

## OXFORD CITY FULL COUNCIL MEETING 20 JULY 2015

### AGENDA ITEM 18 (was 17): QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

#### **Board Member for Customer Services and Corporate Services**

##### 1. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Brown

As the performance of the Council lies very largely in the hands of its staff, whose wellbeing is thus of great importance, can you assure Council that the working conditions in St Aldate's chambers are as good as they should be?

##### **Response:**

Councillor Fooks will be aware that St Aldates Chambers underwent a significant modernisation programme four years ago which radically improved the working environment. This has allowed for more modern working practices including hot-desking and home working but also increased the number and quality of toilets and kitchen facilities. More recently security arrangements have been improved. All staff, including the chief executive and directors, benefit from working in an open plan office with access to shared meeting rooms.

In the recent hot weather staff have benefitted from the passive ventilation system (a greener and less expensive alternative to air conditioning), and the chilled water on tap in every kitchen.

The Facilities Management Helpdesk enables staff to log any concerns with the environment or facilities on a day to day basis, and an office champions' group made up of at least one member of staff from each service area meets quarterly to address feedback and any concerns such as storage, health and safety, maintenance and housekeeping. Actions are logged and progress reported back to staff.

64% of staff scored the office environment as "Excellent" or "Good" in the latest survey in May 2015, a further 25% said it was "Satisfactory".

The City Council has a comprehensive Wellbeing Programme in place for all staff which includes: an employee assistance scheme offering help and advice covering a range of topics; discounted membership for various leisure facilities; health and wellbeing practice groups and workshops and free health checks.

##### 2. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Brown

The Council has rightly been promoting exercise to help staff be healthy. Do you think that this has been furthered by the decision to increase the cost to staff of a Slice card from £37 a year to £30 a month?

##### **Response:**

Councillor Fooks is wrong in every detail in her question. There has been no change to the cost of the slice card in 2015/16. The Medium Term Financial Plan agreed by Council in February included a proposal to increase the cost to £20 per month from April 2016 to bring the subsidy in line with the cost to staff of utilising facilities negotiated with LA Fitness in the City Centre. The proposal will be reviewed in the autumn as part of the Council's medium term financial plan refresh process.

The slice card is just one of a number of measures the Council has put in place to promote health and wellbeing.

## **Board member for Climate Change and Cleaner, Greener Oxford**

### **3. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Tanner**

How long has the City Council been aware of the imminent financial challenges relating to the funding of recycling, with the current providers, whose contract is up for renewal in October, proposing to charge the City, rather than pay it, for each tonne of materials recycled?

#### **Response:**

Our existing contractual arrangements allowed the contract to be extended by mutual agreement for a further 3 years. Discussions began with the current contractor in January of 2015 about extending the contract however this was against a backdrop of falling market prices for the recycling material we collect. By March 2015, it was evident that our contractor wished to charge us a substantial per tonne gate fee to handle our material. The size of the fee prompted Officer's to consider alternatives, one of which was to go out to tender for a new contract.

An Invitation to Tender (ITT) has been prepared and will be published on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2015, with contractor submission required by 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2015. The award date, after the "standstill" period, is 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2015 with a commencement date of 6<sup>th</sup> October 2015.

### **4. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Tanner**

I understand that you have authorised the issuance of a Section 46 notice (under the 1990 Environmental Protection Act) to residents in HRA flats who are not correctly recycling. Those that persist will be given a Fixed Penalty Notice. Do you think that this response is fair and proportionate?

#### **Response:**

Our education and enforcement procedure applies to all households that do not comply with the waste collection service we provide, as stated in Section 46 of the 1990 EPA.

The procedure starts with our Collection Crews applying a reminder sticker and reporting the issue via their in-cab technology. This automatically produces an educational letter. A second occurrence receives a re-sticker and an in-cab report that stimulates a Field Officer educational visit. A third non-compliance is stickered again and activates an Enforcement Officer investigation with the potential of a S46 being served. Breaches of this notice can result in the issuing of a Fixed Penalty Notice.

The procedure is applied to all privately managed flat sites, HMO's, individual private residencies as well to all properties within the Council's ownership.

