

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

(1) Question to the Board Member, Benefits and Customer Services (Councillor Susan Brown) from Councillor Sam Hollick

Discretionary Housing Payments

Is the board member disappointed that the council will be returning money to the government that could have been spent on Discretionary Housing Payments to help people who are being charged unaffordable rents?

Response: I am very disappointed for residents in this city that the government has chosen to penalise people on low wages, tenants in private rented housing, people with disabilities and people whom the government in its wisdom have decided have too many bedrooms.

I am also very disappointed that the government thinks that giving councils a budget that it will not commit to beyond a year called 'discretionary housing payment' which is only designed to be given as a temporary measure to local residents in order to 'wean' them off benefits will materially improve the lot of many of the city's residents.

In the light of these policies I commend the excellent work of the council's welfare reform team who have worked hard to ensure that as many people as possible who have been affected by the government's benefit changes have been alerted to the possibility of using discretionary housing payments as a temporary measure to help them bridge the gap between their income and their outgoings, of which in this city where housing is so expensive, rent is a major factor. I also note that 80% of applicants have been successful in their application for discretionary housing payment .

I regret the fact that the government has done nothing to tackle the real cause of the rising benefit bill in Oxford which is the catastrophic rise in the cost of housing owing to the restrictions placed on the city's need to develop.

A robust and extensive process was undertaken to ensure maximum take-up and award, including:

- All tenants affected by the bedroom tax being written to offering support;
- All residents impacted by the Benefit Cap being phoned, and letters sent when there was no contact to offer support; and
- Promotion of DHP internally to Housing, Benefits, Rents, Revenues and Customer Contact teams and externally to Housing and Voluntary Groups including advice agencies, housing associations, and organisations providing housing support or support to specific interest groups.

Compared to previous years, the amount of DHP awarded is double that granted in 2012/13 and more than three times that awarded in 2011/12

and 2010/11 and the City Council has spent 82% of the budget. This is in spite of the fact that the Universal Credit which the government had said would be introduced this year has been postponed, so the council has not seen the number of claims it expected to see this compared to previous years, the amount of DHP awarded is double that granted in 2012/13 and more than three times that awarded in 2011/12 and 2010/11.

This is in spite of the fact that the Universal Credit which the government had said would be introduced this year has been postponed, so the council has not seen any claims as anticipated for this benefit cut and yet it has still spent 82% of the grant for this year.

(2) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

New Independent Planning design Panel

Greens welcome the new independent planning Design Panel post-Roger Dudman Way, but with the controversial Blavatnik Building, the former Ruskin extension and Westgate outline all being given permission what priorities does the Portfolio Holder believe the new Design Panel should have?

Response: The aim of the Oxford Design Review Panel is to produce reports which will assist and encourage potential developers / applicants to achieve and maintain high quality designs for their proposals. The advice should make clear whether the panel supports the proposal or finds fundamental flaws. The report is likely to contain appropriate praise as well as criticism. It will also explain what actions the panel are expecting the developer / applicant to take to address any concerns.

In addition, the contents of the most recent Design Review Report for a scheme will be reported to the Planning Committee through the planning case officer's report on the proposal. The advice will be a material planning consideration. It will remain the role of the planning committee to give consideration to all material planning considerations, to consider what weight to give to each, and to reach its own decision on the merits of the application.

(3) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor David Williams

Mitigation of visual impact of Oxford University Graduate Buildings, Roger Dudman Way

In the light of the findings of the Independent Report into the flaws, errors and limitations in the planning processes around the approval given to the damaging and highly controversial Roger Dudman Way Oxford University graduate buildings, what mitigating measures are being taken to ensure that the visual impact of the buildings are reduced?

Response: The University of Oxford has agreed to prepare a voluntary Environmental Statement, which will indicate mitigation measure that it proposes should be made together with an assessment of the effectiveness of each. Once the City Council receives this voluntary Environmental Statement it will be published for public consultation. The City Council will subsequently give consideration to the mitigation being proposed and to all comments that it has received. At this stage options for action available to the City Council can be assessed and appropriate decisions taken.

