

Public Questions to the City Executive Board

Item 7: Safeguarding Children Policy

Questions: Jane Alexander

Question 1: I am pleased to see that safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is, or would seem to be important to Oxford City Council. I am concerned, however, that your agenda already congratulates councillors and councillor officers for their work in this and so recently after the Bullfinch trial which some of the perpetrators have now been locked up for their crimes, but for which those who should have helped much sooner still walk free. I see the first problem as being the fact that those who have suffered such crimes (and other crimes) have not been listened to and are still not being listened to.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What part of safeguarding children does this fall into please?

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

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

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

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

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