## **Board member for Crime, Community Safety and Licensing**

### **5. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Sinclair**

How many hours of officers' time and at what cost (direct wages) were spent on the City Centre PSPO project prior to the PSPO paper being pulled from CEB on 11th June 2015?

#### **Response:**

The development of the PSPO proposal was absorbed into Officer's day to day activities and no such calculation exists. The report was only deferred, not withdraw, and will return to CEB. Therefore any time spent on preparation has not been wasted or aborted time.

6. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Sinclair

Will the Council be issuing a formal response to Liberty's critique of the City Centre PSPO and commenting on its threat to start legal proceedings against the Council had CEB voted in favour of the PSPO on 11th June 2015?

**Response:**

No. It was merely an opinion. Legal Officers time will be better spent on addressing any valid criticisms within the body of the CEB report, rather than issuing a counter opinion.

**Board member for Culture and Communities**

7. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Simm

Will the Portfolio Holder agree to rescind the notice issued to the East Oxford Community Association to quit the Community Centre given that the new management committee have met all the Council's requirements?

**Response:**

The Notice to Quit to East Oxford Community Association will not be rescinded as it is not apparent that all the requirements have been met. I am not going to provide detail of this in a public forum.

Instead efforts will be focused on supporting the Reference Group which the Council has established to support a positive future for the Centre and for the people that it should serve.

The Reference Group includes representatives from the Community Association, the current users of the Community Centre, local Councillors, tenants of the Community Centre, the Chinese Community Centre, the Games Hall and the local Residents Association. Its work is supported by City Council officers and Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action.

The purpose of the Reference Group is to facilitate the process of identifying the needs and aspirations of the local community to inform the development of the Centre, including design, and to support the process of consultation with that community. It is an opportunity for reflection and forward planning.

I am confident that by engaging with the wide range of opinions, interests, activities and talent the future of the Community Centre will be both supported and enhanced.

In the immediate future, the Council will support the continued use of the Centre for all its current activities, and will welcome new suggestions, proposals and initiatives. This process is already underway. By working together we can achieve a thriving Centre meeting the needs if the community it serves.

## **Board member for Housing**

### **8. From Councillor Hollick to Councillor Seamons**

The council is already missing its targets on keeping down the number of people sleeping rough before the effect of County Council cuts has started to be felt. What urgent action will the board member take to prevent people having to sleep rough?

#### **Response:**

Although rough sleeping numbers continue to be high in the city, our last four street counts show a downward trend (Sep 2014 counted 31; Nov 2014 counted 26; Feb counted 20; May 2015 counted 18). This is evidence of the good work that is done by services and in particular the outreach team that is funded by Oxford City Council. The outreach service was restructured following re-commissioning and the new service has been in place since 1st April 2015.

We commissioned emergency provision – The ‘sit-up service’ – in O’Hanlon House in July 2014, providing 10 additional spaces for rough sleepers to come off the streets. This will remain in place initially until 31st March 2016, when it will be reviewed.

The adult homeless pathway is currently in live tender. This is led by the County Council and the City has had limited input into the development of the service specification, but will be involved in tender evaluation. In the meantime we will continue contingency planning work using the available resource and are currently modelling options.

### **9. From Councillor Hollick to Councillor Seamons**

The HMO registration targets were missed this year, despite the target representing only half the number of HMOs in the city, and the compliance rates with license conditions is very low. What is the board member doing to address this poor performance?

#### **Response:**

The target for the number of licensed HMOs was only missed because of processing issues brought about because of delays due to legal requirements and steps have been taken to reduce the backlog that built up in the system.

Compliance with licence conditions and the requirement to obtain a licence is the responsibility of landlords and it is their poor performance that the Council has been challenging, with 33 successful legal cases taken in the last 12 months resulting in fines of £110,000.

The HMO Licensing Review has highlighted the significant improvements made by regulating a sector that nationally has high levels of non-compliance and the review recognises that further work is required, which is why we are currently consulting on renewing the scheme for a further 5 years to enable the Council to continue the solid progress it has made so far.

### **10. From Councillor Hollick to Councillor Seamons**

Can the board member explain why we are yet again failing to meet our target for delivery of affordable housing? Could they explain what use, if any, has been made of compulsory purchase powers to make up for the failure of the private sector to deliver affordable housing?