(4) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor David Williams

Late night levy

In the light of the decision by Newcastle, and now Cheltenham, Council to introduce a 'late night levy', with Southampton, Plymouth, Leeds and York considering the matter, will the Portfolio Holder re-consider the decision not to implement the levy in Oxford – which could raise £50,000 towards community support officers.

Response: The late night levy was reviewed during a Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee meeting. The Licensing Manager had mapped the anticipated income from such a scheme (Councils receive 30% of any levy income) and the actual figure that the Council would be likely to receive from the venues that were licensed and would fall currently within the scope of the levy was approximately just over £30,000.

It should be noted that any monies received by a Licensing Authority must be reinvested in the night time economy (less the costs of administering the levy itself). The Police would receive 70% of the levy income, approximately half the cost of a police officer salary. The impact the monies the Police would receive may not meet with the expectations held by the public should a levy be charged.

This Authority has not rejected ever introducing the levy, rather we have agreed to see how the national picture maps out, what legal issues may arise elsewhere through the introduction of the levy, maintain a watching brief through our regular reports from officers, and remain flexible to a request for a levy should a robust case be made to introduce the scheme.

There are two Special Saturation Policies in place which allow the Licensing Authority to manage the late night economy with our Partners and the members of the Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee. These policies work very well, and are widely supported leading Oxford to be regarded as a safe city. The night time economy is well policed, and also enhanced by the frequent and highly visible enforcement operations carried out by our own Licensing Team. It is unclear how a Late Night Levy would impact upon the Special Saturation Policy.

Two councils have adopted the levy, Newcastle would receive a highly significant income from the levy due to there being such a vast number of licensed premises trading during the relevant hours that a levy may be applied. How successful Cheltenham will be is of interest and time will tell whether that decision was wise.

A small number of other Councils are considering the levy, however, on the basis that there are 361 local authorities nationally. A significant number of councils have not taken this option, either due to the income that would be generated not being sufficient to meet with the expectations of the public at large, and as such place a reputational risk on the council; or they have adopted our stance and are waiting to see what the national picture becomes before reviewing the matter further.

(5) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor John Goddard

Pear Tree Park and Ride siting

Does the Executive member agree that in the new era of growth that is now planned for the City and the County that the Pear Tree Park and Ride site is badly placed and should be moved to a more strategic position further north where it would not pull into the city traffic that does not need to be there and that this would release the current site for more productive use for employment and housing?

Response: The City Council has been working closely with the County Council as highway authority to assess the detailed traffic implications of the Core Strategy proposal for the Northern Gateway site. It has recently consulted on the Area Action Plan Options. Part of this work is to consider the appropriate car parking arrangements both for Park & Ride and to service the mixed housing and commercial developments. In addition the County Council has recently commissioned a North Oxford Transport Strategy which has a wider scope than just the Northern Gateway, but stretches north to Kidlington and West to Eynsham.

I maintain an open mind on the sagacity of Cllr Goddard's suggestion for the relocation of the Pear Tree Park & Ride and will await the outcome of the North Oxford Transport Strategy and Northern Gateway consultation before coming to a view. However I will ask that both City and County Officers give this idea careful consideration.

(6) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Craig Simmons

Sale of crustaceans in the Covered Market

I understand that live crustaceans (lobsters and crabs) are now being sold in Oxford Covered Market. According to RSPCA guidelines, crustaceans should not be kept in strong light or noisy conditions, and they should be killed only by trained personnel. Can the portfolio holder confirm whether these guidelines are being complied with?

Response: Responsibility for the enforcement of animal welfare matters in retail premises lies with the County Council's Trading Standards department, DEFRA and the Police. In the Council's role as landlord we will support the enforcement agencies if there are concerns over animal welfare at any Covered Market premise.

(7) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Tony Brett

Welfare standards for the sale of live crustaceans

Can you tell me what measures are taken by your administration to ensure appropriate welfare standards are being met for the keeping, and selling of live crustaceans, in the Covered Market? How do you ensure that crustaceans are being killed humanely either before or after sale?

Response: Responsibility for the enforcement of animal welfare matters in retail premises lies with the County Council's Trading Standards department, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (DEFRA), and the Police. In the Council's role as landlord we will support the enforcement agencies if there are concerns over animal welfare at any premises in the Covered Market.

