

FULL COUNCIL 2 FEBRUARY 2015

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

Board member for Educational Attainment and Youth Ambition (Councillor Pat Kennedy)

1. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Kennedy

Following the presentation of the report by the KRM educational organisation to CEB, will the board member acknowledge that the scheme has failed to deliver councils own published target for improvements at KS2? While we wholeheartedly support councils desire to address a significant problem, will he acknowledge that council should have been more ready to consider combining with the similar, more successful, scheme run by the county? Will he support us in calling for the KRM project not to be continued, and for underspent funds, and any further available funds, to be made available for schemes which genuinely address the real educational needs in the city?

Response:

I am not sure where Cllr Gant is getting his information from but the comprehensive report presented by Dr Jonathan Solity to the Scrutiny Committee set out very impressive gains in educational attainment in the schools which chose to take up this programme funded by the City Council.

Of course KRM is just part of the overall programme designed by and agreed with the schools to meet the ambitious targets for 2016. As it is only January 2015 we do not know whether we shall meet them or not. However, progress is strong as we can see from the recent results for schools across Oxfordshire. The schools which chose to follow the overall educational attainment programme are showing twice as much progress as other schools in Oxfordshire at age 7 and at age 11 the progress is four times as much. This represents substantial progress towards the 2016 targets, rather than failure.

It was always intended that, as soon as possible, that schools would become self-sufficient in the approaches and techniques advocated in the KRM approach. As such there was no long term commitment to funding the KRM programme.

We are awaiting the results of an evaluation currently being carried out by Professor Deborah McGregor of Oxford Brookes University. She is currently visiting all the target schools. As part of this process she is asking head teachers what support they would find most helpful to assist them in their continuing journey of raising achievement. We are waiting for her report in early March before deciding how to commit the funding for the next two years.

Board member for Leisure Contract and Community Partnership Grants (Councillor Mike Rowley)

2. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley

I'm sure the board member is aware of the vital work carried out across Oxfordshire by Oxford's Community Action Groups (CAG) and the impending cut to its support from the County Council. Would they consider contributing to the joint commissioning of CAG in the future along with other Oxfordshire councils?

Response

CAG Oxfordshire is a network of over 50 local community action groups (CAGs). We recognise the useful work that the Community Action Groups do in bringing communities together to take local action, particularly in the city around low carbon and recycling. Each CAG is unique, but all are run by local volunteers who organise events and initiatives to raise awareness and take action on climate change issues. They help their local communities to live a more sustainable and less resource-dependent life by promoting:

- waste reduction and the 3Rs (reduce, reuse and recycle)
- carbon reduction
- sustainable transport
- food, energy and water issues

The county fund £96,000 which they are cutting over three years.

The County Council is facing a major budget shortfall this year and are forced to make cuts, but the saving achieved by reducing the financial support to the CAGs is very small in relation to the £20 million target, and the damage done to the County network of community action groups is disproportionate to the benefit to the County budget. I have personally lobbied the County to withdraw this proposed cut.

While the City Council has been able to maintain and in some cases increase its funding for the voluntary and community sector, we cannot reasonably be expected to pick up the bill for every County Council cut. We regret the reductions in funding proposed by the County Council but note that this is being phased out over a three year period. We therefore propose to engage with the CAG network and those groups operating in the city to see if a new sustainable model can be found preferably without the City having to step in once again to fund another County Council cut.

3. From Councillor Hollick to Councillor Mike Rowley

Can the board member justify why Temple Cowley Pool was closed early on the 23rd December with no warning to centre users, disrupting swimming for pool users including the evening women-only session?

Response

The pool was due to close that evening for the Christmas break and there had been a series of unplanned fire alarms during the day which caused serious disruption to the users of the pool and to the staff. In the situation where the Leys Pool had

already opened and the sale of the land to Catalyst Housing Association was being concluded, it was decided to close the pool earlier. I am sorry if this caused inconvenience for a small number of people who would have wished to use the pool before the normal closing time of 10pm.

The new pool opening is the final stage in the delivering the 2009 Leisure Strategy that has seen usage in the centres increase by 40%, with the greatest increases in target groups and annual costs reducing from c£2 million to a zero cost service in 2016/17. The feedback from the new pool has been excellent and at the opening weekend the centre received 12,000 visits.

