

Council



Briefing note and supplementary papers

Date: **Monday 29 January 2024**

Time: **5.00 pm**

Place: **Council Chamber - Oxford Town Hall**

The Council agenda, reports, this briefing note, and any other supplementary papers should be considered together.

This briefing note forms part of the papers to be considered at the Council meeting. It contains additional information; councillors' questions, public addresses; and amendments to motions.

All papers for this meeting can be accessed through the council's website.

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All public papers are available from the calendar link to this meeting once published

Briefing note

Information for councillors and additional papers to be considered.

	Pages
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Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting Report 2024/25	7 - 20
<i>Following the Cabinet meeting of 24 January 2024, amendments made to recommendation 4 are shown below and in the attached report.</i>	
<p>The Head of Financial Services submitted a report to Cabinet on 24 January 2024 which presented the outcome of Oxford City Council's (the Council's) annual rent review and associated rent setting proposal for 2024/25 in respect of all Council dwellings within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), including the setting of associated services and facilities charges.</p>	
<p>The draft Cabinet minutes are available here.</p>	
<p>Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management will present the report and present Cabinet's recommendations.</p>	
<p>Recommendations: Cabinet recommends that Council resolves to:</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Approve an increase of 7.7% for 2024/25 (subject to any subsequent cap on increases imposed by central government) in social dwelling rents from 1st April 2024 giving an average weekly increase of £9.27 per week, and a revised weekly average social rent of £129.72 as set out in the Financial Implications section of this report;2. Approve an increase to rents for shared ownership dwellings as outlined in paragraph 15 of the Financial Implications;3. Approve an increase to service charges by 7.7% (CPI + 1%) to enable the HRA to recover the associated cost of supply;4. Approve an increase to the charge for a garage of 7.7%, equating to an increase of £1.37 per week for a standard garage with a revised charge of £19.22 per week, and an increase of £1.55 per week for a premium garage with a revised charge of £21.71 per week; and5. Approve the option to exercise the Rent Flexibility option in respect of re-lets to new tenants as outlined in paragraph 6 below.	
9	
Questions on Cabinet minutes	

This item has a time limit of 15 minutes.

Councillors may ask the Cabinet Members questions about matters in these minutes:

9b Draft Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting held on 24 January 2024

The draft minutes are available [here](#).

10 Questions on Notice from Members of Council

21 – 46

49 questions on notice.

The questioner may ask one supplementary question of the Cabinet Member who submitted the response, or the Leader in their absence.

11 Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision at this Council meeting

47 – 52

This item will be taken at or shortly after 7.00pm

4 public addresses and 1 question not relating to matters for decision at this meeting.

Up to five minutes is available for each public address and up to three minutes for each question.

A total of 45 minutes is available for both public speaking items. Responses are included within this limit.

13 Motions on notice 29 January 2024

53 - 65

This item has a time limit of 60 minutes.

Minor technical or limited wording amendments may be submitted during the meeting but must be written down and circulated.

Council is asked to consider the following motions:

- a) Stop the Anti-Boycott Bill (proposed by Cllr Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini, seconded by Cllr Chris Jarvis) [Amendment proposed by Cllr Chris Smowton, seconded by Cllr Lawrence Fouweather]
- b) Moving Oxford City Council to a committee system of representation to increase residents' confidence in democracy (proposed by Cllr Amar Latif, seconded by Cllr Shaista Aziz)
- c) The Cost of Living Crisis and local spending in England (proposed by Cllr Ed Turner, seconded by Cllr Nigel Chapman) [Amendment proposed by Cllr Andrew Gant, seconded by Cllr

Katherine Miles]

- d) Scrap the two-child benefit cap (proposed by Cllr Christopher Snowton, seconded by Cllr Katherine Miles)
- e) Disposable Vapes (proposed by Cllr Lucy Pegg, seconded by Cllr Rosie Rawle)

This briefing note is published as a supplement to the agenda and should be considered along with the agenda; reports; and other supplementary papers.

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To: Council
Date: 29 January 2024
Report of: Head of Financial Services
Title of Report: Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting Report 2024/25

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present the outcome of Oxford City Council's (the council's) annual rent review and associated rent setting proposal for 2024/25 in respect of all council dwellings within the Housing Revenue Account, including the setting of associated services and facilities charges
Key decision:	Yes
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing
Policy Framework:	The rent setting forms part of the Budget and Policy Framework document

Recommendation(s): That Council resolves to:	
1.	Approve an increase of 7.7% for 2024/25 (subject to any subsequent cap on increases imposed by central government) in social dwelling rents from 1 st April 2024 giving an average weekly increase of £9.27 per week, and a revised weekly average social rent of £129.72 as set out in the Financial Implications section of this report.
2.	Approve an increase to rents for shared ownership dwellings as outlined in paragraph 15 of the Financial Implications.
3.	Approve an increase to service charges by 7.7% (CPI + 1%) to enable the HRA to recover the associated cost of supply.
4.	Approve an increase to the charge for a garage of 7.7%, equating to an increase of £1.37 per week for a standard garage with a revised charge of £19.22 per week, and an increase of £1.55 per week for a premium garage

with a revised charge of £21.71 per week.

5. Approve the option to exercise the Rent Flexibility option in respect of re-lets to new tenants as outlined in paragraph 6 below.

Appendices to the report:

Appendix 1	Housing Revenue Account Rent by Ward
Appendix 2	Risk and Equalities Assessment

Introduction and background

1. On an annual basis, as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), the HRA sets the Rent for HRA tenants for the next financial year. The rent setting is governed by two national documents – The Rent Standard, and the Rent Policy Statement.
 - a. **The Rent Standard states:** *Registered providers must comply in full with all the requirements and expectations set out in this Rent Standard. They must additionally comply with all the requirements and expectations of the Rent Policy Statement on the setting, increase and decrease of rents and service charges.*
 - b. **The Rent Policy defines:**
 - i. **Weekly Formula Rent** as 70% of the national average rent; multiplied by relative county earnings; multiplied by the bedroom weight; plus 30% of the national average rent; multiplied by relative property value.
 - ii. **Affordable Rent** (inclusive of service charges) must not exceed 80% of gross market rent, where ‘Gross market rent’ means the rent (inclusive of any applicable service charges) for which the accommodation might reasonably be expected to be let in the private rented sector. Property size, location type and service provision must be taken into account when determining what gross market rent a property might achieve if let in the private rented sector.
 - iii. **Rent Flexibility Level** - The government’s policy recognises that registered providers should have some discretion over the rent set for individual properties, to take account of local factors and concerns, in consultation with tenants. As a result, the policy contains flexibility for registered providers to set rents at up to 5% above formula rent (10% for supported housing). If applying this flexibility, providers should ensure that there is a clear rationale for doing so which takes into account local circumstances and affordability.
2. The maximum increase in both types of rent is currently restricted to CPI + 1% (CPI as at September in the preceding year) until 2025 at which point this will be reviewed by the government. The September 2023 CPI rate was 6.7%, giving a maximum increase of 7.7% subject to any additional cap imposed by the government. The government

imposed a 7% cap on rent increases for the 2023/24 rent setting. (Ref. GOV.UK Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing)

3. As well as the restriction on maximum increases, rents are also capped as follows:
 - a. Social Rent – rent caps apply as a maximum ceiling on the formula rent and depend on the size of the property (the number of bedrooms it contains). Where the formula rent would be higher than the rent cap for a particular size of property, the rent cap must be used instead. (Ref. GOV.UK Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing)
 - b. Affordable Rents - The rent for affordable rent housing (inclusive of service charges) must not exceed 80% of gross market rent. 'Gross market rent' means the rent (inclusive of any applicable service charges) for which the accommodation might reasonably be expected to be let in the private rented sector. Property size, location type and service provision must be taken into account when determining what gross market rent a property might achieve if let in the private rented sector. (Ref. GOV.UK Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing)

4. The HRA must adhere to these restrictions and caps on rent increases even if a tenant's rent is below formula rent, or if the HRA has previously applied a lower – or no – annual increase. Where this is the case, the HRA may only move the rent up to formula rent when the property is re-let following vacancy (subject to the rent cap).

5. The table below demonstrates the amount of rental income foregone because of these restrictions, and last year's cap of 7% maximum increase:

	Number of Properties	Total Weekly Rent Foregone	Total Annual Rental Income Foregone
Actual Rent is less than Formula Rent	7,208	£72,856	£3,788,523

One additional consideration is for OCC to join other social housing providers in lobbying government (DLUHC) for the re-introduction of rent-convergence measures to address the gap between actual rents of £48.7m and formula rents of £52.5m. Currently this is an annual loss to the HRA of £3.8m

6. Rent Flexibility

Landlords are permitted under the regulations to set rents at levels above the social formula rents where it has taken local factors, market conditions and affordability into account.

- For general needs accommodation a 5% flexibility is allowable
- For supported housing, such as sheltered schemes a 10% flexibility is allowable.

(Ref. GOV.UK Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing)

Not all our rents are at a level equal to the formula rent for the property. Where a property becomes vacant and is going to be let to a new tenant following refurbishment, the formula rent for the property is proposed to be set at 105% of formula for general needs accommodation and 110% of formula for all supported housing units.

7. Housing Stock

As at 1st April 2023 the HRA held 7,833 dwellings, as shown below:

	Number of bedrooms						Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5+	
Flat / Maisonette	140	1,222	1,732	156	5		3,255
House / Bungalow		275	830	2,791	253	42	4,191
Sheltered	29	271	30				330
Shared ownership		23	31	3			57
Totals	169	1,791	2,623	2,950	258	42	7,833

8. Types of Rent

There are two types of rent charged within the HRA:

- **Social Rent** - Since 2001, rents for properties let at 'social rent' (which constitute a majority of rented social housing properties) have been set based on a formula set by government. This creates a 'formula rent' for each property, which is calculated based on the relative value of the property, relative local income levels, and the size of the property.
- **Affordable Rent** - In 2011, the government introduced 'affordable rent' which permits rents to be set at up to 80% of market rent (inclusive of service charges).

9. A table of the highest rents charged by OCC HRA is shown below:

No. of Bedrooms	2023/24 Highest Weekly Rents	
	Social Rent	Affordable Rent
1 and bedsits	£133.61	£190.85
2	£174.71	£233.91
3	£199.09	£281.98
4	£195.07	
5	£214.65	
6 or more	£189.72	

Formula rent caps for 2023-24

Number of bedrooms	Rent cap
1 and bedsits	£173.79
2	£184.00
3	£194.22
4	£204.43
5	£214.66
6 or more	£224.87

Housing Benefit / Universal Credit Housing Cost Element

10. As at the end of July 2022 there were a total of 3,559 HRA tenants (45.6%) claiming Housing Benefit or the Housing Cost element of Universal Credit, made up of 2,318 Housing Benefit claimants and 1,241 Universal Credit claimants. The amount claimed by each tenant will vary depending on their individual circumstances.

As Social Rents are based on formula rent, the maximum amount housing benefit will cover is 100% of the rent depending on the tenants' eligibility and financial circumstances.

11. For Affordable Rents, the current Local Housing Allowance Rates for Oxford are set out below. These are the maximum eligible rents to be used when calculating Housing Benefit for Affordable Rental Properties. The government recently announced that these would be increased for the year beginning 1st April 2024.