(8) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Tony Brett

Covered Market Manager

We know how important the Covered Market is to you and to your colleagues, and how keen you are to support it by buying cheese there. Can you tell us who has been offered the post of Market Manager, a bit about their relevant experience? What do you hope they will be able to achieve in their first three months in post, and then the rest of the year for which the post is initially planned?

Response: It would be unfair to give Council the impression that I only buy cheese at the Covered Market. I also buy meat, bread, cakes, picture frame mounts, and recently a new watch. I eat in the cafés and have my hair cut at the barbers.

We are pleased to confirm that Elaine Phipp has been offered the post of Markets' Manager for the Covered Market. She has an extensive experience in the retail sector and has successfully implemented and managed key projects within retail groups including Whittard of Chelsea, Newby, Homebase and Wedgwood. She was the unanimous choice of the interview panel which included Councillors Campbell and Lygo, as well as union and trader representatives. The first three months will involve agreeing a short and medium term action plan as well as reviewing operations and management of the market. She will be liaising closely with the traders and others to implement the adopted Covered Market strategy which has been endorsed by the Council and traders.

Elaine will be expected to provide marketing and retail support across both the Covered Market and Gloucester Green markets.

(9) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Tony Brett

Private hire vehicles

Can you, as Chair of the committee that licences private hire vehicles, explain why there appears to be a sudden influx of licenced vehicles being used for private hire in our City that have been licenced (sometimes as hackney carriages) by other neighbouring licensing authorities? Do you share my regret that your administration's recent imposition of draconian standards and age limits on private hire vehicles in our City has actually had the reverse effect to that intended, by bringing in an influx of vehicles licenced outside our City, that have to reach much lower standards? For example many vehicles on private hire jobs no longer have their numbers on their sides and other licencing authorities license plates are much smaller, so hard to see from any distance.

Response: The vehicles seen licensed by other Authorities are not Private Hire Vehicles, but Hackney Carriages, this is a very important point of law. The current laws relating to taxis and private hire do not prohibit a Private Hire Operator from one district from sub-contracting a booking to a Hackney Carriage licensed by another district, hence the wide variety in standards Councillor Brett mentions.

However, there will be no vehicle age limits in place in Oxford until January 2016, and the criteria for licensed vehicles in Oxford has not changed since 2006 in terms of the need to maintain a vehicle. In order to ensure a transparent yet ever forward progression of the licensed fleet, age limits are to commence with effect from 2016 which embrace both emissions within our great City, and advancements in vehicle safety technology.

In order to address the concerns raised, discussions have and continue to take place with neighbouring districts in relation to their Hackney Carriages and the use to which they are put. Appropriate countywide enforcement operations and procedures are in place to deal with any out of district Hackney Carriages that may be plying for hire in Oxford.

It should be noted that there is nothing to prevent the large Private Hire Operators in Oxford from having a wider presence through Oxfordshire and beyond, and there is nothing to prevent those other districts' Hackney Carriages from linking with our Operators to ensure that the demand for taxis and private hire are met. The criteria for licensed vehicles set by some of our neighbours is not always as high as that of Oxford, our Licensing Team are working with the other districts in order to assist them to aspire to our high standards.

This is a nationwide issue, not just an issue for Oxford, and our Licensing Manager has raised our concerns to the Home Office and

Local Government Association, in order that the authorities who seek to have high standards are seen to be the standard that other authorities should look to adopt, in order that the services provided to the public are consistent nationally.

(10) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Jean Fooks

Provision of transport for the elderly and disabled of Oxford

When will you be announcing how you intend to use the Fifty Thousand Pounds held in Contingencies for the provision of transport for the elderly and disabled of Oxford?

Response: To be given at the meeting

(11) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Jean Fooks

Air Quality Action Plan – Good Planning Guidance

The City Council has adopted an Air Quality Action Plan to reduce the health-threatening pollution experienced in many parts of the city; in particular to reduce the concentrations of transport-related NOx and PM (particulates) by 50% from 2005 levels by 2020. There is an excellent Low Emission Strategy in place. With major construction and traffic-generating schemes being proposed, such as at the Westgate and Northern Gateway sites, would you now ask officers to develop Good Practice Planning Guidance linked to these documents, as has been done in other local authorities?

