

PUBLIC QUESTIONS FOR CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD - THURSDAY 14 MAY 2015

3. Public Questions (Pages 3 - 10)

When the Chair agrees, the public can ask questions about any item for decision at the meeting for up to 15 minutes. Questions must have been given to the Head of Law and Governance by 9.30am one clear working day before the meeting (email executiveboard@oxford.gov.uk or telephone the person named as staff contact). No supplementary questions or questioning will be permitted. Questions by the public will be taken as read and, when the Chair agrees, be responded to at the meeting.

Public Questions received from:

Jane Alexander (Item 7- Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adult Policy)

Chaka Artwell (Item 7 Safeguarding Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adult Policy)

Nigel Gibson (Item 10 - Approval of Housing Strategy 2015-18)

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Public Questions to the City Executive Board

Item 7: Safeguarding Children Policy

Questions: Jane Alexander

Question 1: I am pleased to see that safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is, or would seem to be important to Oxford City Council. I am concerned, however, that your agenda already congratulates councillors and councillor officers for their work in this and so recently after the Bullfinch trial which some of the perpetrators have now been locked up for their crimes, but for which those who should have helped much sooner still walk free.

I see the first problem as being the fact that those who have suffered such crimes (and other crimes) have not been listened to and are still not being listened to.

How can this or any other authority safeguard anyone when it refuses to listen to those it is paid to listen to?

Safeguarding is a statutory obligation on local authorities and the City Council takes it very seriously. The report relates to the City Council's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures. This makes it clear that, while the City Council has a duty to refer and report concerns relating to children, young people and vulnerable adults to the appropriate authority, it does not have a responsibility for the assessment and treatment of their conditions. We are confident that the City Council has reported and referred concerns relating to children appropriately, and that it continues to do so.

The County Council and Thames Valley Police have put in place a range of new measures and taken the actions that were recommended by the report and serious case review concerning child sexual exploitation. Currently a Stocktake Review is being undertaken by the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Board to assess whether appropriate learning has taken place and whether the actions taken have resulted in real changes to the way that services are provided. The findings of this report will inform future actions by the various bodies concerned, including the City Council.

Question 2: It would seem that this is only a 'review' by Cllr Kennedy and officers, of another 'review'. of a policy you have created in the wake of the horrific abuse you did not address at the time.

No one has actually DONE anything! It's all just words. In what way does any of this actually DO anything at all to safeguard children?

A Section 11 Safeguarding Review is a Self- Assessment Process that is required by the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board to ensure that the Council is meeting its duties in relation to safeguarding. The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board tests the robustness of the self-assessment through a Peer Review Process.

There was a separate review following the Serious Case review report and this report brings together the actions identified from the Section 11 Review and the SCR Review.

Question 3: Only this week at the Barton Park Briefing, councillors accepted that they "have a challenge" to keep children safe from the very busy and 'fast' road as they remove the accident-preventing iron railings between the A40 and Northway estate, which were placed there by a more enlightened council in 1952, specifically to save children's lives.

When a council ignores the people it purports to serve, it is only stacking up trouble for itself for the future, and risking the lives of children and others in the process.

What part of safeguarding children does this fall into please?

The City Council carefully considered transport and safety issues as part of the planning application for the Barton Park development. This included extensive working on the junction designs and safety with Thames Valley Police and the County Council as the highway authority. The maximum road speed on this section of the ring road will be reduced from 70mph to 50mph as part of the scheme. We had hoped to secure a reduction to 40 mph, but this was not supported by partners or the Planning Inspector.

Question 4: You can tell people the same story until you are blue in the face that the new Blackbird Leys pool is 'nearby' but if it is not accessible to travel there affordably and by time and or money then they cannot access a swimming pool. How safe are children from risk of drowning, ignorance of water safety and ill health through lack of exercise, when you close their swimming pools at Temple Cowley and when they are unable to get to one of the other pools?

Children in Oxford's primary schools are provided with swimming lessons and it seems from the evidence provided by the schools that the overwhelming majority acquire the ability to swim; many of course reach very high skill levels. All the public pools in the city are accessible by public transport, cycling and walking.