Local Housing Allowance Rates for 2023/24

Number of Bedrooms	£ per week	£ per month
Room in Shared Accommodation	118.87	516.52
1 Bedroom	178.36	775.02
2 Bedrooms	210.00	912.50
3 Bedrooms	253.15	1,100.00
4 Bedrooms	364.77	1,585.01

Financial implications

12. The recent HRA Strategic Review identified that the HRA faced an uncertain financial future within the next 10 years due to the scale of investment required because of the demands placed on it by new legislation and housing standards. As a result, the review recommended that the HRA maximised its income streams where permissible. Implementing the maximum rent increase allowed by government would help the HRA to meet its legal obligations and remain viable going forward.
13. A rent increase that is lower than inflation will have a detrimental impact on the viability of the HRA as the income will not be able to keep pace with rising costs and as a consequence would be at risk of failing its tenants in the supply of services and support.
14. The CPI rate for the 12 months to the end of September 2023 was 6.7%. For comparison purposes the impact on rents is shown in the table below using the recently announced Welsh assembly cap of 6.7%, last year's cap of 7%, and CPI+1% of 7.7% :

Rent Increase	Weekly Increase based on Average Social Rent of £120.45	Weekly Increase based on Maximum Social Rent of £214.65	Weekly Increase based on Average Affordable Rent of £215.07	Weekly Increase based on Maximum Affordable Rent of £281.98	Total Annual Increase to HRA Rental Income
6.7%	£8.07	£14.38	£14.41	£18.89	£3.265m
7.0%	£8.43	£15.02	£15.05	£19.74	£3.411m
7.7%	£9.27	£16.52	£16.56	£21.71	£3.752m

15. Shared ownership rent setting is currently laid out in the lease agreements and reviewed annually in accordance with the greater of :
- i) the Gross Rent under this Lease immediately preceding the Relevant Review Date x 1.005; and
 - (ii) the Gross Rent under this Lease immediately preceding the Relevant Review Date x ((B/A) + 0.01). (Where B & A are the CPI indexes for the review month and 12 months prior respectively)

The rent rise included in the Consultation Budget under these agreements is effectively an increase of 0.5% for properties less than 12 months old of which the council currently has 2 such properties and CPI + 1% (7.7%) for older properties of which the council owns 57 properties.

16. The charge for garages is proposed to be increased by 7.7% from £17.85 to £19.22 per week for a standard garage, and up from £20.16 to £21.71 per week for a premium garage.

17. Service charges such as caretaking, cleaning, CCTV, communal areas etc. will be increased by CPI plus 1% across all tenure types in the HRA to ensure that the HRA recovers the cost of providing these services. Service charges are monitored and reviewed regularly to ensure costs of provision are being recovered and tenants are not being overcharged.
18. The proposed increases and estimates contained within this report are also contained within the report: *Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-26 to 2027-28 and 2024-25 Budget for Consultation* to be presented at Cabinet on 13th December 2023. Due to the requirement to give written notice of increases to tenants - one months' written notice (Social Tenants) and two months' written notice (Shared Ownership Tenants) the need to approve these increases by way of a separate report has arisen. The main budget consultation period runs from the 14th December 2023 to the 31st January 2024, and any responses received relevant to this report by the 17th January 2024 will be included in the version of this report presented to Cabinet and Council.

Budget Consultation

19. The budget consultation concentrates on a number of key areas with 146 responses received as at 12th January. Of the 146 responses, 135 were residents of Oxford, of which 12 were Council Tenants. A summary of the responses is shown below for the main areas:
 - Service Priorities
 - There was strong support for the provision of affordable housing with 66% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing.
 - Capital Investment
 - Highest support (72% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed) for capital investment in new social housing of £352 million which will deliver a return in the future.
 - Energy Efficiency initiatives and Climate Change improvement, funded out of tenants' rents at £33 million – 66% agreed or strongly agreed, with only 16% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.
 - 64% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with £40 million of internal and external capital investment in council dwellings funded from tenant's rent, whilst only 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed.
 - Council Housing
 - Highest support was for targeted estate regeneration (63%) closely followed by investing in the look and feel of our council estates (62%) and improving Energy Efficiency and progressing to zero carbon (57%) with least support given to Building & acquiring new council homes (51%) and maintaining the quality of existing homes (48%) although it should be noted that only 12 respondents were council tenants.

20. Members will be updated at the council budget meeting with any further responses that are received up until the consultation closes on 31st January.

Legal issues

21. The rent setting is governed by two government documents – The Rent Standard (Regulator of Social Housing), and the Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing (GOV.UK).
22. The HRA is a ring-fenced account and is required to finance its activities from the income it generates - predominantly rental income. Failure to maintain a positive balance of the HRA account would lead to the collapse of the HRA at Oxford City Council.

Risk Implications

23. The main risk to the HRA is that the increases are not approved resulting in an unsustainable financial position that would require significant reductions in the provision of services and support to its residents.

Equalities impact

See Appendix 2.

Carbon and Environmental considerations

24. This report is for rent setting purposes, and the proposed budget changes do not affect the council's ability to reach our net zero target.

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Service area or department	Finance
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Background Papers:

- 1 GOV.UK: Policy statement on rents for social housing
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/direction-on-the-rent-standard-from-1-april-2020/policy-statement-on-rents-for-social-housing>
- 2 Regulator of Social Housing: Rent Standard
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1136773/Rent_Standard_April_2023.pdf

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Wards	2023/24		2024/25	
	Actual Rents	Formula Rents	Actual Rents	Formula Rents
Abingdon	134.55	151.18	144.91	162.82
Barton & Sandhills	122.76	132.59	132.21	142.80
Blackbird Leys	117.63	126.15	126.69	135.86
Carfax & Jericho	127.94	149.39	137.79	160.89
Churchill	118.72	126.53	127.86	136.27
Cowley	110.56	117.43	119.07	126.47
Cuttleslowe & Sunnymead	117.03	128.20	126.04	138.07
Didcot	110.80	115.19	119.33	124.06
Donnington	121.58	128.63	130.94	138.53
Headington	121.61	123.12	130.97	132.60
Headington Hill & Northway	118.34	127.55	127.45	137.37
Hinksey Park	119.88	140.85	129.11	151.70
Holywell	116.70	124.20	125.69	133.76
Kidlington	123.41	128.55	132.91	138.45
Littlemore	123.16	116.28	132.64	125.23
Lye Valley	116.97	125.53	125.98	135.20
Marston	125.97	140.55	135.67	151.37
Northfield Brook	116.27	124.92	125.22	134.54
Osney & St Thomas	122.23	135.46	131.64	145.89
Quarry & Risinghurst	117.85	125.42	126.92	135.08
Rose Hill & Iffley	121.88	131.72	131.26	141.86
St Clement's	117.31	125.94	126.34	135.64
St Mary's	121.49	131.00	130.84	141.09
Temple Cowley	122.59	130.33	132.03	140.37
Walton Manor	126.74	146.23	136.50	157.49
Wolvercote	114.35	124.41	123.15	133.99

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Oxford City Council HRA Rent Setting for 2024-25 and for inclusion in the Budget Consultation (Equality Assessment)

The following assessment gives more details from an equality and diversity perspective on the Council’s rent setting proposal. It provides an initial commentary to indicate the potential risks before the wider public consultation period from December 2023 to January 2024.

19

Budget Proposal	Rent setting: Increase in council house rents by 7.7% per annum for 2024/25.
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	From 1 st April 2020 under the 2020 rent standard, the Government have determined that rent will be increased by CPI +1% for a period of 5 years for local authority and housing association social rents. For 2023/24 the relevant CPI rate at September 2023 is 6.7% and hence council house rents under this formula would be estimated to increase by 7.7% from 2023-24 levels. With inflation running at 8.9% the Council would need to make reductions on service should the rent rise not be at least 7.7% which is recommended within this Budget paper.
What are the likely risks?	The increase for 2024-25 at 7.7% represents an average of £9.27 per week. There is a risk of increased rents arrears which could rise as a result of the increase. Issues may arise from the implementation of universal credit which is being monitored by the Council
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	The proposed increases will be published in “Tenants in Touch”, both hard copy and digital editions during the consultation period. Once the charges have been approved by Council, Tenants will be notified in writing giving the statutory one months’ notice (Social Tenants) and two months’ notice (Shared Ownership tenants) before implementation on the 1 st April.
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	The Social Housing Act and enhanced Regulatory Standards has an expectation that landlords will know their tenants as individuals, understand their views, know their protected characteristics, know reasonable adjustments that need to be made and work with an ever-increasing number of vulnerable tenants in our housing stock, delivering high quality, efficient services. As a result, Housing Officers will need to be able to case manage, key work and co-ordinate a range of services to support tenants going forward. Additional staffing has been proposed in response to the new standards and should assist in providing an early warning mechanism of arrears increasing and a resource to help tackle the potential increased rent arrears. As at the end of July 2022 there were a total of 3,559 HRA tenants (45.6%) claiming Housing Benefit or the Housing Cost element of Universal Credit, made up of 2,318 Housing Benefit claimants and 1,241 Universal Credit claimants. The amount claimed by each tenant will vary depending on their individual circumstances.

Overall assessment of the equality risks			
	Race	Disability	Age
	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
	Gender reassignment	Religion or Belief	Sexual Orientation
	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
	Sex	Pregnancy and Maternity	Marriage & Civil Partnership
Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	

To: Council
Date: 29 January 2024
Report of: Head of Law and Governance
Title of Report: Questions on Notice from members of Council and responses from the Cabinet Members and Leader

Introduction

1. Questions submitted by members of Council to the Cabinet 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 Cllr answering the original question.
4. This report will be 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

Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships; Leader of the Council

SB1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Brown – Christmas Tree	
Question	Written Response
<p>What was the total and breakdown of the cost for the city’s Christmas tree this year and what are the requirements in terms of location? Which locations were assessed to determine a suitable alternative location to Broad Street in addition to the Rose Hill location that was finally chosen?</p>	<p>The Christmas Tree forms part of an overall tender which includes the Festive Lighting in the city and the Reindeer too. It is not possible to break it down as a separate cost.</p> <p>The Christmas Tree was sited this year at Rose Hill as it was the only other</p>

	<p>suitable location it could be placed that was a Council asset with level ground and access to the required power supply and connection. The city council explored a number of other city centre locations with the county council but could not get agreement to proceed with any of them.</p>
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SB2 From Cllr Gant to Cllr Brown – Overnight tourist levy	
Question	Written Response
<p>Can the Leader update us on discussions with other councils about efforts to persuade central government to grant cities like Oxford powers to place a small overnight levy on hotel and other accommodation, as has been commonplace in European countries for many years, the revenue to be used for place-making and other improvements to the city, thus enhancing amenity for visitors and residents alike?</p>	<p>Author: Ted Maxwell</p> <p>The Council continues to explore the options for a locally-managed tourist levy. The rationale is similar to what you have said, in that the monies raised would enable the Council and partners to deliver more of the City Centre Action Plan and its projects, all of which will improve the city centre, for residents and visitors alike.</p> <p>The European model, of a blanket “visitor levy” is not possible in Oxford without primary legislation. The Scottish Government is pursuing a bill – the “Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill” – which would make this possible in Scotland, but we are not aware of any similar legislation being pursued by UK Government.</p> <p>Officers have engaged with several councils that are pursuing Accommodation Business Improvement Districts, which may be an appropriate route for Oxford to follow. The Council has also contributed to the “Oxfordshire Destination Management Plan” and its follow-up relating to strategic funding options. One of the report’s recommendations is to monitor the progress in Scotland and to lobby the UK Government for new legislation. We will support those efforts, mindful that 2024 is an election year and so potential changes will realistically only be from 2025 onwards.</p>

SB3 From Cllr Jarvis to Cllr Brown – Closure of courses**Question**

Has the Council Leader written to Alistair Fitt - Vice Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University - as Oxford East MP Annalise Dodds has done, to convey concerns about the closure of courses such as music and maths, given the impact these closures have on the options for students in Oxford and across Oxfordshire?