Response: I agree that this is an excellent Low Emissions Strategy and I will ask officers to find out what planning guidance has been prepared by other local authorities to find out what can be learnt from them.

(12) Question to the Board Member, Parks and Sports (Councillor Mark Lygo) from Councillor Tony Brett

Parking costs at the Ice Rink

I know how keen you are to encourage sport in our City and that's an admirable aim. Can you tell Council why parking at Oxford's ice rink is the most expensive in our Country and why the concessionary hour between 8am and 9am for those arriving before 8am (and thus having to pay the £2.50 night charge) has recently been removed, thus making it more expensive to park, say, for an hour between 7.30am to 8.30am (a night charge of £2.50 night charge plus an hour from 8am-9am at £2.50, when the normal 2-hour charge is £4.10) than it is for any other two-hour period in the day or night? Do you think this is fair on young skaters and their parents who are currently travelling, often daily, to Oxford to practice while the main rink at Milton Keynes is being refurbished?

Response: The Oxpens car park is a City Centre car park and the tariff structure is similar to all other City Centre car parks. The Council has a 24 hour tariff structure. There is an evening tariff which operates between 2000 and 0800 hours. The tariff for this period was £2.50 for 2013/14 (£3.00 from 01.04.14). There is a concession period between 0700 and 0800 during which time a customer will obtain a full hour's parking. This concession period remains in place. Our signage clearly states the tariff structure. There has not been a concessionary period between the hours of 0800 and 0900 for at least the past five years.

We are keen to encourage Ice Rink usage and we have offered a permit system to the Ice Hockey Club for members which effectively provides a 25% discount from the normal tariff price. This will enable the Ice Hockey Club to issue these to regular members.

(13) Question to the Board Member, Leisure (Councillor Mike Rowley) from Councillor Craig Simmons

Community bid for Temple Cowley Pools

Can the Portfolio Holder update us on the status of the community bid for the Temple Cowley Pool site.

Response: The marketing deadline for the sale of the Temple Cowley Pool site has been extended to Wednesday 16th April to enable all interested parties to bid. In addition, the Council has accepted the registration of the site as an Asset of Community Value under the Localism Act 2011. This will trigger a moratorium, initially six weeks with the potential to be extended to six months if a qualifying preferred bidder comes forward.

All interested parties have been and will continue to be kept informed of the process.

The Council has an obligation to obtain best value for the public (judged on quality as well as price) and judgement will be made on that basis.

(14) Question to the Board Member, Housing (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Social Housing – Westgate development

Is Councillor Seamons aware of the reasons given for not including social housing on the site of the expanded Westgate Centre?

Response: Whilst no formal decision has been reached on whether an off-site contribution to affordable housing would be accepted instead of on-site provision, I am aware of the reasons why this was suggested as the approach at the outline planning phase.

Both options would be in accordance with the Council's Affordable Housing SPD adopted by CEB in September 2013 and that document details when such a contribution would be appropriate. In short, where a

development's on-site provision of affordable homes cannot best meet the City's housing need the Council may choose to accept a financial contribution to fund better alternative affordable homes elsewhere, for example at Oxpens.

A formal decision will be reached by the West Area Planning Committee when it meets to review the detailed plans for the development.

(15) Question to the Board Member, Housing (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Affordable Housing – Westgate development

Point 146 of the Westgate planning report states that "...policy CS24 of the Core Strategy requires 50% of the dwellings on site to be affordable whilst policy WE16 of the West End AAP and policy HP3 of the Sites and Housing Plan also require a tenure mix of 80% social rented and 20% shared ownership...". Does Councillor Seamons agree that allowing planning permission without complying with the Council's own planning policy, allowing it within days of Oxford being rated as the least affordable place in the UK, and allowing this to happen on Council land, is shameful?

Response: No, accepting an off-site financial contribution to affordable housing would be in compliance with our planning policy as set out in the Affordable Housing SPD adopted last year. I refer the councillor to the report on the Westgate development to the West Area Planning Committee and the section which sets this out, and the officer recommendation why the payment of an off-site contribution would be appropriate in these circumstances. A decision will only be formally reached when the detailed planning application is considered by a future meeting of that committee.

