

To: Council

Date: 20 February 2017

Title of Report: Public addresses and questions that relate to matters for decision – as submitted by the speaker

Introduction

1. One address made by a member of the public to the Council on the budget, registered by the deadline in the Constitution, is below.
2. This report will be republished after the Council meeting as part of the minutes pack. This will list the full text of speeches delivered as submitted, summaries of speeches delivered which differ significantly from those submitted, and any further responses.

Address by Neo - Speech regarding Green Party Budget Amendment to re-open Lucy Faithfull

Thank you for the opportunity this evening to speak to you about homelessness in Oxford and the importance of re-opening Lucy Faithfull House.

My name is Neo. I am homeless, and I speak tonight not just for myself but on behalf of all those sleeping rough who – for various reasons - are unable to access local services.

For the last few weeks myself and local volunteers have been housing and taking care of homeless people at Iffley Open House. The public support has been immense and we feel that it's time for a change.

I have a simple question for you tonight: why do the doors to Lucy Faithful house remain locked whilst people sleep in doorways?

I want to share with a few statements from residents and volunteers at Iffley Open House:

Lewis Lock says *"I have one week left as a resident of Iffley Open House. Please, please vote for the budget amendment to re-open Lucy Faithfull House. We need more homeless accommodation not less"*.

Luke Bolt says *"I'm a homeless resident of Iffley Open House. I'm asking you to vote to re-open Lucy Faithfull House. You can make a real difference to people like me with just one vote."*

Miranda Shaw – one of our volunteers says *"I believe from my experience as a local resident of Oxford that we have a serious responsibility to do everything we possibly*

can to provide safe spaces for all people to be able to live in. Whether that is refugees, local people who have hit hard times, young, old - anyone. We have a responsibility - all of us - as a community to do everything that we can to look after one another. After all, homelessness can happen to any of us."

I know that reopening Lucy Faithfull house is the right thing to do if we have the possibility of doing that. We must do everything we can collectively do to support our community in whatever ways we can.

If local people and students can house 20 homeless people for 2 months, through creative solutions then, surely the council can come up with a creative solution or just agree to use the money that has been ring-fenced for this sort of emergency for the purpose it is intended for.

After all, what do we pay our taxes for - if not to provide support structures for those who need them? We know that people want to support each other from the overwhelming amounts of donations, volunteers, money and time that people have given from Oxfordshire, London and further afield. Everyone wants you to do the right thing. You have a mandate from the public to use this money in this way. You have the money to do it. So do it!

We know that a short amount of time can make a huge difference to people to be able to change their patterns or find a different path. Having a safe place to call home, to be able to apply for work and to get a bank account could be the difference between starting a new life and staying on the streets and then surviving or not surviving.

Former city councillor Elise Benjamin – another of our volunteers says: *"I have witnessed first-hand the difference having somewhere warm and dry can have on someone's life. Simply by providing a roof over someone's head they are in a better position to move on with their lives, finding work, accommodation, and going back to full time education, as is the case with residents at Iffley Open House. I have also seen evidence that people are being made homeless on an almost daily basis in Oxford"*.

Iffley Open House will close soon and we face a race against time to ensure that no-one ends up back on the streets. This is why we need more accommodation, not less.

Oxford has a growing homelessness problem and urgent action is needed to provide some shelter in order to help people get back on their feet. By re-opening Lucy Faithfull House you will be sending out a message that Oxford cares about people over profits. Rejecting the Green budget amendment will simply confirm what many residents fear, that you would rather sell off the Lucy Faithfull site than provide vital support for people in need."

Please do the right thing and support the amendment to re-open Lucy Faithfull House.