Written Response**Author:**

I have had a number of conversations with the Vice Chancellor raising concerns on behalf of the people of Oxford and seeking reassurances about the impact on students in Oxford and Oxfordshire.

SB4 From Cllr Jarvis to Cllr Brown – Redundancy at Oxford Brookes University**Question**

Oxford Brookes University has announced that redundancies are on the cards as part of its programme of cuts. What support can Oxford City Council provide to students and staff affected by job cuts at the university?

Written Response**Author:**

As I understand it, current students should not be impacted by these changes as the idea is to continue students in existing programmes but not to recruit new students. We will continue talking to Oxford Brookes to ensure that staff and students are getting any support they need.

SB5 From Cllr Aziz to Cllr Brown – Empty shops in Covered Market**Question**

What is being done to ensure empty shops in the Covered Market are not left empty?

Written Response

Prior to a longer term letting, empty units are either made available for a short-term letting or as an event/promotional space either for new businesses or to support existing tenants' short-term needs- examples last year include unit 46 as an art therapy art show, unit 54-55 for Christmas trees and 115-117 used for window displays.

There are currently 4 empty units, 3 of which are under offer and legal completion is anticipated imminently. The only really vacant unit is being marketed and offers sought in line with the leasing strategy.

SB6 From Cllr Aziz to Cllr Brown – Council support for small business

Question

What is the Council doing to support small business? Six more business in the Covered Market are empty, including some of the longest established.

Written Response

Author: Ted Maxwell

There are only four businesses that are empty currently and three of them are under offer, only one being currently marketed.

The council has limited resources to support businesses, but we are committed to supporting small businesses.

The economic development team's work is guided by Oxford's Economic Strategy and Delivery Plan, which include a range of actions and projects to support small businesses. A recent highlight is the Meanwhile in Oxfordshire programme, a county-wide initiative delivered by Oxford City Council and Makerspace Oxford. Its purpose has been to repurpose empty units for the benefit of start-ups and the independent business sector and so far 100 organisations have been housed and 200 jobs created or supported through the programme since its launch in 2021.

From a City Centre Management perspective, the City Centre Action Plan is the guiding strategy, which acknowledges that it has been a challenging environment for small businesses and seeks to help with this: our monthly city centre newsletter provides a wide range of useful information relating to the city centre; our quarterly "Talk of the Town" meetings rotate around city centre venues and are proving to be an increasingly popular way for small businesses to network and seek help and advice; and our city centre manager is available for one-to-one meetings to identify needs and sign-post further opportunities.

On the Cowley Road, the Council has supported the creation of a new ongoing business-council series of meetings, so that independent businesses in that area

	<p>have a regular chance to discuss issues and opportunities for improvement with the council and other agencies. It is hoped that this dialogue evolves into the businesses formalising their own association or grouping so that they have even more of a voice and ability to work well with the council and we are offering to help with this. We have also offered support to independent businesses on the Botley Road.</p>
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SB7 From Cllr Aziz to Cllr Brown – Diversity representation in Cabinet	
<p>Question</p> <p>From October to November 2023, Oxford City Council has seen the resignation of two cabinet members, both are people of colour who are rooted in Oxford’s communities and has also seen most members of colour resign from the Labour Group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What work is being carried out by the rest of the Cabinet to ensure Oxford’s diverse communities voices and needs are being recognised and represented by the group? • Will the Leader confirm that she is committed to ensuing Oxford City Council has a Cabinet that represents the diversity of the residents of the city - as it did before Oxford Labour lost control of the council? 	<p>Written Response</p> <p>As Cllr Aziz has often said, and I agree with her, it is important that valuing diversity and listening to diverse communities does not fall on the shoulders only of those who themselves come from those communities.</p> <p>We have in place policies in the city council to ensure that we do listen to diverse communities, from the representative nature of our citizen’s panel to the outreach work that our officers do across our communities.</p> <p>In addition, Labour councillors are regularly out on the doorstep listening to and talking with residents across the city.</p> <p>Our cabinet was and is representative of the ruling group’s diversity. I am sure it will continue to be so.</p>

SB8 From Cllr Aziz to Cllr Brown – Leader’s call for action on rising Palestinian civilian casualties	
<p>Question</p> <p>Has the council leader written to the Mayor of Ramallah and other institutions in our twinned city to share her and Oxford residents alarm and horror at the sharp rise in killings and detentions of</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>Author:</p> <p>Yes. I wrote to the Mayor of Ramallah in December.</p>

Palestinian civilians?	
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SB9 From Cllr Aziz to Cllr Brown – Flying the Palestinian flag

Question	Written Response
When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Oxford ended its twinning relationship with the Russian City of Perm, and also flew the flag of Ukraine from the Town Hall. Will the Palestinian flag be flown from the Town Hall once the flag mast is fixed?	<p>Author:</p> <p>We are flying the City of Oxford flag at half-mast again as we did previously. One of our flagpoles is still out of action and likely to be so for quite some time as work is needed to make the access way across the roof safe for staff to access it.</p>

Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management; Deputy Leader of the Council

ET1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Selling gifts to council

Question	Written Response
What document explicitly states that gifts to the city council (e.g. the Morrell Trophy or the personalised car number plate) cannot be sold with the proceeds invested into another asset class?	There is no one single document that sets this out. Rather each item/asset may have its own documentation and the Council would also have to adhere to general rules on best value.

ET2 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Existing and future flooding costs to council

Question	Written Response
<p>What was the financial cost of this month's flooding to the city council and what was the money spent on?</p> <p>How is the council managing this increasing financial risk of loss and damage in the face of increasing severity of extreme weather events and flooding due to climate change?</p>	<p>The costs are still being accumulated but latest estimate is that the total cost will be around £70- £80k spent. Duties included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring flood sites in the run up to the event, including monitoring river levels and physical site inspections. • Manufacture and placement of flood warning signs across the city.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacture and placement of signage to close the towpath in various locations. • Bullstake Close - Erecting the flood barrier, sandbag wall and pumps. 24 hour a day monitoring once set up. • Vicarage Road - Setting up pumps and sandbag wall. 24 hour a day monitoring once set up. • Ferry Hinksey Road - Setting up pumps and sandbag wall. 24 hour a day monitoring once set up. • Delivery of sand and empty bags from depot to Redbridge. • Assisting EA with works on Abingdon Road area. • Extra sweepers deployed to clean areas after flooding. • Call out to Oatlands Rec and Botley Park. • Call out to council houses in Fox Crescent area. • Deployment of temporary toilets to Abingdon Road for tenants. • Assistance with the deployment of pumps <p>We hope and expects costs to be picked up by Government and if that does not happen in a timely fashion we will obviously make appropriate representations. If these were not forthcoming we would need to revert to reserves and balances to fund such costs.</p> <p>Oxford City Council will continue to support the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme (OFAS) as a partner in order to reduce flood risk to the city of Oxford, its resident's businesses and the Council. I would also point to the extensive coverage of this major concern in our new Local Plan.</p>
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ET3 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Business rates delinquency rate**Question**

What is the delinquency rate on business rates owed to Oxford City Council versus collected over the last 12 months?

Written Response

As at 31/12/2023

- 2022/23 collectable debt is £90,072,862.21, we have collected 96.82% so the delinquency rate is 3.18%
- 2023/24 collectable debt is £89,361,210.49, we have collected 81.11% so the delinquency rate at this stage in the year is 18.89%

ET4 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Empty council owned commercial property**Question**

How many of the council's commercial property portfolio is currently empty?

Written Response

Currently there are 18 properties that are vacant in the Council's investment portfolio, excluding the Covered Market.

9 properties – under offer/in legals

4 properties – currently being marketed (none in city centre)

5 properties – requiring conversion works, or due to residential use will be taken to the market in a different way to the wider portfolio.

ET5 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Council owned commercial property portfolio EPC rating**Question**

What is the breakdown of the EPC ratings within the council's commercial property portfolio? (i.e. how many of the properties of the total number have each EPC rating?)

Written Response

Please see response provided in the table shown in Appendix 1

ET6 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Summertown public toilets**Question****Written Response**

<p>What are the opening hours for the public toilets in a) South Parade and b) Diamond Place, and what is the respective cost of operating these public conveniences?</p>	<p>The opening times for both toilet blocks are 08:00 till 17:00</p> <p>Due to the multi-faceted way that the streetscene crews work, it's really difficult to get an exact cost for cleaning 2 individual toilets. However, the best estimate for the 2 blocks would be £32k per annum, this includes labour, vehicle and consumables.</p>
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ET7 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Fee from South Park use for fireworks	
Question	Written Response
<p>What was the fee was paid to the City Council for the use of South Park for the firework display that caused damage to the park in 2023?</p>	<p>£3,150</p>

ET8 From Cllr Pegg to Cllr Turner – Meadow Lane car park	
Question	Written Response
<p>When will there be a public update on the future of the Meadow Lane car park, including a timeline for a decision-making process?</p>	<p>Following a review of all matters raised by the stakeholders, we are working with our consultants Jessop and Cook to submit a planning application on behalf of the Council. The timeline is still to be agreed and an update will be provided to stakeholders in early February.</p>

Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks; Deputy Leader of the Council

CM1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Munkonge – Cycle parking city owned parks	
Question	Written Response
<p>Does the city council follow the national guidance LTN 1/20 for installing cycle infrastructure when installing cycle stands in parks?</p>	<p>We are reviewing local transport note 120 and how we apply it within our parks and open spaces.</p>

CM2 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Munkonge – Use of park contract requirements

Question	Written Response
What restrictions are placed on organisations using South Park (or other city-owned or operated parks) on use of vehicles and heavy machinery on grass surfaces?	There are currently no restrictions on the use of vehicles and heavy machinery on grass surfaces although this is under review.

CM3 From Cllr Snowton to Cllr Munkonge – South Park remediation	
Question	Written Response
Can you confirm whether the council will need to spend any of its own money on restoration of South Park following the damage resulting from the Guy Fawkes Night event? What is the cost of the estimated officer time spent on managing remediation efforts after this damage compared to if no damage would have been caused?	The event organisers are paying for all the rectification costs for South Park following the firework event. At this point, it is unclear what officer time will be needed to manage the remediation efforts as the timescale involved is weather dependent.

CM4 From Cllr Morris to Cllr Munkonge – Allotment sites asbestos contamination	
Question	Written Response
Can the portfolio holder explain what steps the city council is taking to address the threat of asbestos contamination on allotment sites and remove all historic hazardous asbestos material from allotments sites, including in sheds and fencing?	The council is aware of the presence of asbestos in a number of the sheds and other structures on some allotments and has undertaken appropriate management surveys. Asbestos would only present a significant risk if disturbed and any posing a risk has been removed. Removal and disposal of the material would bring a significant budget pressure

CM5 From Cllr Morris to Cllr Munkonge – Grass cuttings collection	
Question	Written Response
Can the portfolio holder reassure residents that grass will be cut and collected towards the end of August and not left in situ to rot down and encourage rank vegetation to grow and block up street drains?	The cutting of the verges is undertaken by ODS on behalf of County Highways. County is unable to fund the additional costs of removal of the grass and green waste disposal which would be significant given the scale of the operation.