The Council has an excellent record in delivering affordable housing on land it owns. Our affordable homes programme is delivering over 500 new Council houses over the next five years and we will be bidding for more funding for more Council housing through the new City Deal and the Homes and Communities Agency. The Council's planning team recently received a national award for delivering planning permissions for over a hundred new Council houses under the Affordable Homes Programme.

(16) Question to the Board Member, Housing (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Affordable housing provision

Point 147 of the Westgate planning report that went to West Area Planning Committee on 11th March states, in relation to affordable housing provision, that "In consultation with colleagues within the Council's Housing Services however it emerges that neither of the two possible sites for affordable housing are ideal for this type of accommodation." It then explains that one location, to the east side of

Old Greyfriars Street, "...would be constrained by the need to accommodate commercial floor space within this block to its rear." and that balconies would "...directly overlook the proposed service access and taxi rank." Would Councillor Seamons agree with me that there is something seriously wrong with a development that can somehow accommodate private housing but apparently can't find any suitable locations for affordable housing?

Response: No, more accurately there would be something seriously wrong if the Council required the provision of affordable housing in developments, which due to design or location, would not adequately meet the needs of those in desperate housing need on our register. In those limited circumstances it would be quite appropriate to accept a financial contribution instead as set out in our planning policies.

There is private housing demand for small, single aspect flats above retailing and leisure uses in the city centre-even if its environment is affected by a day and nighttime economy and traffic. But such housing is unlikely to be suitable for many of our high priority housing applicants, such as families, the vulnerable and the elderly-as our Housing Service has made clear.

An off-site financial contribution would allow the right affordable housing for those in greatest need, for example in the wider West End area action plan area at Oxpens, and would be in accordance with the Council's Balance of Dwellings policy.

(17) Question to the Board Member, Housing (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Westgate Development – Unaffordable service charges

Point 148 of the Westgate planning report, when dealing with why it is not possible to accommodate affordable housing on site, states that the second possible location at block 1A is not suitable because "...as the block is likely to be built to a high specification to maximise values, the level of service charges which would have to be set would make rented and shared ownership units alike unaffordable." Does Councillor Seamons agree that this reference to unaffordable service charges is an embarrassment to a City Council that professes to care about those in housing need?

Response: It is a fact that mixed use high specification developments incur high service costs for lift servicing, more complex door entry systems and high maintenance and decoration costs. Many of these higher costs are associated with the location of this particular residential development which shares a fabric with retail and restaurant uses. Passing these costs onto affordable housing tenants, who are on low incomes or in vulnerable groups, would be inappropriate.

In meeting housing need the council will ensure that new housing whilst still of high quality is low cost to run and best meets the requirements of those who need it. This is in line with the council's wider policy on rents

and service charges ensuring fairness in these rates, and keeping costs as low as possible within a prudent housing business plan.

(18) Question to the Board Member, Finance, Efficiency and Strategic Asset Management (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor Sam Hollick

Landlords Accreditation Scheme

What publicity is planned for the relaunch of the Landlords Accreditation Scheme, and how will you ensure that enough tenants are aware of the scheme for there to be some benefit to people who are renting?

Response: As the questioner may know, the Council has just carried out its biggest ever consultation on privately rented housing in Oxford, including the subject of accreditation. We are currently reviewing the feedback, and he can be sure that when the scheme is relaunched, it will be given the fullest publicity, recognising the service provided by landlords and agents who are accredited. At the same time, we need to be realistic about the limits to accreditation - the scarcity of property in Oxford is such that many tenants will end up continuing to rent from landlords who are not accredited, which is why the Council needs to press for homes and management to be of acceptable quality through its statutory powers, as well as using accreditation

(19) Question to the Board Member, Cleaner Greener Oxford (Councillor John Tanner) from Councillor Jean Fooks

Biomethane gas refuelling station and freight consolidation depot

Now that the County Council has voted to recommend that the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board includes air quality as an outcome indicator in Oxfordshire, and noting that transport is the main source of poor air quality in the city, with freight being the second worst source of pollution after buses, would you insist that

- every effort is made to develop the use of low-pollution fuels in the city, including suggesting that a biomethane gas refuelling station is considered so that the new John Lewis store can use biomethane-fuelled vehicles for their Home Delivery service, as they are doing in Camden?
- all possible efforts should be directed to the establishment of a freight consolidation depot on the edge of the city?