#### **Response:**

There has been some slippage in the Council’s development programme which has resulted in a number of units not being delivered at the end of March 2015. The 14/15 delivery targets were

therefore not met, but these units will be handed over by September, and will result in the 15/16 affordable housing delivery targets being exceeded, as they are now falling into that financial year.

The Council has not yet used compulsory purchase powers to help in the delivery of affordable housing, but could consider this, for certain sites, as an option, if and when appropriate. In such instances, the City Executive Board would be required to approve this.

#### 11. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Seamons

The recent budget increased the tax relief offered to those who rent out spare rooms in their homes. Given that this continues to present one of the lowest cost options for those seeking full or part-time accommodation in Oxford, what is the Portfolio Holder doing to encourage home-owners with spare rooms to offer them for rent?

#### **Response:**

The Council provides a clear strategic commitment to consider private sector and 'renting rooms' as a housing solution. This is identified in the Homelessness Strategy 2013-17. This strategy includes a priority of: 'Preventing and Responding to Homelessness'. Actions to meet this priority are: 'Increase access to private rented sector homes'.

The Council also undertook a marketing campaign in October 2013 to boost the private rental sector as part of the solution to finding a suitable home for people in housing need. The campaign included publicity in the newspapers, websites, Social Media, bus shelters, schools etc. As a result, some family accommodation was made available rather than individual 'rent a room' opportunities.

We are keen to pursue all options to maximise housing opportunities, so following receipt of this question, officers have added additional and up to date information on this scheme to the Housing pages on the Council's website, with links to Government and Shelter websites for more advice and information.

### **Board member for Leisure, Parks and Sport**

#### 12. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Rowley

Following the tragic drowning of 15 year old Mohammed Hussain near Donnington Bridge in 2012, former Green Iffley Wards Councillor David Williams put in several requests to install lifebelts on the Meadow Lane side of the Thames, funded from his ward member grant. Can the Portfolio Holder explain why the offer to fund these lifebelts was lost in the system and, despite reminders, still hasn't been acted upon?

#### **Response:**

The availability of lifebelts is checked on a regular basis, but there is a significant problem of vandalism which results in replacements often being required and gaps therefore occurring in their availability. We will re-assess the current number and placing of lifebelts and will also work with the EA and other partners to review the management of risk from drowning. Sadly, the most recent death occurred in a side channel where life belts would not generally be expected and re-emphasises the need for good provision of swimming lessons and lessons at school covering the hazards presented by the many watercourses around the city.

#### 13. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Rowley

The latest tragic drowning of 13 year old AownDogar has once again raised awareness of the lack of lifebelts on some stretches of the Thames. Will the Portfolio Holder assure me that the long promised life belts on the Meadow Lane side will be installed as a matter of urgency, and will the

portfolio holder also instruct officers to conduct a review of lifebelts along all our waterways to ensure that there are no other gaps in provision?

**Response:**

The availability of lifebelts is checked on a regular basis, but there is a significant problem of vandalism which results in replacements often being required and gaps therefore occurring in their availability. We will re-assess the current number and placing of lifebelts and will also work with the EA and other partners to review the management of risk from drowning. Sadly, the most recent death occurred in a side channel where life belts would not generally be expected and re-emphasises the need for good provision of swimming lessons and lessons at school covering the hazards presented by the many watercourses around the city.

## **Board member for Planning, Transport and Regulatory Service**

### **14. From Councillor Gotch to Councillor Hollingsworth**

You will hear an address relating to the petition to Council from Rob Whitty of Lower Wolvercote. Will the Portfolio Holder use his best endeavours to ensure that CIL funds are made available to contribute towards the total cost of an effective sound barrier between the A34 and houses in Home Close, Rosamund Rd and Elmthorpe Rd in Lower Wolvercote? Funding is also being sought from the County Council and central government. Section 106 funding should also be attached to any planning consents for the Mill Site and Northern Gateway to protect those sites against A34 noise. Noise levels in Lower Wolvercote from the A34 exceed EEC and UK legal limits.

**Response:**

I agree that environmental noise is a serious concern and that noise barriers could be worth considering as a means of reducing exposure to some properties, though funding or a power to require them are beyond the City Council's remit.