	<p>However, Oxford City Council does fund the collection of grass cuttings on across the 8 verges that formed part of its original 'no mow' pilot where this has been found to have increased biodiversity. These verges are on the following roads:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marston Road • Sunderland Avenue • Headley Way (Oxford Road Bypass) / Eastern bypass • The Round way • Bayswater Road • Grenoble Road • Abingdon Road • Abberbury roundabout
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CM6 From Cllr Latif to Cllr Munkonge – New leisure provider 1	
<p>Question</p> <p>Can it be explained to Council why a new provider for leisure services is being announced with just 2 months to go, given the previous provider had a 15-year contract?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>There is a procurement process that needed to be followed in relation to any appointment of a leisure provider. Work started on this around 2 years ago, contracts should be reprocured as close as possible to the end of the previous contract to ensure the bids reflect current market trends and requirements of the Council.</p> <p>This has been a significant piece of cross council work for the authority. The process has been very competitive. There has been significant member engagement which has included regular member briefings, cross party steering groups, leaders and cabinet meetings.</p>

CM7 From Cllr Latif to Cllr Munkonge – New leisure provider 2	
<p>Question</p> <p>What risk to leisure services across the city exist given the new provider has just two months' notice before a changeover of provider?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>Serco has confirmed that they are able to mobilise within this period and have a mobilisation plan in place.</p> <p>In addition, the Council has its own overarching transition plan and risk</p>

	<p>assessment in place. This includes contingency options to support the operator if required.</p> <p>Whilst we expect the transition to go smoothly, insight from local authorities across the country flags that there is always the risk of some minor disruption.</p>
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CM8 From Cllr Latif to Cllr Munkonge – New leisure provider 3	
Question	Written Response
<p>During the covid pandemic many primary school children missed swimming lessons. What immediate measures have been agreed with the new leisure provider to ensure these potentially lifesaving lessons are provided for children who missed out?</p>	<p>Being able to swim is a key life skill and we recognise the impact of the pandemic, this is referenced within our Thriving Communities Strategy as a priority and something that we will continue to monitor.</p> <p>School swimming bookings will transfer over to the new operator and they understand the priority of these. In addition the operator does have a focus with its business plan on providing more after school swimming lessons.</p>

Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities

LU1 From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Upton – Templars Square redevelopment	
Question	Written Response
<p>What steps has the council taken to encourage the redevelopment of Templar’s Square since the new owners of the site took ownership in 2022 and have been consulting on its future?</p>	<p>The potential redevelopment of Templar’s Square shopping centre is an important opportunity. However, it is one that will need careful thought given the important role the centre plays as a local retail and community asset, alongside its relationship with surrounding residential communities.</p> <p>In early 2023, officers established both an internal officer working group and an external working group with the new</p>

LU1 From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Upton – Templars Square redevelopment	
	<p>leaseholders Redevco to explore opportunities. This work has also informed the proposed site allocations policy in the draft Local Plan.</p> <p>Redevco requested a pause in our discussion last year while it undertook further work internally, but late last year signalled it will be ready to reengage again in early 2024.</p> <p>The Council is in the process of commissioning external consultants to provide advice on any future redevelopment options for the centre. Once this is in place a clearer programme will be established with Redevco.</p> <p>A briefing for local ward councillors with Redevco and the City Council is being set up, expected to be in March.</p>

LU2 From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Upton – Gardens being lost	
Question	Written Response
As part of the planning application process for property redevelopment (e.g. extensions and major alterations) can the Cabinet Member ensure that applicants are informed that any reduction of the amount of garden space in favour of hard surfaces must be defined and included?	<p>The Oxford Local Plan 2016-2036 includes policies that set out what is expected from development in terms of sustainable urban drainage (SUDS) techniques.</p> <p>The Council has a National and Local Validation List that sets out what is expected from planning applications, and this specifies that all applications must include details of the SUDS proposals for the scheme. The latter includes how they intend to ensure that rainwater soak away is maintained.</p>

LU3 From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Upton – SUDS	
Question	Written Response

<p>Given the recent extensive flooding in Oxford, can the Cabinet Member work with colleagues to drive an improvement in runoff amelioration relating to property redevelopment (e.g. extensions and major alterations), for example by tightening future requirements that new or replacement hard surfaces must be to the SuDS standard?</p>	<p>There are already measures in place to achieve this.</p> <p>The Oxford Local Plan 2016-2036 already has a policy that requires new development to manage surface water through SUDS systems and techniques to limit run-off and reduce the existing rate of run off from development. This is considered as part of our determination of planning applications.</p> <p>Householders can replace hard surfaces with permeable paving under permitted development rights. Householders wanting to replace hard surfaces exceeding a certain area with non-permeable paving would need to apply for planning permission.</p>
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LU4 From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Upton – Contractor site access damage	
Question	Written Response
<p>Can the Cabinet Member discuss with the County Council how it might, as highways authority, put in place measures through its consideration of planning applications to ensure that where any work is carried out under City Council planning permission, that applicants are made liable for the repair of damage caused to pavements and/or adjacent roads?</p>	<p>Where there will be permanent alternations or improvement works to the highway as part of a planning consent the applicant would be required to enter into a section 278 legal agreement with the County and as such the County would be able to approve and oversee any works and/ or damage.</p> <p>Where this is not the case and there is damage, e.g. erosion of verges or pavements etc. then the County would be the authority most likely to be able to enforce this.</p> <p>In most cases planning applications include conditions seeking construction traffic management plans, which include requirements for condition surveys of roads pre and post construction. The County Council highways team deal with such matters.</p>

LU5 From Cllr Latif to Cllr Upton – ODS overtime costs 1**Question**

The Budget Review Group were recently advised that the overtime costs to ODS had risen from £140,000 per annum to £168,000 per annum over the last year. Has this added cost to ODS, and subsequently the Council, been factored into the modelling around LTNs and the cost-benefit analysis?

Written Response

This is the estimated additional cost incurred by ODS as a result of the LTN's which the Council has agreed to pay. I am not aware of whether these costs have been factored into the cost-benefit analysis of the LTN's which would be a matter for the County Council

LU6 From Cllr Latif to Cllr Upton – ODS overtimes costs 2**Question**

Has the figure of £168,000 been shared with residents across Oxford to allow them to consider the full impact of LTNs on the City, and potential impact on Council services?

Written Response**Author: Nigel Kennedy**

The figure has been calculated by ODS as an estimate of the additional cost of them carrying out their services for the Council. It is referred to in the Council's published budget papers which are currently out to public consultation.

Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services**NC1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Chapman – Data systems****Question**

What data system does the council use to aggregate and track all incoming complaints from residents to the council and direct them for resolution by the appropriate team (e.g. related to litter, fly tipping, noise nuisance, business regulation, environmental health etc.)

Written Response

The Council currently uses Aareon QL to manage all Housing related complaints and will expand this to the rest of the council from 1st April 2024. Complaints are captured by using a form which is directed to the appropriate service for investigation. Prompts are made by the system when the actual response times are outside of those expected. The system provides management information including the analysis of

	trends to identify future improvements
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NC2 From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Chapman – Housing Management System

Question	Written Response
<p>Given the revelations regarding deficiencies in the Post Office Horizon System and the supplier Fujitsu, can the Cabinet Member assure the Council that the system has been properly and independently audited in its use for financial transactions? Can he also confirm that the supplier has robust procedures in place to ensure that the Council is informed promptly of any and all software faults which could adversely affect its use of the system?</p>	<p>There are controls in place to ensure the accuracy of data entered into the system by staff and this is supported by regular reconciliation of data being fed in via interfaces from other systems. With all systems, errors do from time to time occur, but these issues are raised in a timely manner and the project team work on these to fix, thereby ensuring that the accuracy of the output is maintained. When problems occur, which are more in respect of systems design, these are reported to the supplier by any one of its customers and are subsequently fixed in future systems updates and patches. System controls are from time to time subject to internal audit scrutiny with any recommendations on changes being reported back to management and Audit and Governance Committee for action. Whilst errors can never be entirely eradicated, the mitigations and controls that are in place should be sufficient to ensure that these are kept to a minimum.</p>

NC3 From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Chapman – ODS work on floods

Question	Written Response
<p>Does the portfolio holder agree that ODS did an excellent job in minimising the impact of the recent floods for both residents and businesses?</p>	<p>Yes, I do. The ODS Flood teams did an amazing job during Storm Henk working around the clock to protect businesses and properties. As a result of working over the weekend and through the night, only four domestic properties in Oxford suffered flood damage. Whilst I feel for any person affected by flooding, given the risks, this is a very good result.</p> <p>There was excellent co-operation with the Council and the Environment Agency. There are always lessons to learn to be even better next time and a</p>

	<p>review of how we responded is being undertaken.</p> <p>But I am very proud of the response – a practical example of ODS “Doing Good” in action and of public service at its best.</p>
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NC4 From Cllr Pegg to Cllr Chapman – Driving to household waste recycling centre

<p>Question</p> <p>Following the removal of bring banks, how can residents recycle textile waste if they are not able to drive or cycle to a household waste recycling centre?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>ODS is in discussions with charities that operate seasonal/temporary bring banks for textile collection – and it is expected these arrangements will continue.</p> <p>More generally, residents wanting to dispose of good quality and usable textiles are advised to consider the following options:</p> <p>Charity shops (most charity shops are happy to take a range of textiles and household items, as long as they’re clean and in good condition)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online second hand vendors, i.e. Shpock, Vinted, Depop, ebay • Oxford Freegle – the local online secondhand marketplace <p>For other textiles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of retailers take back items within store (e.g. H&M and Dunelm) • Charity shops such as the British Heart Foundation, Helen and Douglas, Age UK and OXFAM accept rags (unusable textiles) except bedding and curtains. But please double check by calling your local store before visiting them. <p>As a very last resort, textiles can be disposed of in your green refuse bins.</p>
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NC5 From Cllr Rehman to Cllr Chapman – ODS maintenance efficiencies

Question	Written Response
<p>When ODS are called out to a property for maintenance. What percentage do they have to return to within 4 weeks to carry out further works? Once called out do operatives carry out an inspection of the property? If not, would it be more efficient to do so, and any works required booked into routine works.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 1st Jan 23 – 31st Dec 23 there were 29,523 responsive repair & heating breakdown orders raised. • Of these 23,840 were raised at first point of contact by OCC Contact Centre • On attendance the ODS operative will identify if any further works are required and will also ask the tenant if there are any further repairs they want to report. If further works are required, we raise the order through our mobile working IT solution and agree an appointment with the tenant before leaving the property - last year ODS raised 5,683 additional work orders. • Properties are not routinely inspected as part of the repairs appointment, but additional works are identified and appointed as detailed above. • However, as part of the ODS Damp and Mould strategy, our operatives have been trained to identify if there are any mould and damp issues in the property. This is also part of the script in our mobile working IT solution. If damp and mould is identified an electronic survey report is produced and sent directly to OCC. Last year we completed damp surveys to 855 properties where mould or damp had been identified. These are then reviewed by OCC who decide what action is required. • Orders raised by the OCC Contact Centre within 1 month of a previous order was 2,410 orders = 8.16%. These orders primarily relate to heating, plumbing and electrical repairs, which were not known at the point of the previous repair order visit.

JH1 From Cllr Rehman to Cllr Hunt – South Park damage

Question

The damage to South Park caused by the firework display in November. When will the park be repaired and what is the estimated cost?