Response: Oxford City Council is fully supportive of the use of alternative low emission fuel, as shown from our Air Quality Action Plan (December 2013), which sets out an aim to investigate the feasibility of developing infrastructure to support emerging low or zero emission vehicle technologies.

With specific reference to the Westgate development, a recommendation for a condition has been included which require submission of a Low

Emission Strategy at reserved matters stage. It is envisaged that a Low Emission Strategy will be required to consider the use of alternative fuels, such as biomethane.

The City and County Council is currently jointly developing a brief for a freight study, which will report at the end of the summer. The study will investigate the most appropriate solutions for Oxford in terms of freight management and the development of a consolidation centre will be considered as one of the options.

(20) Question to the Board Member, Cleaner Greener Oxford (Councillor John Tanner) from Councillor Graham Jones

Formula for road and pavement repairs

Will he please set out the formula for prioritising and scheduling road and pavement repairs, and say whether it matches the formula used by the County.

Response: The prioritising and scheduling of road and pavement schemes is undertaken by the County Council as the Highway Authority. The City submits a bid to the County under the Section 42 framework with a list of priorities based on condition inspections, complaints and claims, however the County Council subsequently undertake a HAMP(Highways Assessment Management Plan) assessment and grade the priorities accordingly.

(21) Question to the Board Member, Housing (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Sam Hollick

Bid to the National Affordable Homes Programme

The Housing Strategy Action Plan proposes making a bid for money to build more affordable homes in the second round of the national Affordable Homes Programme. Will the Council be going ahead with a bid to address the shortage of affordable homes in the city?

Response: The administration will leave no stone unturned in its desire to expand Oxford's stock of affordable housing, including bids to relevant government funds. Care needs to be taken because sometimes conditions are attached to these funds which may prove unacceptable, however.

(22) Question to the Board Member, Finance, efficiency and Strategic Asset Management (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor Craig Simmons

Retail relief scheme for business rates

On 22nd January, the City Executive Board agreed the following Item 133(b): *...to adopt a retail relief scheme for business rates on the terms set out in Paragraph 19 and to delegate the authority to administer the*

Retail Relief Scheme to the Head of Customer Services in conjunction with the Section 151 Officer.

Can the Councillor please explain:

- (a) The amount of rate relief given by the Council over the last three years?
- (b) How the new scheme will impact on small local businesses?
- (c) What support is available to small businesses that previously relied on this Relief?
- (d) Whether the Councillor will consider making an exception and grant rate for those businesses affected by the partial closure of St. Clements Car Park?

Response:

- (a) The total amount of rate relief given over the current and preceding 3 years to include mandatory charitable relief, discretionary charitable relief and small business rate relief is as follows:

- 2014/15 – £21,308,017 (not including Retail Rate relief)
- 2013/14 – £20,397,141
- 2012/13 – £21,121,368
- 2011/12 - £18,035,323

- (b) Retail Rate Relief is a new relief. The Government announced in the Autumn statement that it would provide relief of up to £1,000 to all occupied retail properties with a rateable value of £50,000 or less in each of the years 2014/15 and 2015/16. This includes small businesses. This relief has been awarded to 946 businesses to date with a total relief awarded of £901,268.40. The cost is fully reimbursed by Central Government.

- (c) There are a number of other reliefs that small businesses may qualify for. These include:

- Small Business Rate Relief
- Rural Rate Relief (we have none in Oxford City Council)
- Discretionary Charitable Relief
- Mandatory Charitable Relief

Full details of these reliefs can be found on the Council's website on the "Business Rates Discounts and Exemptions" page.

- (d) Regarding the partial closure of the St Clements Car Park, we have been advised that the Valuation Officer has agreed to recognise the loss of the car park spaces and reduce the rateable value of those shops in St Clements Street, where he believes there has been an impact, by 5%. These reductions will be effective from 8 April 2013 and will be a temporary reduction which will remain in place for the period of the works. The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) will write to the ratepayers concerned to advise them of their intended action. Once the work is completed it will be necessary to remove

the temporary allowances granted. If the ratepayers are of the view that this allowance is insufficient then they do have the right to submit a formal proposal against the reduced rateable value. For this to be successful they will need to provide evidence to support the view that the allowances should be greater. The VOA will be endeavouring to get letters out to the ratepayers in the next 10 working days with formal notices of alteration to follow shortly thereafter.