Whilst sympathetic to the request for CIL funding, the principle underlying CIL funding is that it should be used to support development rather than to remedy existing problems like this. As the A34 is part of the national trunk road network it should be the responsibility of Highways England to fund a barrier, if one is required (although if it is not in their current spending programme, then this could be an uphill task). I doubt that the County Council will be willing to contribute as it isn't responsible for the A34.

We have already identified a number of schemes to be funded from CIL receipts, indeed the cost of the schemes on the CIL list already outweighs the amount of CIL that we have collected or expect to collect. If we were to spend CIL receipts on an A34 sound barrier it would inevitably mean that another scheme elsewhere would miss out on funding. (This proposal isn't on our CIL Regulation 123 list at present)

The decisions on the CIL spending programme are taken, by all Councillors, as part of annual budget setting process.

The CIL regulations do however also specify that 15% of CIL receipts from development in areas without a parish council (such as Wolvercote) have to be spent in accordance with the wishes of the community under the neighbourhood funding element of CIL. If the local community considers the sound barrier to be a key priority, then this project could be a candidate for funding from the 'neighbourhood' CIL pot.

It should be borne in mind that infrastructure projects cannot be funded through both CIL and S106 as this would constitute double charging, so if the City Council did decide to allocate some CIL

funds towards the A34 barrier this would preclude us from seeking S106 contributions towards the same project.

In any event the Council can only require planning obligations or impose planning conditions that are necessary to resolve some issue that otherwise makes the development unacceptable. It cannot use them to remedy a pre-existing problem or issue not created by the proposed development. The Council also cannot impose requirements that the developer is unable to comply with.

#### 15. From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Hollingsworth

What attempts were made to try and find a developer to build housing - rather than a hotel - on the site of the Cooper Callas building on Paradise Street?

#### **Response:**

This is a privately owned site, and if a landowner/prospective landowner wishes to develop the site for a hotel or any other uses they will submit the proposal and the City Council will consider any such application on its merits against the policies that apply.

The relevant policies are contained within the West End AAP which identified sites for development (Appendix 2 of the AAP). The Cooper Callas site was identified as being potentially suitable for flats, offices, food and drink uses and/or arts and cultural uses but this is not a site allocation. As such these identified sites are not restricted to the indicative uses. Other uses may also be suitable.

. The AAP seeks to deliver a renaissance of the West End area and to deliver high quality development that matches Oxford's international reputation. An important element of the AAP was for sites to be mixed use which ensure vibrancy area throughout the day and support a wider range of activities. The AAP sought to encourage not just office and residential development but other types of development such as commercial leisure and tourist related development. As such the Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 site allocation for primarily residential on this site was removed and the AAP brought in more flexibility in potential uses on any site in the West End. The AAP itself was adopted by the Council in 2008.

In terms of policy the West End Area Action Plan (Policy WE26) states that hotels are a suitable use throughout the West End and therefore would be appropriate on the Cooper Callas site in principle (subject to design matters and other policy matters). The Oxford Hotel and Short Stay Accommodation Futures published in 2007 was important evidence to justify the policy approach of encouraging more hotels in the West End. It showed that there was a high demand for hotel rooms in Oxford and strong potential for growth in demand for hotel and short stay accommodation in Oxford. It summarised "the buoyancy of the hotel, hostel and serviced apartment sector and keen commitment of operators and developers to be part of Oxford's future, represent a real opportunity for the sector to make a positive contribution to the development of this world class city."

The AAP also requires sites to be mixed use so we would expect more than one use to be developed on the site.

A planning application for a hotel development has not been received although a public exhibition of potential development has recently been held.

#### 16. From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Hollingsworth –

Has the Oxford Association of Hotels and Guest Houses been consulted with, regarding the plan to greatly increase the number of hotel rooms in the city centre?

#### **Response:**

An increase in hotel bed spaces was agreed in Policy CS32 of the Core Strategy, which was adopted in 2011 after a five year consultation and development process. The Policy CS32 identified the West End as an area where new hotel accommodation will be supported. The West End Area Action Plan (AAP) Policy WE26 and supporting text provides some further direction on new hotel accommodation. Both the Core Strategy and the West End AAP policies are derived from the evidence within The Oxford Hotel and Short Stay Accommodation Futures Study produced in 2007.