Written Response

The park will be repaired when the ground is firm enough. Given the scale of the damage, attempting to undertake the work while the ground is still waterlogged will make the situation worse and cause further compaction of the soil. The cost for rectification is currently being assessed together with the event organiser.

JH2 From Cllr Rehman to Cllr Hunt – Cowley Road Carnival

Question

Can we have an update on the Cowley Road Carnival. After last year's late cancellation, it was promised the City would engage earlier and work more closely with organisers to ensure we have a carnival this year.

Written Response

Council officers have been in regular contact with Cowley Road Carnival throughout the last year. The Carnival Committee have submitted a funding application to the Arts Council and expect to know the outcome in April 2024. Officers have supported the committee with grants advice and encouraged them to apply to the council's Oxford Community Impact Fund as well as other external funders. The council is also encouraging the Carnival Committee to contact local businesses

Cabinet Member for Housing

LS1 From Cllr Goddard to Cllr Smith – Rented housing inspection

Question

What is the role of Metastreet in the City Council's rented housing inspection programme?

Written Response

Metastreet is the software system used to process applications and to record property inspections undertaken as part of the selective licensing scheme.

LS2 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Smith – Rats in rented accommodation

Question

What is the average time taken for complaint resolution when rubbish dumped in the gardens of HMO or rented properties are the source of local rat infestation?

Written Response

In the last 3 years there have been 149 complaints concerning rubbish from privately rented HMOs. On average service requests are open for 3 months for such types of complaint.

LS3 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Smith – Green Square Accord - maintenance issue

Question

How many complaints has the council received regarding Green Square Accord properties over the last 12 months, and on which broad categories of topics (e.g. mould/leaking roof)?

Written Response

Regulatory Services have received 6 complaints regarding GreenSquareAccord properties in the last 12 month and they have been about:

- Damp and Mould (2 properties)
- Pests (2 Properties)
- Disrepair
- Overcrowding

LS4 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Smith – Green Square Accord - communications quality

Question

How many times has Green Square Accord met with Council officers and/or councillors to resolve maintenance

Written Response

Officers from regulatory Services have met GreenSquareAccord 6 times in relation to 3 properties concerning

<p>issues of their properties within the city over the last 12 months?</p>	<p>maintenance issues, in relation to the 3 other properties where complaints were received, the issues were resolved without the need to meet GreenSquareAccord.</p>
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<p>LS5 From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Smith – Brownfield development grant application</p>	
<p>Question</p> <p>The DLUHC has announced further funding (£80 million) for converting Council owned brownfield land so that it can be used for housing. Is the City Council bidding for a share of this funding for any projects and if so where?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>Author: Dave Scholes</p> <p>The Council successfully bid in the previous round for BLR funding for 5 small sites, and these are being progressed into delivery – with a report to Cabinet on 24th January 2024. The Council has a project to consider approx 200 small garage and back-land sites that might be suitable for housing, but often have many constraints and delivery challenges. It is proposed to review the resourcing required to bring forward further sites, after this initial ‘pilot’ phase moves into delivery, and to only apply for further funding after further decisions on this.</p>

<p>LS6 From Cllr Rawle to Cllr Smith – Landlord registry</p>	
<p>Question</p> <p>Can the portfolio holder explain why the rogue landlord registry is not made public?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>Housing and Planning Act 2016 does not permit the Rogue Landlord Database to be in the public domain. In 2022, the government announced, following a consultation into widening the access to the database that they would “introduce a Property Portal to make sure tenants, landlord and local councils to have the information they need”, there are no details as to when this will be introduced.</p>

LS7 From Cllr Rawle to Cllr Smith – Discrepancy in selective licence registration

Question

At present, fewer than 7,000 properties are registered with either a selective licence or an HMO licence. According to the City Council's estimates prior to the selective licence scheme being introduced, there were 30,000 privately let properties in Oxford. Can the portfolio holder explain the discrepancy between these two figures and why many landlords appear not to be registered?

Written Response

The estimated 30,000 privately rented properties includes properties which are exempt from licensing under the Housing Act, due to ownership/ management eg college owned student accommodation, we estimated 12,000 exemptions. Currently we have received 11,451 selective licence applications covering 12,796 properties/units. (due to block licences covering a number of flats) Within the HMO stock we have 3630 HMOs currently either licensed or in the process of being licensed.

The remaining equates to 5% of the estimated number that are not licensed, however work to find unlicensed properties continues.

Please note, the Housing Act 2004 and associated regulations require licences to be placed on the register only once the licence has been granted.

LS8 From Cllr Rawle to Cllr Smith – Unregistered landlords

Question

Can the portfolio holder explain what steps are being taken to catch unregistered landlords and what the City Council would advise residents whose landlords are unregistered to do?

Written Response

Work to identify unlicensed properties is on-going. We have received 285 reports of unlicensed properties in the last 12 months. All such reports are investigated and where appropriate formal action will be taken for properties operating without a licence. Proactive work is recommencing in the near future following training of officers in this area. Residents can report concerns about unlicensed properties via the website. Occupiers of unlicensed properties can also apply for a rent repayment order to reclaim rent paid from the landlord, whilst

	the property was unlicensed, details of this are on the website.
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LS9 From Cllr Rawle to Cllr Smith – Section 21 notices

Question	Written Response
Can unlicensed landlords issue section 21 notices to tenants?	A section 21 notice to evict a tenant cannot be served where a valid licence application has not been made or a property licence has not been issued.

LS10 From Cllr Djafari-Marbini to Cllr Smith – Kestrel Crescent garages

Question	Written Response
It is very positive that innovative community led housing developments will be led at the Balfour Road and Pegasus Road site via the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust especially considering the very high cost of and need for housing. Officers inform us that there is also a review under way of all such small sites. There is a similar site at Kestrel Crescent. This is a derelict and mostly unoccupied or abandoned garages (around 15-20). Quite a few are boarded up and have graffiti on etc and residents have been enquiring the possibility of the use of this space for much needed car parking spaces. What are the plans for this site?	<p>Author: Dave Scholes</p> <p>As referenced with regard to the question above (LS5), a small sites project is underway to assess approx 200 sites, many of which are very under-used. This project proposes to test the viability of each site for housing, but where that is deemed unviable, then alternative uses will be explored to try and bring these spaces into more worthwhile use again. That could include EV charging, and other possible uses, all of which can be explored on a site by site basis.</p>

LS11 From Cllr Rehman to Cllr Smith – Community centres

Question	Written Response
Given the investment made in community centres and Blackbird Leys and East Oxford currently not available to residents. Why are resources available not being utilised and operated to fully to fill some of the voids the closures have caused. Asian Cultural centre operating on limited hours with no elections for over 5 years. Littlemore Community	Staff resources from the temporarily closed community centre's at East Oxford and Blackbird Leys have been reallocated to cover vacancies at Rose Hill Community Centre and to also support the work to redevelop those sites.

<p>Centre not producing accounts for 5 plus years. As Landlords what are we doing to ensure that centres are operating to the terms of very favourable lease agreements and ensuring residents are receiving value for money and social benefits?</p>	<p>Discussions with the Asian Cultural centre have been taking place over the past couple of months to support the association in increasing its usage. More recently this month the senior officer team have included the facility within the East Oxford locality walk around.</p> <p>We meet with all of the Community Centre Associations on a monthly basis, to understand any issues, how the centres are performing and to look at opportunities to work better together. We will look to work with Community Associations where issues arise and have written to Littlemore Community Association regarding their accounts.</p>
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Appendix 1

EPC Band	Number of commercial let Properties with EPC in band	
A	0	
B	8	
C	41	
D	67	
E	56	
F	1	<i>This is a listed building</i>
G	5	<i>Out of the 5 - 2 are MEES exempt and 3 are awaiting revised EPCs following works.</i>

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To: Council

Date: 29 January 2024

Report of: Head of Law and Governance

Title of Report: Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision – as submitted by the speakers and with written responses from Cabinet Members

Introduction

1. Addresses made by members of the public to the Council, and questions put to the Cabinet members or Leader, registered by the deadline in the Constitution, are below. Any written responses available are also below.
2. The text reproduces that sent in the speakers and represents the views of the speakers. This is not to be taken as statements by or on behalf of the Council
3. This report will be republished after the Council meeting as part of the minutes pack. This will list the full text of speeches delivered as submitted, summaries of speeches delivered which differ significantly from those submitted, and any further responses.

Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda

1. Address from Isabel Tucker – Operation of Gloucester Green Market
2. Address from Cat Hobbs – Oxford's Leisure Contract to Serco
3. Address from Diana Volpe – Oxford's Leisure Contract to Serco
4. Address from Maryam Firdous Ahmed – Anti-BDS Bill
5. Question from Chaka Artwell – Female Sanitary Products

Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda

1. Address from Isabel Tucker – Operation of Gloucester Green Market

As you'll no doubt be aware, Oxford's historic charter market, now operating at Gloucester Green, used to be run by Oxford City Council. Since 2013, the operation of this market has been outsourced to a company called LSD Promotions, and in March 2023 Oxford City Council decided to renew their contract, following a re-tendering process. The new contract between LSD and Oxford City Council has not yet been finalised, and I am here today to urge you not to sign it. This market has declined markedly since it was operated by LSD. They shouldn't be allowed to run our market any longer.

Why do I say this? It's because the market has become dominated by street food. LSD introduced a street food row at the bus station end of the market some years ago. It's a welcome innovation and is very popular, but it's expanded and is encroaching on the rest of the market, now taking up space in another row, and leaving less than two rows for other stalls. The tables and chairs needed for the street food also take up a lot of space, so the layout is more spacious, and the number of stalls in the rest of the market has gone down significantly. The street food is clearly the most profitable part of the market, but the rest of the market should not be being neglected in this way.

The market operates on four days a week: Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. The Saturday market, a general market, isn't so much of a concern, but on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, the non-street-food area is much depleted. Wednesdays were the day on which local people might do their shopping because fresh food and household goods were sold then. However, we've lost a huge number of these stalls.¹ Some of the space is filled up with jewellery stalls. One Wednesday, I counted eight of them, even though jewellery isn't part of the normal Wednesday offering. The situation is similar on Thursdays and Fridays.

Why has a vibrant and popular market with lots of potential declined so badly? One reason is that the fees have gone up considerably since LSD took over. A basic stall on a Wednesday costs a minimum of £38, excluding electricity and waste disposal. Compare this to the cost of a stall at Witney or Chipping Norton: stalls at both those markets, which are run by the District Council, cost £22 a day. One of the Thursday traders recently told me that LSD had told them they were going to raise the stall fee to £60 a day. When she protested, they said they might limit it to £50. One trader who comes on a Wednesday pays £55 for his space at Gloucester Green, but £10 at a market in Wiltshire.

It looks very much as if LSD won't run the market in the way the council intends. Through a Freedom of Information request (FOI 2023 000493), I got a redacted copy of the council's draft re-tender specification, their statement of requirements, and LSD's tender. Obviously, the council wants this market to contribute to its strategy and objectives, most relevantly, thriving communities and an inclusive economy. The draft specification and the statement of requirements make it clear that the council wanted the market days to be properly themed and differentiated, but, as I said before, there's little sign of that at the moment, with jewellery stalls proliferating on all days and taking up space that could be used by stalls that tie in with the theme of that day. The council also stated that they wanted proper consultation with local residents, but again, there seems to be little of that at the moment, and I am not aware of any having happened over the last ten years.