(23) Question to the Board Member, Finance, efficiency and Strategic Asset Management (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor Dick Wolff

Supermarket Levy

What progress is being made on researching and implementing the 'Supermarket Levy' agreed by Council last November 2013?

Response: Officers have met with the pressure group Local Works to investigate the potential to implement this. The Leader of Oxford City Council has notified other council leaders in support of this change that we also support the proposal, and has written on behalf of Local Works to 114 other Labour Council Leaders to seek their support for this campaign. Derby City Council has been proactive in leading on the implementation of a supermarket levy and has recently undertaken four weeks' consultation on the subject, the results of which are being collated. Their intention on the advice of Local Works is to submit an application to Government with the support of other authorities in support, including Oxford City Council.

(24) Question to the Board Member, Finance, efficiency and Strategic Asset Management (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor Craig Simmons

Additional community grant

Given the increased pressure on the service, will the Portfolio Holder be giving some of the unallocated, additional community grant agreed at the Budget Council to the Oxford Food Bank as proposed by the Greens in our budget amendment?

Response: A process for applying for grants will be set out by the lead City Executive Board member, Councillor Curran, in this council year. There will, as always with our grants processes, be a transparent application process with clear assessment criteria. Clearly food banks, of which there are a growing number due to the callous and punitive policies of the coalition government, would be able to apply.

(25) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Dick Wolff

Local Authority Co-operative Network

Background to question. This motion was agreed by general consent on 16th July 2012:

'This Council resolves to investigate becoming a member of the Local Authority Co-operative Network and to that end asks the Chief Executive to prepare a report to the City Executive Board in the Autumn illustrating the advantages that may accrue from membership in terms of a range of policies especially in the area of economic development, the creation of local co-operatives and housing trusts.

This Council, moreover, is determined to assist Oxford in becoming a city of co-operatives. To that end, it considers that, alongside investigating membership of the Local Authority Co-operative Network, it is a matter of priority to consider how the Council can support and promote co-operatives and requests that officers and Community and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee investigate all possible means to develop and embed co-operatives further in the fabric of our City's life.'

This question was submitted at Council 17th December 2012:

As we are now near the end of the UN International Year of Cooperatives, could the Leader tell us what progress has been made in (a) exploring membership of the Local Authority Cooperative Network and (b) investigating means for developing and embedding co-operatives further in the fabric of Oxford life?

The Leader's response was:

There has not yet been an officer report on this topic to the City Executive Board nor have the Members of the Communities and Partnership prioritised this into their work programme.

However, the Council has continued to take practical steps to ensure best value in the widest sense, and to work with social enterprises and not for profit organisations such as the Low Carbon Hub, Groundwork, the Guardian Charity Award winning Aspire, and Fusion Lifestyles. The City Executive Board has also taken account of the potential to weigh social value in awarding contracts in our review of the Council's Procurement Strategy earlier this month.

A report of the opportunities offered through cooperative ventures will be commissioned in the New Year.

The New Year in question (2013) has come and gone, our Local Enterprise Partnership has produced a strategic economic development plan which makes no mention of cooperative enterprise, and the innovative People's Supermarket coop has come and gone with a complete lack of interest and support from the Council. It seems that no investigation has yet been made into the advantages that might accrue

from encouraging the development of that distinctive form of enterprise, the cooperative.

(a) Could the Leader say whether he believes that cooperative enterprise is of sufficiently marginal interest to be not worth investigating?

(b) Could the Leader tell us what support his party and its Councillors receive, in gift or kind, from the Cooperative movement?

Response: It has not been possible to prioritise policy work on co-operative forms of enterprise due to the demands on the Council's small economic development team of the City Deal, the Superfast Broadband Initiative and the Strategic Economic Plan. I am sorry that this has been the case as I am sure that members of all party groups are strongly supportive of co-ops and other forms of social enterprise, and some are actively involved in the co-operative movement. Cllr Coulter for example chairs the Co-op Party national council. As the answer to a previous question made clear, the Council is closely engaged at an operational level with a range of locally based social enterprises such as the Low Carbon Hub, Groundwork, Aspire and Fusion. I will ask officers to discuss with the new Portfolio holder and the incoming chair of Scrutiny what resource can be allocated to the investigation that was sought in the original motion and to set a time scale for the production of a report to members.