Question 5: Please can you tell me if this Safeguarding Children Policy also protects children from all kinds of abuse including that by some police authorities against children who use excessive force and weapons including Tasers and in what way would the City Council be prepared to stand up against the police to enforce that?

The City Council will formally ask Thames Valley Police to provide information on the use of Tasers on children in Oxford and we will ask the Oxford Community Safety Partnership to monitor and review their usage on an annual basis.

Public Questions to the City Executive Board

Questions from Chaka Artwell

1. Oxford has gained notoriety for failing to protect working class children from abuse. According to the United Nations, a Taser is classified as an instrument of torture and considering the fact that the human brain continues to develop until the age of twenty one, no tests have been carried out to determine the long-term effect on the brain for a child who has been Tasered. What Policy measures will the Councillors of Oxford City Council implement to protect the children of Oxford, who are at increased risk of being subjected to torture, via the increased deployment by Thames Valley Police of these 50,000 volts Taser weapons?

The City Council will formally ask Thames Valley Police to provide information on the use of Tasers on children in Oxford and we will ask the Oxford Community Safety Partnership to monitor and review their usage on an annual basis.

2. Students at Oxford University and Brookes University have reported a noticeable increase in students having mental health issues, and there is widespread use of Ritalin to treat children starting as young as 9 years; and also, the popularity among our teens of British grown “Skunk” which is also connected with mental health issues needs to be of great concern to us all. Can you please explain how this policy will address mental health issues in children? Is the Council concerned with the numbers of children in our primary and senior schools who are given the powerful psychotropic drug Ritalin? Would Oxford City Council adopt a policy of issuing public information notices specifically warning Parents and Teenagers of the adverse mental health damage and character changes which British grown “skunk” has on the still developing brain of teenagers?

The Report relates to the City Council Safeguarding Policy and Procedures. The City Council has a duty to refer and report concerns relating to children, young people and vulnerable adults it does not have the responsibility for assessment and treatment of mental health conditions.

The City Council supports Oxfordshire County Council Programme of Public Campaigns through our website and networks as appropriate.

3. What is Oxford City Council’s Policy concerning the Community Centres of Oxford City?

The City Council is committed to ensuring that Community Centres have robust management arrangements which ensure that they are able to provide valued services to their communities and meet the needs of local people.

The Community Centre Policy is still being developed and we are in the process of consulting with partners to establish the best methods to realise the full potential of the centres.

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Public Questions to the City Executive Board

Nigel Gibson

Item 10: Approval of the Housing Strategy 2015-18

- 1. The report records 113 new Council homes developed during 2011-2015 – what was the carbon emission cost of building these homes, measured in Tonnes CO2 equivalent?**
- 2. What is the anticipated Carbon emission cost of building the 354 homes predicted under the new strategy?**
- 3. If the carbon emission values are not available, can you please explain why this information is not recorded, particularly in regard to the Council's commitment to a "Cleaner, Greener Oxford"?**
- 4. How does the carbon emission cost of building this number of homes contribute to the Council's commitment to a "Cleaner, Greener Oxford"?**

Answer to Questions 1-4:

The properties are built to at least the Code for Sustainable Homes level 4 which should have an emissions factor at design and post construction phase on Dwellings Emission Rate (DER), this is the estimated CO2 emissions per m2 per year (KgCO2/m2/year) for the dwelling as designed. It accounts for energy used in heating, fixed cooling, hot water and lighting. This is not an assessment of embodied carbon which is what the questioner appears to be asking for. That information is not held and cannot be provided.

The City Council sets a carbon dioxide target around its own estate and operations where it is the bill payer and thus responsible for use. Our approach is set out in our Carbon Management Plan. We have no access to any data in council properties since individual tenants are responsible for bill payment and use of utilities.

- 5. Can you please explain why the housing project currently under development at Barns Road in Cowley, Northway and Marston included the transfer of Council land at no cost to the developers?**

It is incorrect to assert that the sites at Northway and Cowley passed to Green Square for no value. As well as the creation of 75 new affordable and private housing, and the building of new community facilities, and other related benefits (like improved facilities for the Emmaus social enterprise and the funding of a Community Support Officer) the Council is to receive a form of profit share on the receipts actually achieved (subject to certain values being met).