Among many other improvements, the replacement of the pool has enabled us to schedule three rather than two women-only sessions a week, in different parts of Oxford: at the Leys, Barton and Ferry. We are committed to building on these successes and making the leisure service as accessible as possible for all Oxford's communities.

Board member for Housing and Estate Regeneration (Councillor Scott Seamons)

4. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Seamons

It is Council policy that all hard surfaces on any development should be permeable. Why is it then that the works done last year to replace paving stones on HRA land with tarmac was allowed? It is most definitely not permeable and there is a lot of it. When will the Housing department be asked to replace the tarmac with permeable paving of some kind to comply with the Council's own policy?

Response:

This policy applies to new development. The work referred to is for planned maintenance of paved areas. The original paving slabs are pointed in and as such do not offer a permeable surface. In addition they can become a trip hazard, creating maintenance issues that the Council could have liability for around their upkeep.

Existing paving slabs in such areas have been replaced with tarmac which is low maintenance, easy to repair and has no further drainage issues than the surface it has replaced. In general, pathways to blocks are well served by adequate water run-offs.

The larger new engineering works, such as the car parking schemes currently being undertaken on the city's estates, have fully permeable, Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) compliant surfaces installed.

5. From Councillor Hollick to Councillor Seamons

Can the board member update council on any progress they have made, since council passed the relevant motion in November 2013, in negotiating for locally set right to buy discounts in order to protect our stock of council housing being sold off?

Are they aware of recent efforts by Brighton and Hove council to negotiate for an end to the right to buy in favour of alternative incentives that would protect council stock - and will they support these negotiations now there is more widespread support for our initiative?

Response

The contents of the motion of 25 November 2013 were sent in the form of a letter to the Minister of Housing on behalf of the council in the name of the chief executive, without response. Unfortunately we have to comply with national policy on this issue which does not include the possibility of local exemptions. We will follow Brighton and Hove's attempts with interest but see no prospect for success under the present coalition government. I would also draw colleagues attention to recent announcements from the conservative party that if they were to be elected they would wish to introduce new measures to further stimulate the right to buy including the extension to Housing Association properties. As a Council we will also look at other ownership models for our new housing provision that will give greater protection to rent levels and from loss of stock to right to buy. We intend to review our options following the general election and as Government policy then emerges.

Deputy Leader of the Council, (Councillor Ed Turner)

6. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Turner

At Council on 1 December, you replied to my question on the Covered Market that 'the draft Action plan and Programme would be available within the next month'. Can you tell Council where they can find this document?

Response:

A draft document has been drawn up and will be progressed further with a submission for CEB.

Leader of the Council, Corporate Strategy, Economic Development and Planning (Councillor Bob Price)

7. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Price

In Autumn 2014, the City Council abandoned its planning requirement for developers to comply with its Natural Resources Impact Analysis SPD in favour of policy HP11 which weakens the requirement to provide 20% of energy from renewable sources. Now, developers now longer MUST provide any on-site renewable energy. Given this:

- Will the Councillor agree that this is a retrograde step?
- Will he explain how this helps the Council deliver on its climate change aspirations?
- Since HP11 replaced the NRIA how many qualifying developments have complied with it as opposed to the tougher criteria of NRIA?
- Will the Councillor commit to reinstating the tougher RE targets set out in the NRIA which the Council first adopted in 2006?
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Response:

I do not agree that Policy HP11 is a retrograde step; our policy has not been weakened but rather has extended the requirement to provide 20% minimum on-site renewable energy.

Policy HP11 was introduced when the Sites and Housing Plan was adopted in February 2013. It continues to implement the 20% on-site renewable energy policy and requires the 20% to account for total energy (i.e. regulated and unregulated). Policy HP11 also introduced a requirement for sites of less than ten dwellings to provide an element of on-site renewable energy and produce an Energy Statement to document how renewable technologies and sustainability measures have been incorporated into small developments – the NRIA did not include this.

The NRIA Policy still applies for qualifying non-residential developments. In due course policy HP 11 and the NRIA Policy will be reviewed as part of a wider review of Local Plan Policies. Although any new approach in relation to climate change aspirations will need to be in accord with the National Planning Policy Framework prevailing at the time.