The Oxford Association of Hotels and Guest Houses were not consulted specifically on the West End AAP but they were consulted on the Core Strategy at three stages (Issues and Options in June 2006, Further Preferred Options in March 2008 and Proposed Submission in September 2008). The Association did not respond on any occasion.

The consultants of The Oxford Hotel and Short Stay Accommodation Futures Study which informed the West End AAP and the Core Strategy hotel policies, also directly contacted local hotels and guest houses. Research for the Study included:

- A review of national hotel performance and development trends;
- An audit of the existing supply of hotel and short-stay accommodation and assessment of recent and planned future changes to the city's accommodation supply in terms of closures and planned developments;
- Interviews with managers and owners of hotels and short-stay accommodation in and around the city to assess recent and current performance levels and trends;
- An assessment of factors that could influence future demand for hotel and short stay accommodation, including the impact on demand of planned major development projects;
- The preparation of forecasts for the potential growth in hotel accommodation demand over 5, 10, 15 and 20 year periods;
- Consultations with a sample of hotel developers to assess their interest in developing in Oxford.

The study was supported by Tourism South East whose own documents also informed the study.

## **Board member for Young People, Schools and Skills**

### 17. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Kennedy

The Council allocated £250,000, an increase of £150,000 over the original scheme, to the Equity Loans Scheme in the February 2015 budget to support the employment of senior teachers in city schools. How many loans have been made since the scheme started in July 2013?

#### **Response:**

No loans have been granted to date under the criteria of the original scheme which was focussed on new appointments to 'head and senior leadership' posts. Additional funding to extend the criteria was included as part of the Council's approved budget for 2015/16. The revised Equity Loans Scheme, which is being launched this month, now allows housing assistance to be provided to all existing and newly appointed teachers, in permanent leadership posts, within target schools. Opening up the scheme in this way recognises the importance of having settled staff in these key roles as this in turn, helps to drive educational improvement.

## **Deputy Leader of the Council, Board Member for Finance, Corporate Asset Management and Public Health**

### 18. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Turner

At the April Audit and Governance Committee, the City's internal auditors, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, criticised the management of the Rose Hill Community Centre building project. There were substantial criticisms of the procurement process and the project management which ultimately led to an overspend of almost £500,000 or about 12% of the original budget. It was worrying to read in the June CEB report on the Tower Blocks refurbishment project that again a large increase in budget is being requested. An extra £1.75m was requested to increase the budget to over £20m. Using £700,000 of unallocated S106 affordable housing contributions towards the Council's new build programme to help fund an agreed project, not provide a single extra unit of social housing, seems to be contrary to the aim of increasing housing supply. Are you satisfied that sufficient measures are now in place to ensure that such significant overspends do not become a regular feature of City finance reports?

#### **Response:**

First of all, it would not be right to view this as an "overspend (this would be the case if contract costs had been exceeded), but rather, it is a matter of fact that the Council incorrectly estimated the cost of the new building, not least as the specification in the end agreed upon was higher than that originally proposed. A similar point applies in relation to the Tower Blocks. The report from PWC was instigated by officers as a learning point for future projects. Whilst there were a number of recommendations included within this report these were not viewed as criticisms but areas upon which the council could improve its approach towards project management. Indeed at the time of the increase in costs on the Rose Hill Project the Capital Gateway process had only just commenced and the Gateway itself would not necessarily have led to a different outcome regarding the increased cost on this project which was caused mainly by external factors outside the council's control. The reason for the increased cost on the tower blocks has been well documented in the report to City Exec Board and with regard to the issue of the S106 grant the Head of Finance advised at the June CEB that this was more down to a confusing paragraph in the report, rather than an inappropriate use of S106 monies as is suggested here. The Tower Block

report was attempting to say that unallocated section 106 receipts held by the Council for affordable housing would be used to fund such expenditure in the Council's existing capital programme currently funded by capital receipts. The released capital receipts would in turn be used to fund the budget increase in the Tower Block programme. Whilst price variations, especially on contracts of this size cannot be ruled out in future I am satisfied that the embedding of the Capital Gateway process for project management will provide a robust process by which the council can as far as possible budget, procure, identify, mitigate and report issues and provide overall good governance to capital projects that it undertakes..

19. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Turner –

What is the Portfolio Holder doing to address the slippage in the Capital Programme which has again occurred despite the introduction of the Gateway Process?

**Response:**

The overall slippage on the capital budget was around £12million in comparison to the original budget of £63million. This primarily related to three schemes, Rose Hill Community Centre, Affordable Homes Programme and Vehicles. The average spend on capital over the last 9 years has been around £20million and the delivery of £48.7 million in 2014/15 is significantly above this and represents the largest investment in the city in as many years. The Council will continue to embed and improve its monitoring through the Capital Gateway process which the Council is continually improving. However, the councillor should note that some delays (particularly where external contractors are involved or the conclusion of financial agreements is required) are beyond the Council's control.

20. From Councillor David Thomas to Councillor Turner

Can the portfolio holder explain why the HRA budget of 2013/14 underestimated depreciation by a worrying 50% to the tune of £3m, contributing substantially to the fact the HRA account was only able to support the Capital programme by £10.1m rather than the anticipated £16.8m?

**Response:**

The question refers to 2013/14 but I suspect means 2014/15.

Please note that the movement in depreciation does not have a detrimental impact on the availability of resources for revenue contributions to capital as inferred in the question. Through a series of allowable accounting adjustments they both represent resources available to fund HRA capital expenditure in the year.

This is because depreciation in the HRA whilst initially budgeted for in accordance with proper accounting practices is effectively overridden at year-end with the actual Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) figure the Government has pre-determined and insisted we show as part of the self-financing valuation agreement first implemented in April 2012. This is best exemplified by the tables below:

<b>2014/15</b>	<b>£'000's</b>
HRA Capital Programme Expenditure	21,134
<b>Total Spend</b>	<b>21,134</b>
<b>Sources of Finance</b>	
Major Repairs Reserve	8,704
Revenue Contribution to Capital	10,109
Grants and Contributions	221
Capital Receipts	2,100
<b>Total Financing</b>	<b>21,134</b>

<b>2014/15</b>	<b>£'000's</b>
<b>HRA Extract</b>	
Depreciation	8,704
Revenue Contributions to Capital	10,109

The highlighted lines within Sources of Finance are the two elements identified within the HRA, namely depreciation and revenue contributions to capital.

Therefore, there was no need to provide £16.8m revenue contributions to capital as it was not required, we only needed the £10.109m as shown above. What has been undertaken is the balance of unused resources in the HRA was transferred to an HRA reserve to finance slippages in the 2014/15 HRA capital programme that will now take place in future financial years. So in effect all the 2014/15 revenue funding for capital will indeed follow the capital spend as and when it is incurred.

#### 21. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Turner

Given that you have agreed to roll over unspent ward member budgets into the next financial year, why have you refused Scrutiny Committee's request to rollover unspent grants money? (I am referring to the underspend to the small grants and social inclusion funds which amount to about 25% of the total.)

#### **Response:**

Underspends are considered by City Executive Board each year in the context of the financial outturn and approval given to carry unspent balances is then considered. In particular, projects work can be carried forward, but that is not the case here. Unfortunately not all underspends can be carried forward since the underspends are required to mitigate overspends or other emerging budgetary pressures such as the increased cost of recycling highlighted in the 2014/15 outturn report. We will monitor the call upon our grants budgets throughout the year and see if variation to the budget is required. The Councillor will note the long-standing commitment of the administration

to supporting community and voluntary organisations in Oxford and the fact that, even in times of austerity, budgets have been maintained and indeed increased.

#### 22. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Turner

Will the Portfolio Holder (a) join me in congratulating the organisers of the Cowley Road Carnival for another excellent event and (b) commit to extending their funding at the same time as (c) looking at ways to increase the City Council's contribution to costs?

#### **Response:**

First of all, I enjoyed attending the carnival with my family and would absolutely agree with the congratulations to the organisers, as well as the council staff and other public services who helped make the event such a success. The council committed a three year programme of funding which ends this year. This funding was put in place to give the event organisers time to develop a sustainable carnival model; they are due to present their business plan to the council's events team this August, and we will obviously need to consider the outcome of this meeting. We want the Carnival to continue to flourish – at the same time, other potential sources of finance obviously need to do their bit as well. I find it puzzling that the suggestion from the outset is that the Council should look to increase its contribution to costs from the outset, and that does not reflect the good sense of the councillor in most financial matters, nor does it demonstrate an awareness of the financial situation of local government at the moment.

