adopted?

- When has the action been taken?
- Can a copy of the letter be made public?
- Has the council received a response from our MPs?

Response

Letters from myself have been sent to both MPs setting out the Council's position on a People's Vote, however I must apologise to Council that this has only just been actioned. Copies of the letters are attached and will be published on the City Council website and once we receive responses from the MPs these too will be published.

Copies of the letters are attached at Appendix 2

29. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Brown – People's Vote

Following this Council's decision in July 2018 to back a motion calling for a People's Vote, what (if any) response has been received from our MPs and what has this Council been doing to promote the People's Vote campaign?

Response

City Councillors of all parties were involved in promoting the recent People's Vote march in London and many people from Oxford attended it. Oxford University Students union has also given its backing for a People's Vote.

30. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Brown – Oxford Union and Steve Bannon

Will the Leader join me in unconditionally condemning the alleged Bannon supporters who were photographed and filmed doing 'Nazi salutes' outside of the Oxford Union during a recent visit by the far-right former Trump strategist and urge the police to follow through with their investigations of the incident.

Response

It does the University of Oxford's reputation for diversity and inclusion no good at all to invite speakers from the far right to come and speak in front a privileged few under the dubious guise of 'free speech'. I am unimpressed that our hard pressed police force were taken away from far more important work such as investigating crime in our city.

On behalf of the city council, I am doubly outraged that they chose the night of our Christmas Lights Festival to invite a divisive and unpleasant speaker, causing last minute changes to have to be made for safety reasons to children parading through our city.

Supplementary question

Would you write to the Oxford Union expressing the views set out in your response?

Response

Yes I will.

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