- 6. Is it part of the Council housing policy to make Council land available to developers free of charge, and under what conditions would such a transfer of land be applicable?**

The Council does not make land available to developers free of charge. Where appropriate the Council will contribute land suitable for housing development in exchange for the development of additional affordable homes for rent.

7. Why has the land comprising the Barton West development been transferred through the joint venture at a nominal value of £850,000?

There was an initial payment to the Council of £850,000 on the establishment of the joint venture. The land was valued by an external valuer at the time .

8. Clearly the receipts from developers paying for the land at Barton West will be considerably in excess of the nominal £850,000 value transferred from the council into the joint venture. How will the profits from the land receipts be split between the council and the other party comprising the joint venture, and what value do you expect this to be?

There is a formula which provides for the sharing of profits between the Council and its joint venture partner after costs have been met. The details are commercial and confidential. The terms of the joint venture were independently assessed by external advisers and subject to an independent audit by PWC and assessed as sound and in accordance with best practice.

9. The new central government announced during the election the return of the “right to buy” for council tenants; how will this affect the policy, and what is the council doing to safeguard and retain the council housing stock?

Right to Buy existed before the general election. The Council has kept under review options to mitigate Right to Buy and has made provision for Right to Buy in its financial plans.

10. How long will a tenant need to be resident in one of the 354 new council houses in Barton West before they can invoke their right to buy, and what restrictions will the Council place on any future sale by that tenant?

Presently one a person has been a Council tenant for 5 years, they can exercise the Right to Buy. From 26th May 2015 the Government has reduced this to 3 years. If the property is sold within 10 years from purchase, the Council has to be given the first refusal on the purchase. If sold within 5 years, there is a sliding scale by which the purchaser must repay some of the discount given.

11. Section 1.2.2 of your policy talks about aiming to “unleash a new wave of innovation-led growth”, referring to the Oxford City Deal expanding employment opportunities. How does this increase in employment growth address in any way the current housing shortage, in particular the Northern Gateway initiative where so few homes are planned?

The City Deal provides for employment growth and new homes, and its forecasts for growth are included in the Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment. Northern Gateway is designated as an employment-led development site, and the provision for housing in the scheme has been increased from 200 to 500 homes. The inspector at the recent Northern Gateway Area Action Plan (AAP) found the principles of the AAP sound.

12. The Council managed to subvert the SHMA report, turning an original forecast of downturn in housing demand into a 'need' for some 24,000-31,000 homes by 2031. Since you have a policy of 50% affordable homes, this implies a growth in affordable homes during the period covered by this strategy of approximately 3,000 – how will this strategy achieve this, particularly as you only appear to be forecasting a tenth of that figure (354)?

The Oxfordshire SHMA was prepared by independent consultants and approved by the City, District and County Councils. This shows that the city will require around 30,000 new homes to meet its forecast housing need. A proportion of this need can be found within the city boundary, and this is estimated at around 10,000 homes. The balance will need to be found in the surrounding Districts. The Councils have agreed a process for this under the planning requirement known as the Duty to Co-operate.

13. Section 5.3 of the policy references 151,900 people registered in the 2011 census – how many of those are students, and are student statistics included in consideration of the 43,000 born outside the UK, and ethnic group distribution?

At the 2011 Census, 24% of the city's adult population was a full-time student (30,000 people) - Around one-third of full-time students were born outside the UK so, around 10,000.

14. Section 5.6 – 313 of total applicants on the housing register – how many of these are in bands 1-4, and how many in band 5 (which confers no entitlement to housing)?

There were 193 applicants with this requirement in bands 1-4 and 120 in band 5.

15. Section 6 – how will building homes (of any volume or type, affordable or un-affordable) address the issue of house prices, which will continue to increase regardless of the number built, since there is only so much land space available, and Oxford City is finite?

Increasing the number of homes will provide a greater choice of market and affordable homes for those who wish to live in the city. This is the primary objective. It may contribute to a lower rate of price increase, but there is no suggestion that delivering Oxford's housing need will reduce house prices.

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