There's quite a gulf between what LSD claims it will do and what it is doing at Gloucester Green at the moment. In its response to the statement of requirements, it says, in Case Study 1 on page 14, that there is a 'huge range of fresh food and products with inspirational recipe ideas', when in fact there are only a small number of stalls selling fresh food, and the range is narrow. There are no recipe ideas on offer. They cite 'a fabulous selection of stalls offering a huge variety', when there is a preponderance of jewellery stalls and not much variety. The 'fashion fare' they mention seems to consist of some T-shirts, one or two stalls selling second-hand clothes and the occasional appearance of a couple of stalls selling Indian-style clothing.

¹ Among those that are gone are a fruit and vegetable stall, a stall selling fresh bread and cakes (of the cheaper variety), and a stall selling cheese, eggs, cold meat and pies. There were also stalls selling fresh meat, luggage, underwear and nightwear, picture frames, pet food and accessories, and indoor and outdoor plants, but they've all gone as well now, and there are always several empty stalls.

They don't explain what they mean by 'urban mix style', and anyway, this seems to be in conflict with the council's desire to have the weekday markets properly themed.

In their answer to Question 7 (on p. 17), LSD says that they 'welcome sellers with fresh, organic fruit and vegetables', whereas in practice they discontinued the farmers' market that used to operate at Gloucester Green and made it impossible for traders selling organic produce to continue. They also intend (apparently) to welcome sellers of 'the finest essentials' and 'wholesome specialist food and drink products'. There is currently one stall on a Wednesday that sells expensive pâté, cheese and wine, but little else in this regard.

Gloucester Green Market is a key amenity and should be used to help generate wealth locally and keep it in the community. A stall at this is one of the more affordable trading spaces in a city with high commercial rents. Hiring out these stalls at a reasonable price would be a way of helping local businesses (not just street food and jewellery businesses) to trade. A lot of shops have closed at the northern end of the city centre, and Gloucester Green could play an important role in enabling people to buy items they would have bought in Boswells or Debenhams, for example, and might otherwise buy online. Excessive online shopping drains a city of its wealth, life and variety, but a good local market can help revive it. We should enable Gloucester Green to fulfil its potential for generating wealth locally and preventing it from 'trickling up'. Oxford is fast becoming a 'clone town', and Gloucester Green market could help us buck this trend.

I have consulted quite widely with other local residents at community events and through social media and civil society organisations, and a great many of them miss the old market and object to seeing our market run down by a private contractor. Here, for example, is one response:

"I was glad to pick up your leaflet at the Green Fair on Saturday. Yes, Gloucester Green Market has definitely lost most of its useful stalls, over recent years, just as Oxford has lost most of its independent shops. With Council business rates so unaffordable, I would hope that our local markets can fill the gap.

Not long ago, I remember that the Wednesday GG market sold a much greater variety of fresh food: ingredients, not just street-food 'ready-meals'. Lee's Cheese, for example, is much missed, and I know several people who no longer bother to go to the market, now he is no longer there selling affordable and varied cheeses both British and European. There used to be stalls selling spices, jams and pickles... and several bakers with good bread. A butcher's van, too - and game in season. I would definitely like stalls like these to come back.

Non-food stalls used to sell luggage and handbags (my favourite backpack came from there!) and affordable clothes, including lovely cotton items from India and Vietnam. In the spring and summer, there were gardening and plant stalls, sometimes."

The council needs to consider other ways of running this market. It could be run by a social enterprise, for example. Councils up and down the country are finding good ways to run their markets, and Oxford City Council could perhaps learn from them. Above all, it's important to ask, why, if this market is profitable for LSD, it couldn't be profitable for the council itself. If the council ran it, any profit made could be invested back into the market or into other council services. It would surely have long-term benefits for our community too, supporting small businesses and enabling new enterprises to get off the ground.

I urge the council not to sign this contract and to reconsider the decision to outsource the operation of this market to LSD. There are other options, and the people of Oxford deserve a better market than this

2. Address from Cat Hobbs – Oxford's Leisure Contract to Serco

I was truly appalled to find out that Oxford City Council, which has been such a leader in insourcing and direct running of council services, is planning to hand over its leisure contract to Serco. I grew up in Oxford and have spent most of my life here - I love Hinksey Pool and the ice rink and have regularly used the other leisure facilities too.

I work at the Old Music Hall on Cowley Road at We Own It which campaigns for public services that work for people not profit. I have been aware of Serco's unbelievably bad track record for over a decade now.

I would like to highlight five examples of the company having contracts ended early or earlier than expected - because it didn't provide the value for money, control and flexibility or service quality that the public sector needed.

2013: Serco had a contract to run the out of hours GP service in Cornwall. It left surgeries short of doctors and then falsified data 252 times. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/jul/11/serco-gp-out-of-hours-substandard>

2015: Thurrock Council in Essex ended Serco's back office services contract 5 years early because it wasn't providing value for money. The council had to pay £10 million to exit the contract early but said it would save £4 million a year as a result. The council leader said he wanted profits to go towards services for local people, not Serco's shareholders. <https://www.thurrockgazette.co.uk/news/13495275.council-leader-speaks-out-after-20m-serco-contract-is-terminated/>

2019: Serco's contract with the Scottish government to provide asylum accommodation came to an end and was not renewed. Serco treated the people relying on its service - including parents, pregnant women and children - with a lack of dignity. <https://www.scottishhousingnews.com/articles/serco-loses-government-s-asylum-accommodation-contract-in-scotland>

2022: Serco's contract to run the Caledonian Sleeper railway service was ended 7 years early. Serco tried to renegotiate the contract. The Transport Minister in Scotland said it did not represent 'value for money to the public'. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/02/caledonian-sleeper-rail-service-to-be-nationalised-by-scottish-ministers>

2024: Peterborough City Council has just announced it will end its contract with Serco 7 years early to save money and provide 'best value for residents'. The council had to pay an undisclosed sum but said the savings would outweigh this cost. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-67962092>

I really do understand that these are incredibly difficult times for councils with the ongoing, deeply damaging policy of underfunding and austerity from national government. I know you have difficult decisions to make but this is not the way forward.

Serco, as a multinational company with teams of lawyers, is well placed to benefit from contracts with the public sector. Whatever sweeteners it may offer now, it may be viewing this contract as a loss leader from which it will ultimately benefit financially, as we have seen in the examples above.

I implore you to think again so that Oxford's vitally important swimming pools, leisure facilities and ice rink can provide the high quality service we expect, the control the council needs and the value for money that we all deserve in our wonderful city.

3. Address from Diana Volpe – Oxford's Leisure Contract to Serco

Given that

1. Serco Leisure is a part of the Serco Group PLC, and is therefore functionally indistinguishable and an integral part of Serco;
2. Serco has a reputation as a leading name in running immigration detention centres for profit, a motive that inevitably seeks to drive down costs to the detriment of those subject to immigration control, and earning a terrible track record in doing so. These include, but are not limited to: cases of accommodation filled with [rats, cockroaches, and sinks filled with sewage](#); allegations of abuse by Serco staff at Yarl's Wood culminating in [a highly critical report](#) by the HM Inspectorate of Prisons in 2015; systematic denial of abuse and degrading treatment even in the face of over 100 migrant women [going on hunger strike in protest of their conditions](#) in 2018;
3. Oxford's repeatedly asserted its aspiration to be a city of sanctuary;
4. The public feels strongly about this decision, as evidenced by the pushback and the petition arising from the news of this bid;
5. That this bid includes plans to convert much sought-after hall space in Blackbird Leys in ways that may take away important community spaces from local sports clubs that are dedicated and inclusive to women and nonbinary people, as well as other marginalised populations;

I ask: Were ethical considerations taken into account as part of the decision making process? Do you not see a fundamental contradiction between SERCO's well-documented abuse of asylum seekers and refugees, and Oxford's aspiration to be a Local Authority of Sanctuary?

By proceeding with this, you are essentially sending a message to our community that it is acceptable to take money funding for public infrastructure through the exploitation of migrants, all while claiming to be a place of refuge for them.

4. Address from Maryam Firdous Ahmed – Anti-BDS Bill

I am speaking here today to emphasise the draconian "anti-boycott bill." This bill outlines the stopping of "businesses and organisations including those affiliated with Israel-being targeted through ongoing boycotts by public bodies." I and many members of the public feel this is a flagrant disregard for the democratically institutional rights that this country emphasises.

I am sure everyone here is aware of the U.K government's role in the South African anti-apartheid movement that gathered pace in the 1960s. Which gained the support of the United Nations General Assembly with a call for economic measures including the boycott of South Africa goods. By 1985 a total of 121 local authorities adopted a statement in some respect to South Africa. Whilst the U.K government continued to resist. When Nelson Mandela addressed the U.K parliament in 1966, his most fulsome thanks was not for the 'wisdom' of the U.K government that opposed the boycott divestment and sanctions movement. Instead it was millions of Britons who through the years and like others elsewhere in the world stood up to no to apartheid." I see history infolding in front in a cruel way, with Britain once again being on the wrong side. There are clear lessons to be learnt from the BDS movement in South Africa which seem to elude us. I ask that in the same vein that Oxford City Council path the way for leading historical change. I ask that that this council be the pioneer for change so history books and the people of Palestine can look towards Oxford as beacon of hope. To channel the notions and ideas that are taught within the University, to place those within reality. I see no hope if we do not internalise these learnings and move forward to not repeat the mistakes of the past.

History books do not long fondly on Britain and its legacy of empire. It is pure hypocrisy to champion democracy, free speech whilst in the same breath opposing the very means by which citizens can exercise this right. As a young person I feel the government increasingly despotic actions as isolating a new generation of enfranchised youth who are aware of the hypocrisy, corruption in state institutions. I ask you to remember that a large cohort of young people will make up the cohort of the voters, newly enfranchised youth who are tired and want change. I ask each of you if you truly believe in liberty and democracy, and you hold these values true to oppose the anti-boycott bill. To listen to your moral conscience and do right by the people. To allow Britons to exercise their democratic right to boycott. I ask that Britain write itself positively in the history books for once.

5. Question from Chaka Artwell – Female Sanitary Products

Without enduring any opposition, criticism or debate, the Green Councillor, Ms Rawle's motion for female sanitary products to made available in Oxford City Council's male toilets was approved, at November's Full Council meeting.

Oxford's biological male population has no biological use for the functionally designed female sanctuary product.

Therefore, Cllr Rawle's motion is a City Council approved flagrant waste of public money, to endorse the current left-wing culture wars, and uphold Stonewall's LGBTQIAP2S evangelical creed.

Will Oxford City Council reverse its decision to waste public money by purchasing female sanitary products for display in male public toilets?

Will Oxford City Council oppose the biological deception, for politically correct reasons, of requiring biological human beings, by their self-assigned gender ad hocly on any given morning.

To: Council
Date: 29 January 2024
Report of: Head of Law and Governance
Title of Report: **Motions and amendments received in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11.18**

Councillors are asked to debate and reach conclusions on the motions and amendment listed below in accordance with the Council's rules for debate.

The Constitution permits an hour for debate of these motions.

Introduction

This document sets out motions received by the Head of Law and Governance in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11.18 by the deadline of 1.00pm on 17 January 2024, as amended by the proposers.

All substantive amendments sent by councillors to the Head of Law and Governance by publication of the briefing note are also included below.

Unfamiliar terms are explained in the glossary or in footnotes.

Motions will be taken in turn from the Oxford Social Independents, Independent Group, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green groups in that order.