The number of qualifying developments that have been assessed under Policy HP11 is not data that is readily available at this time, but will be provided later.

8. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Price

At its meeting in December, Council voted unanimously for the city to impose conditions concerning cycle safety on lorries used by its own contractors, and to urge the county council to use its own powers to do the same for all other lorries within the city boundaries. Will the board member inform council on what progress has been made, and responses received from the county?

Response:

The available information is being collated and will be reported in writing to members.

9. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Price

As a result of the confusion over the merging of Evergreen 3 and East West Rail, it has become unclear whether the residents of Stone Meadow and Cox's Ground on the Waterways Estate are still covered by amelioration plans with respect to noise and vibration. Will the City Council press Network Rail to recognise the impact of the increased rail traffic on Waterways and Waterside and put in mitigation measures to protect the residents?

Response:

The City Council's powers in relation to railway development programmes are limited. The rail operators enjoy comprehensive permitted development rights deriving from successive pieces of legislation since the 1840s. Council officers have been liaising closely with Network Rail and Chiltern Railways about the schemes that

are currently under way covering the whole stretch of line from Redbridge to Water Eaton. They have consistently sought to emphasise the need to take full account of the visual and aural impact of the works that they are undertaking on local residents, and the various residents groups have been liaising very effectively with the rail operators. The Council has yet to come to a decision on the discharge of Condition 19 of the Inspector's report relating to the Wolvercote section of the work, and will continue to do everything that is within its power to secure appropriate mitigation measures against noise, vibration and visual intrusion.

10. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Price

Will the leader join us in unequivocally condemning the fact that a legal, commercial decision by a trader has been overturned by threats of intimidation and violence? (this refers to the decision by the Wendy News proprietors to cancel their order for 500 copies of Charlie hebdo because of intimidation. it was in the Oxford Mail and at www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-30896558)

Response

Intimidation and threats of violence against shopkeepers should have no place in a civilised society.

11. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Price

Would the board member investigate the adoption of a £1 a night 'bed tax' for hotel stays in Oxford? This is used in Paris, Berlin and Barcelona, and the Labour-controlled Camden council is seeking to join with other London councils for the right to impose a tourist levy of £1 per bed per night. Camden estimates it could raise 5 million p.a. from the levy which would be spent on extra street cleaning in popular tourist areas. Monies raised in Oxford could be 'reinvested in marketing and urban realm improvements' (from report of the London Finance Commission, set up by the Mayor of London in 2012).

Response

The power for local authorities to raise income from sources such as overnight stays in hotels and guest houses has been regularly advocated by the Local Government Association. Fiscal devolution of this type must figure in whatever policies are proposed by the incoming government in May 2015.

12. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Price

Will the Leader write to Newsquest on behalf of the Council expressing concern at the proposed reduction in staff numbers at their Oxford office and proposal to further centralise subbing activities to Newport, Wales?

Response:

I have already done so, in response to a request from the NUJ Branch.

13. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Price

Will the leader of the council give his full support to working with stakeholders to re-instate this year's lantern parade?

Response:

Planning for the Christmas Light Festival 2015 is at a very early stage, and the scope for re-introducing a Lantern Parade is on the agenda. The issues of route, crowd controls and traffic disruption will be under review to see if a workable solution that will meet Safety Advisory Group requirements can be devised.

14. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Price

Does the leader of the council share my concerns that the alterations in voter registration have led to the loss of thousands of registered voters in the city, mainly within the colleges, and with only a matter of weeks until the general election what will he be doing to increase registration?

Response:

The reduction in the size of the electoral register in the wake of the move to individual electoral registration is clearly a matter of grave concern to the Council and to everyone with an interest in local democracy. The Council ran a major advertising and information campaign over the summer and early autumn months, including attendance at the Freshers Fairs at both universities and intensive work with university and college administrators. That work has continued and I have had meetings with key SU and University representatives, including the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford and the Academic Registrar at Oxford Brookes University. Council Electoral registration staff held a further meeting on January 28th with all these groups and a major drive is under way to ensure that as many students are registered as possible.

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