#### 23. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Turner

Can you tell Council whether there are still plans to change the name of the Panel Room to the Freeman's Room, at an estimated cost of between £15k and £20k?

#### **Response:**

The change of name forms part of the wider re-signage plan for the Town Hall, which is likely to take place over the course of the next year, as part of the general maintenance and refurbishment programme. The cost of the change of name for the Panel Room itself will be very small.

### **Leader of the Council, Board Member for Corporate Strategy and Economic Development**

#### 24. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Price

The Town hall café is I gather losing money. I understand that service areas are charged for any refreshments, including water provided in Council rooms. Do you not think that water, as an important health provision, should be provided in every room where a meeting is to be held as a matter of course and without charge to the service areas holding such a meeting? Is it true as it appears that these charges are subsidising the operation of the cafe?

#### **Response:**

Water is provided free of charge in all rooms when requested.

#### 25. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Price – officer exec decisions

The Forward Plan for July 2015 to April 2016 has three items listed as Delegated Officer Executive Key decisions. Two involve the delegated authority to make decisions resulting in the Council incurring expenditure of more than £500,000, the third has a significant effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards. In the interest of transparency in

decision making, can the portfolio holder tell Council where the decisions will be publicised when made?

**Response:**

These decisions, when made, will be published on the council's web site and can be viewed on the "Council and Democracy" page under the "Decisions" tab.

**26. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Price –**

Each councillor is allocated £1,500 per year to spend on anything that improves the economic, social or environmental well-being of their ward. At the end of 2013, Labour Councillors had failed to disperse £27,848. This situation deteriorated further during 2014/15, with Labour Councillors dispersing just £25,896 (54%) out of a budget of £48,000, meaning that at the end of 2014/15 Labour Councillors were sitting on a staggering £49,953 - a whole year's budget!. As of 2015/16, the Labour Councillors have an available budget of just short of £100,000 at their disposal. What assurances can the Leader of the Labour Group give that this money will be used for the purpose it was intended and actually dispersed to those in need, and will he commit to setting a target that his group's councillors will have a total carry-over of under £5,000 at the end of 2015/16.

**Response:**

Members have discretion to use their ward budgets as and when they wish. It would be unwise to spend public money if there are no projects for which the funds would be appropriate.

**27. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Price**

Can Councillor Price please disclose the consultation strategy officers will adopt in the redrafting the City Centre PSPO legislation to avoid the repetition of an 11th hour threat of a legal challenge from Liberty.

**Response:**

Officers are currently developing their advice on the points in the letter from Liberty and a fresh report will be the subject of a Scrutiny review and CEB decision in September or October.

**28. From Councillor Hollick to Councillor Price**

Would the board member support the idea of the city centre ambassadors being able to provide first aid to members of the public, and will they arrange for providing publicly accessible first aid kits and training for the ambassadors in first aid and in using the publicly accessible defibrillators?

**Response:**

This is a very interesting proposal and it will be discussed with the City Centre manager and town team.

**29. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Price**

The National Pensioners Convention has created a Dignity Code and is inviting councils to sign up to it. The purpose of this Dignity Code is to uphold the rights and maintain the personal dignity of older people, within the context of ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of those who are increasingly less able to care for themselves or to properly conduct their affairs. This Code recognises that certain practices and actions are unacceptable in the care of older people. (Full details of the Code are available on line via the National Pensioners Convention.)

Could the portfolio holder indicate if they are willing to sign up as a supporter of the Code of Dignity and to uphold these standards in those services provided to older people?

**Response:**

Yes.

30. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Price

How can the Council expect other landlords to charge reasonable rents when it is letting out the two bedroom flat in its own Town Hall (previous let for an affordable rent to staff) for the advertised price of £1,000 per week? (Note this is about three times the average rent for a two bedroom flat in Oxford).

**Response:**

The Town Hall flat is a General Fund asset. Housing Services considered it for letting but felt that it was unsuitable for their purposes. The flat was therefore let through a Landlord and Tenant Act tenancy to J C Penny Ltd for £15,000 per annum. The company refurbished the flat and is now letting it on the open market.