Introduction

- a) Stop the Anti-Boycott Bill (Proposed by Cllr Dr. Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini, seconded by Cllr Chris Jarvis) [Amendment proposed by Cllr. Chris Smowton, seconded by Cllr Laurence Fouweather]
- b) Moving Oxford City Council to a committee system of representation to increase resident' confidence in democracy (proposed by Cllr Dr. Amar Latif, seconded by Cllr Shaista Aziz)
- c) The Cost of living crisis and local government funding (proposed by Cllr Ed Turner, seconded by Cllr Nigel Chapman). [Amendment proposed by Cllr. Andrew Gant, seconded by Cllr Katherine Miles]
- d) Scrap the two-child benefit cap (proposed by Cllr Chris Smowton, seconded by Cllr Katherine Miles)
- e) Disposable Vapes (proposed by Cllr Lucy Pegg, seconded by Cllr Rosie Rawle)

a) Stop the Anti-Boycott Bill (Proposed by Cllr Dr. Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini, seconded by Cllr Chris Jarvis) [Amendment proposed by Cllr. Chris Smowton, seconded by Cllr Laurence Fouweather]

Oxford Socialist Independents Group Motion

Council Notes

1. The Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons on 10 January 2024.¹ It will now continue its passage through the House of Lords.
2. The legislation has been dubbed the 'Anti-Boycott Bill' and seeks to stop public bodies from making any decisions around investment and procurement that aren't in line with UK government foreign or economic trade policies.²
3. The Anti-Boycott Bill is specifically designed to target the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement - an initiative launched by Palestinian civil society organisations. The BDS movement seeks to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law.
4. The only geographical areas that the legislation would prohibit the government making exemption provisions for are - as listed in the Bill - 'Israel', 'the Occupied Palestine Territories' and 'the Occupied Golan Heights'.³ The legislation would therefore explicitly prohibit public bodies - including local authorities - from engaging in any form of boycott of Israeli goods and services, including those produced or developed through an illegal occupation.
5. More than 60 charities, campaign groups, civil society organisations and trade unions have publicly opposed the legislation, including ASLEF, CWU, FBU, Friends of the Earth, Global Justice Now, Greenpeace, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Liberty, Methodist Church in Britain, Muslim Association of Britain, Na'Amod, NEU, NUS, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, PCS, Unison, UCU, and War on Want.⁴

Council Believes

1. The Anti-Boycott Bill is an anti-democratic measure which restricts the ability of public bodies to take ethics and human rights into account in key parts of their decision making. It has profound implications on public bodies' ability to act upon human rights violations, slavery and environmental destruction.
2. Ethical boycotts from public bodies - including local councils - have played an important role in many historic campaigns for justice - most notably in the struggle against the Apartheid regime in South Africa.
3. Local authorities like Oxford City Council have a duty to speak out and resist such attempts to diminish democracy.

Council Resolves

¹ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3475>

² <https://righttoboycott.org.uk/>

³ <https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/53574/documents/4223>

⁴ <https://righttoboycott.org.uk/#signatories>

1. To ask the leader of the council to:
 1. Issue a public statement condemning the Anti-Boycott Bill.
 2. Write to the secretary state for leveling up, housing and communities - Michael Gove - expressing Oxford City Council's opposition to the legislation and calling for him to withdraw the Bill.
 3. Write to Ben Jamal, Director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, expressing Oxford City Council's opposition to the Anti-Boycott Bill and support for the Right to Boycott campaign.
 4. Write to Labour leader Keir Starmer, Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey, and Green Party co-leaders Adrian Ramsay and Carla Denyer, encouraging them to ensure that their MPs actively oppose the legislation in parliament.
 5. Write to the leaders of the parliamentary groups in the House of Lords, encouraging them to ensure that peers within their groups actively oppose the legislation in the Lords.
-

Liberal Democrat Group Amendment

Council Notes

1. The Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons on 10 January 2024.⁵ It will now continue its passage through the House of Lords.
2. The legislation has been dubbed the 'Anti-Boycott Bill' and seeks to stop public bodies from making any decisions around investment and procurement that aren't in line with UK government foreign or economic trade policies.⁶
3. The Anti-Boycott Bill is specifically designed to target the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement - an initiative launched by Palestinian civil society organisations. The BDS movement seeks to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law.
4. The only geographical areas that the legislation would prohibit the government making exemption provisions for are - as listed in the Bill - 'Israel', 'the Occupied Palestine Territories' and 'the Occupied Golan Heights'.⁷ The legislation would therefore explicitly prohibit public bodies - including local authorities - from engaging in any form of boycott of Israeli goods and services, including those produced or developed through an illegal occupation.
5. More than 60 charities, campaign groups, civil society organisations and trade unions have publicly opposed the legislation, including ASLEF, CWU, FBU, Friends of the Earth, Global Justice Now, Greenpeace, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Liberty, Methodist Church in Britain, Muslim Association of Britain, Na'Amod, NEU, NUS, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, PCS, Unison, UCU, and War on Want.⁸

Council Believes

⁵ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3475>

⁶ <https://righttoboycott.org.uk/>

⁷ <https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/53574/documents/4223>

⁸ <https://righttoboycott.org.uk/#signatories>

4. The Anti-Boycott Bill is an anti-democratic measure which restricts the ability of public bodies to take ethics and human rights into account in key parts of their decision making. It has profound implications on public bodies' ability to act upon human rights violations, slavery and environmental destruction.
5. Ethical boycotts from public bodies - including local councils - have played an important role in many historic campaigns for justice - most notably in the struggle against the Apartheid regime in South Africa.
6. Local authorities like Oxford City Council have a duty to speak out and resist such attempts to diminish democracy.

Council Resolves

2. To ask the leader of the council to:
 1. Issue a public statement condemning the Anti-Boycott Bill.
 2. Write to the secretary state for leveling up, housing and communities - Michael Gove - expressing Oxford City Council's opposition to the legislation and calling for him to withdraw the Bill.
 - ~~3. Write to Ben Jamal, Director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, expressing Oxford City Council's opposition to the Anti-Boycott Bill and support for the Right to Boycott campaign.~~
 4. Write to Labour leader Keir Starmer, Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey, and Green Party co-leaders Adrian Ramsay and Carla Denyer, encouraging them to ensure that their MPs actively oppose the legislation in parliament.
 5. Write to the leaders of the parliamentary groups in the House of Lords, encouraging them to ensure that peers within their groups actively oppose the legislation in the Lords.
-

If amended, the Motion would read:

Council Notes

1. The Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill passed its third reading in the House of Commons on 10 January 2024.⁹ It will now continue its passage through the House of Lords.
2. The legislation has been dubbed the 'Anti-Boycott Bill' and seeks to stop public bodies from making any decisions around investment and procurement that aren't in line with UK government foreign or economic trade policies.¹⁰
3. The Anti-Boycott Bill is specifically designed to target the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement - an initiative launched by Palestinian civil society organisations. The BDS movement seeks to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law.
4. The only geographical areas that the legislation would prohibit the government making exemption provisions for are - as listed in the Bill - 'Israel', 'the Occupied Palestine Territories' and 'the Occupied Golan Heights'.¹¹ The legislation would therefore explicitly prohibit public bodies - including local authorities - from

⁹ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3475>

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¹¹ <https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/53574/documents/4223>

engaging in any form of boycott of Israeli goods and services, including those produced or developed through an illegal occupation.

5. More than 60 charities, campaign groups, civil society organisations and trade unions have publicly opposed the legislation, including ASLEF, CWU, FBU, Friends of the Earth, Global Justice Now, Greenpeace, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, Liberty, Methodist Church in Britain, Muslim Association of Britain, Na'Amod, NEU, NUS, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, PCS, Unison, UCU, and War on Want.¹²

Council Believes

7. The Anti-Boycott Bill is an anti-democratic measure which restricts the ability of public bodies to take ethics and human rights into account in key parts of their decision making. It has profound implications on public bodies' ability to act upon human rights violations, slavery and environmental destruction.
8. Ethical boycotts from public bodies - including local councils - have played an important role in many historic campaigns for justice - most notably in the struggle against the Apartheid regime in South Africa.
9. Local authorities like Oxford City Council have a duty to speak out and resist such attempts to diminish democracy.

Council Resolves

3. To ask the leader of the council to:
 1. Issue a public statement condemning the Anti-Boycott Bill.
 2. Write to the secretary state for leveling up, housing and communities - Michael Gove - expressing Oxford City Council's opposition to the legislation and calling for him to withdraw the Bill.
 3. Write to Labour leader Keir Starmer, Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey, and Green Party co-leaders Adrian Ramsay and Carla Denyer, encouraging them to ensure that their MPs actively oppose the legislation in parliament.
 4. Write to the leaders of the parliamentary groups in the House of Lords, encouraging them to ensure that peers within their groups actively oppose the legislation in the Lords.
-

¹² <https://righttoboycott.org.uk/#signatories>

b) Moving Oxford City Council to a committee system of representation to increase resident' confidence in democracy (proposed by Cllr Dr. Amar Latif, seconded by Cllr Shaista Aziz)

Independent Group Motion

This council notes:

Years of low voter turnout in local elections (less than 40% in May 2022)¹³ within Oxford would suggest that there is discontent amongst the electorate in the city.

Low turn out has been suggested to disproportionately affect the more disadvantaged across communities and society who may find it more difficult to access elected politicians, find it challenging to access online consultations and be more disenfranchised with the political process.¹⁴¹⁵

That the Labour administration has lost 10 councillors since October 13th, 2023, which is almost a third of total Labour Councillors, yet continues as a minority administration.

Furthermore, despite Oxford having the third largest ethnic minority population, 29%¹⁶, within the Southeast of England, and being proud of its diversity and internationalist identity as a city, there is only one cabinet member from an ethnic minority background.

Prior to the racist murder of George Floyd in the USA in May 2020 and the reinvigoration of the Black Lives Matter and Rhodes Must Fall Movement in Oxford, the Labour lead Oxford City Council carried out internal work to ensure it has a racially diverse and representative Cabinet, the progress made has since been reversed.

That the decision-making process within the City Council leaves large numbers of decisions to individual cabinet members who cannot fully represent the diversity of views from residents across Oxford.

That other Councils, including Sheffield and Bristol, have moved towards a committee system of representation which better reflects views of residents across their respective cities.

This council believes that a committee system of representation:
Is a better and more transparent way for decisions to be made across Oxford, which will create a more equitable system ensuring residents voices are listened to and acted upon alongside a wider group of councillors.

Will allow a less centralised and more collaborative way of working.
Will better reflect the diversity of views and opinions from a wider demographic of society, including across the political spectrum.

¹³ https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20046/elections_and_voting/1521/oxford_city_council_election_results_-_5_may_2022

¹⁴ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953623000746>

¹⁵ <https://www.democraticaudit.com/2019/10/11/have-we-all-underestimated-the-severity-of-socioeconomic-differences-in-electoral-participation/>

¹⁶ [Ethnicity | Ethnicity | Oxford City Council](#)

Will allow individual Cabinet members to be replaced by Policy Committee Chairs who will have responsibility for different areas of Council policy.

This council agrees to:

Request the Officers assess the implications (financial, resource, legal and otherwise), negatives and positives of the Council moving to a Committee System of governance, including considering and developing plans as to how such a system of governance may work.

Present the final proposals to Cabinet and then Council for comments and consideration as to whether to commence the process to consider a formal change of governance arrangements in the Council, with a view to putting this to a City-wide referendum by May 2025.

c) The Cost of living crisis and local government funding (proposed by Cllr Ed Turner, seconded by Cllr Nigel Chapman). [Amendment proposed by Cllr. Andrew Gant, seconded by Cllr Katherine Miles]

Labour Group Motion

This Council believes that the English local government finance settlement proposed by the Tories for 24/25 is thoroughly inadequate and penalises our poorest citizens the most, who are least well equipped to face the continuing cost-of-living crisis.