Members of the Co-op Party can seek a small amount of financial support for their election expenses when standing for office. I have no information on any contribution that might be made to the party nationally.

(26) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Sam Hollick

Campsfield House

Recently it was reported in the Oxford Times that there are plans to expand the nearby detention centre Campsfield House to double the size. Oxford City Council has long held the position of wanting to see Campsfield closed. Will the leader be writing to Cherwell District Council to restate our ongoing opposition to the existence of Campsfield House, and to formally object to any planning applications that come forward?

Response: If a planning application for the expansion of the Campsfield House Detention Centre is submitted to Cherwell DC, the City Council will consider whether there are planning grounds on which a valid objection to the application can be lodged.

(27) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor David Williams

Gladiator Club update

Following the request from the Greens to officers and the Leader to look at the purchase of The Gladiators Club (and the attached housing and workshop space). Will the Leader update me on the status of this matter?

Response: Property colleagues have valued the site on the basis of it continuing to provide the current club facilities and it is intended that a bid to purchase the site should be submitted, which, if accepted, will be conditional on the necessary approvals from the City Executive Board and Council. A meeting with the club officers is being set up to discuss the position that has been reached.

(28) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Covered Market rent rises

There is case law that confirms that once final figures have been published following arbitration, they are the figures that have to be upheld. Would Councillor Price agree that the Council is risking further arbitration if it continues to demand rent rises that are above the final figures published following the recent Covered Market arbitration?

Response: The arbitration decision that was received in relation to five units rested on an arithmetical error in the award calculations. Regrettably, therefore, it cannot provide a sound basis for extension to the units where a new rent has yet to be settled. Property officers have written to all the lessees involved, proposing rents from 2012 based on the arbitration analysis. If they are not agreed, a further arbitration will be required. Names of possible arbitrators with a local connection have been proposed.

(29) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Jim Campbell

Bi-annual public meetings on major projects and initiatives

In the recommendations to his report on the Roger Dudman Way Flats Vincent Goodstadt proposed strengthening the relationship between the Universities and the Council and “engaging with the community on an ongoing basis and not just as and when projects arise”. In the light of this would the Council be willing to establish bi-annual public meetings where proposed major projects and initiatives, from the universities and/or the City Council, could be explained in outline to local residents who would have the opportunity to comment on them?

Response: I am happy to discuss this proposal with the appropriate officers of Oxford University and Oxford Brookes University.

(30) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Jim Campbell

Unitary status

In 2006 Oxford City Council submitted an unsuccessful bid to Central Government to be granted Unitary Status.

In the light of increasingly swingeing reductions to Local Government funding, and of continuing public confusion as to which authority is responsible for what, would the Council be willing to prepare a new bid for unitary status?

Response: The Coalition Government has made it clear that there will be no consideration of local government reorganisation during this quinquennium. When the new Labour Government takes office in May 2015, the radical devolution of powers and financial resources to city regions contained within the Adonis Report will be accompanied by some adjustments to local authority structures, and I would expect Oxford to be involved in that review process.

(31) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Mark Mills

Oxford transport solutions

In the light of County Councillor Ian Hudspeth's enthusiasm for an Oxfordshire monorail, would the administration be open to supporting other unconventional transport projects? For example, a cable car from East Oxford to Headington?

Response: As the Local Planning Authority, the City Council would undoubtedly be willing to consider planning applications for any innovative transport infrastructure that will help to ease congestion and air pollution in the city.

(32) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Graham Jones

Educational attainment

Will he consider extending the council's successful programme for school leadership and educational attainment to strengthening school-home links?

Response: A number of imaginative and exciting proposals have already been generated by councillors, officers and teachers for the use of the educational attainment budget when the current programme winds down. Strengthening school/home links is one of these proposals building on the successes in this domain of the Childrens Centres. Decisions on the future application of that budget are likely to be taken as part of the 2015/16 budget process.