Government pronouncements about increased funding are “smoke and mirrors” and do not reflect the reality that costs are rising faster than any increases in funding, and that increases in “core spending power” largely come from local residents, not government funding.

Council is very concerned that a one-year increase in local housing allowances (after years of freeze) will be eroded by the Government’s failure to increase the benefits cap and temporary accommodation housing benefit, thus offering support with one hand and then denying it with the other. That failure will be exacerbated by reintroducing the housing allowance freeze again in April 25. This will once again increase homelessness in areas like Oxford.

In addition, this Council is angry that the Conservative Government has abolished funding for the Household support grant from May 24 – denying poorer people a welcome source of cash support for household and fuel bills, and vital heating repairs. This comes in addition to the end of centrally provided fuel bill support for many who had been in receipt of it.

Overall, English local government faces a huge funding crisis and cannot close the gap without cutting front line services, especially those aimed at its poorest citizens. This is evidenced by Oxford City Council having to draw down on its reserves and propose a reduction in funding for its Council Tax reduction scheme from April 2025.

More widely, Council believes households are feeling huge pressure as a result of substantial increases in taxes as well as, for many, higher mortgage costs and rents due to the chaos caused by Liz Truss’ mini-budget, and a sharp focus on the cost of living is urgently needed.

This Council calls upon the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government demanding:

1. A sustainable long term funding settlement in the March Budget for councils like Oxford, facing a funding squeeze due to inflation and the rising costs of homelessness.
2. A commitment to increasing local housing allowances annually in line with local housing costs and scrapping the benefits cap.
3. The re-instatement of funding for the Household Support Grant which provides a flexible and rapid response to people with urgent needs.
4. Support for councils like Oxford which retains a Council Tax reduction scheme for people struggling to pay these costs, and encouragement that other councils should instigate such schemes.

It also asks the Leader of the Council to contact our two local MPs, for Oxford East and Oxford West and Abingdon respectively, and ask them to write with the same demands to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Liberal Democrat Group Amendment

This Council believes that the English local government finance settlement proposed by the Tories for 24/25 is thoroughly inadequate and penalises our poorest citizens the most, who are least well equipped to face the continuing cost-of-living crisis.

Government pronouncements about increased funding are “smoke and mirrors” and do not reflect the reality that costs are rising faster than any increases in funding, and that increases in “core spending power” largely come from local residents, not government funding.

Council is very concerned that a one-year increase in local housing allowances (after years of freeze) will be eroded by the Government’s failure to increase the benefits cap and temporary accommodation housing benefit, thus offering support with one hand and then denying it with the other. That failure will be exacerbated by reintroducing the housing allowance freeze again in April 25. This will once again increase homelessness in areas like Oxford.

In addition, this Council is angry that the Conservative Government has abolished funding for the Household support grant from May 24 – denying poorer people a welcome source of cash support for household and fuel bills, and vital heating repairs. This comes in addition to the end of centrally provided fuel bill support for many who had been in receipt of it.

Overall, English local government faces a huge funding crisis and cannot close the gap without cutting front line services, especially those aimed at its poorest citizens. This is evidenced by Oxford City Council having to draw down on its reserves and propose a reduction in funding for its Council Tax reduction scheme from April 2025.

More widely, Council believes households are feeling huge pressure as a result of substantial increases in taxes as well as, for many, higher mortgage costs and rents due to the chaos caused by Liz Truss’ mini-budget, and a sharp focus on the cost of living is urgently needed.

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1. A sustainable long term funding settlement ~~in the March Budget~~ for councils like Oxford, facing a funding squeeze due to inflation and the rising costs of homelessness.
2. A commitment to increasing local housing allowances annually in line with local housing costs and scrapping the benefits cap.
3. The re-instatement of funding for the Household Support Grant which provides a flexible and rapid response to people with urgent needs.
4. Support for councils like Oxford which retains a Council Tax reduction scheme for people struggling to pay these costs, and encouragement that other councils should instigate such schemes.

It also asks the Leader of the Council to contact our two local MPs, for Oxford East and Oxford West and Abingdon respectively, and ask them to write with the same demands to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Council notes that it is likely a Labour government will be in power by the time this council is forming its next budget, that shadow ministers must make their intentions clear as soon as possible to aid financial planning for that eventuality, and that Keir Starmer has recently pledged not to "turn on the spending taps". It therefore also asks the Leader of the Council, that in event of a change of government at the upcoming general election, they should also write to the new Chancellor of the Exchequer reiterating all four of the above demands.

If amended, the motion would read:

This Council believes that the English local government finance settlement proposed by the Tories for 24/25 is thoroughly inadequate and penalises our poorest citizens the most, who are least well equipped to face the continuing cost-of-living crisis.

Government pronouncements about increased funding are "smoke and mirrors" and do not reflect the reality that costs are rising faster than any increases in funding, and that increases in "core spending power" largely come from local residents, not government funding.

Council is very concerned that a one-year increase in local housing allowances (after years of freeze) will be eroded by the Government's failure to increase the benefits cap and temporary accommodation housing benefit, thus offering support with one hand and then denying it with the other. That failure will be exacerbated by reintroducing the housing allowance freeze again in April 25. This will once again increase homelessness in areas like Oxford.

In addition, this Council is angry that the Conservative Government has abolished funding for the Household support grant from May 24 – denying poorer people a welcome source of cash support for household and fuel bills, and vital heating repairs. This comes in addition to the end of centrally provided fuel bill support for many who had been in receipt of it.

Overall, English local government faces a huge funding crisis and cannot close the gap without cutting front line services, especially those aimed at its poorest citizens. This is evidenced by Oxford City Council having to draw down on its reserves and propose a reduction in funding for its Council Tax reduction scheme from April 2025.

More widely, Council believes households are feeling huge pressure as a result of substantial increases in taxes as well as, for many, higher mortgage costs and rents due to the chaos caused by Liz Truss' mini-budget, and a sharp focus on the cost of living is urgently needed.

This Council calls upon the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government demanding:

1. A sustainable long term funding settlement for councils like Oxford, facing a funding squeeze due to inflation and the rising costs of homelessness.

2. A commitment to increasing local housing allowances annually in line with local housing costs and scrapping the benefits cap.
3. The re-instatement of funding for the Household Support Grant which provides a flexible and rapid response to people with urgent needs.
4. Support for councils like Oxford which retains a Council Tax reduction scheme for people struggling to pay these costs, and encouragement that other councils should instigate such schemes.

It also asks the Leader of the Council to contact our two local MPs, for Oxford East and Oxford West and Abingdon respectively, and ask them to write with the same demands to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Council notes that it is likely a Labour government will be in power by the time this council is forming its next budget, that shadow ministers must make their intentions clear as soon as possible to aid financial planning for that eventuality, and that Keir Starmer has recently pledged not to "turn on the spending taps". It therefore also asks the Leader of the Council, that in event of a change of government at the upcoming general election, they should also write to the new Chancellor of the Exchequer reiterating all four of the above demands.

d) Scrap the two-child benefit cap (proposed by Cllr Chris Snowton, seconded by Cllr Katherine Miles)

Liberal Democrat Group Motion

Council notes that:

- The two-child limit, introduced by the Conservative Government in 2017, restricts support in Universal Credit and tax credits to two children in a family.
- The Child Poverty Action Group identified 4.2 million children living in poverty in the UK in 2021–22, with the prevalence of poverty much higher among Black and minority ethnic groups¹⁷.
- Research by the End Child Poverty Coalition shows that scrapping the two-child limit would lift 250,000 children out of poverty, and that the economic and societal effects of child poverty, including spending on public services, cost the UK £39 billion every year¹⁸.
- A new report by the Commons Education Select Committee warns that cost-of-living pressures on families are driving missed education¹⁹.
- In a country already struggling with fewer and fewer young people supporting an ageing population, it is not in any case in our interests to attempt to prevent or delay people from raising children through financial pressure.
- Despite initially pledging to repeal the policy in 2020²⁰, the Leader of the Opposition then reversed himself and pledged to keep the Tory policy²¹, before eventually adopting a noncommittal stance on the issue²².

¹⁷ <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures>

¹⁸ https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/two_child_limit/

¹⁹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/41590/documents/205047/default/> particularly para.148

Council resolves:

- That the Leader should write to both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition expressing this council's strong support for a repeal to the two-child benefit cap.
- That the Leader should further write to Oxford's MPs requesting that they in turn pressure both government and opposition to abolish the cap.

e) Disposable Vapes (proposed by Cllr Lucy Pegg, seconded by Cllr Rosie Rawle)

Green Group Motion

Disposable vapes are creating an environmental and health crisis. Far from helping smokers to quit, with their attractive packaging and child-friendly flavours, disposable vapes are getting a new generation addicted to nicotine. Frequently littered and hard to recycle, disposable vapes are also causing damage to the natural environment and wasting critical materials.

This council notes that:

- There has been a fourfold increase in the number of disposable vapes being discarded over the past year, with 5 million vapes now being thrown away every week²³
- Vapes contain critical raw materials, such as lithium and copper, which are vital for our transition to a greener society. The disposable vapes thrown away over the past year contain enough lithium to create 5,000 batteries for electric cars²⁴
- 1 in 9 young people aged 11 to 18 have experimented with e-cigarettes, with 69% of these people choosing disposable vapes, according to research from Action on Smoking and Health (ASH). There has been a 7-fold increase between 2020 and 2022 in the choice of disposables amongst this age group, alongside a 50% year on year increase in the proportion of children experimenting with vaping.²⁵
- Lithium ion batteries, like those used in vapes, caused 700 fires at waste sites in 2022 due to not being properly disposed of.²⁶
- Prominent environmental and health organisations have called for a ban, including The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Marine Conservation Society, Centre for Sustainable Healthcare and Surfers Against Sewage.²⁷

²⁰ https://twitter.com/Keir_Starmer/status/1225465424092987393

²¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/jul/16/labour-keep-two-child-benefit-cap-says-keir-starmer>

²² <https://news.sky.com/story/starmer-softens-stance-on-two-child-benefit-cap-amid-snp-attacks-ahead-of-by-election-12940684>

²³ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/sep/08/call-for-uk-ban-on-single-use-vapes-as-more-than-5m-discarded-each-week>

²⁴ ibid

²⁵ <https://ash.org.uk/uploads/Use-of-vapes-among-young-people-GB-2023.pdf?v=1690455394>

²⁶ <https://www.materialfocus.org.uk/press-releases/over-700-fires-in-bin-lorries-and-recycling-centres-are-caused-by-batteries-many-of-which-are-hidden-inside-electricals/>

²⁷ <https://green-alliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Letter-to-ministers-on-disposable-vapes.pdf>

- Councils across the country have called for a UK ban on disposable vapes by 2024, and the Scottish Government has already agreed to carry out a consultation on banning disposable vapes.²⁸ The UK must rapidly respond to it's consultation on youth vaping by bringing in a full prohibition on disposable vapes.
- Whilst vaping can help smokers to quit, reusable vapes serve this same purpose

This council resolves to:

- Request that the Leader of the Council will write jointly to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, supporting a ban on disposable vapes by the end of 2024 on environmental and child health grounds
- Request that the Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities investigate ways the council can encourage retailers selling disposable vapes in Oxford to provide recycling facilities for vapes in their stores

²⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-66718599>

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