

To: Council
Date: 6 February 2017
Title of Report: Questions on Notice from members of Council and responses from the Board Members and Leader republished after the meeting to include supplementary questions and responses

Introduction

1. Questions submitted by members of Council to the Board members and Leader of the Council, by the deadline in the Constitution are listed below in the order they will be taken at the meeting.
2. Responses are included where available.
3. Questioners can ask one supplementary question of the councillor answering the original question.
4. This report has been republished after the Council meeting to include supplementary questions and responses as part of the minutes pack.
5. Unfamiliar terms are briefly explained in the glossary or explanatory footnotes.

Questions and responses

Board member for A Clean and Green Oxford

1. From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Tanner – switch to green energy

With the prices of green (100% renewable) energy contracts becoming more price competitive with fossil fuel-derived energy, will the portfolio holder commit to making sure that the council switches to these contracts at the earliest possible date, especially given the commitment in his motion to reduce the Council's carbon emissions?

Response

With a finite budget our approach is to invest in reducing energy consumption and the cost of energy to the Council.. The greenest energy is the energy that isn't used. The next priority is local renewable energy generation. We pursue these options rather than pay a significant premium for green electricity through the National Grid. The Council is now generating c. 750,000kWh of clean electricity per year from our own PV arrays - 8% of our current electricity demand.

The CEB report on energy procurement in February 2016 outlined this approach, and also set a level for the premium the Council would be prepared to pay at 2% above standard price. The price premium for green electricity has been coming down and Officers are tracking this, and whenever new contracts are due for renewal, request prices for standard electricity and certificated green electricity (ie. having Renewable Energy Guarantee of Origin - REGO status) - if no more than 2% premium then this will inform the decision to be made by the Head of Financial Services and the Lead Member.

2. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Tanner – Bonn Square

What measures are being taken to improve cleanliness and street lighting in Bonn Square?

Response

Bonn Square is washed weekly and litter picked 5-6 times a day. In addition, a deep clean is undertaken every 6 months, normally in February (subject to the weather) and August. The next deep clean will be undertaken within the next 3-4 weeks.

So far as the lighting is concerned, this was specially designed when Bonn Square was rebuilt and there has been a recent component failure that has temporarily reduced the lighting level in the area. Replacement parts have been difficult to source but we have now found what we need and all of the lights should be repaired and fully functional in the week commencing 6th February 2017.

3. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Tanner - parking charges for diesel vehicles

It is now recognised that diesel-fuelled vehicles are responsible for much of the highly hazardous very small particulates polluting the air in the city. Would you consider following the example of Westminster Council in raising parking charges for diesel vans and cars to improve the air quality in Oxford?

Response

Yes - the City Council is committed to encouraging more sustainable modes of transport and will ensure that the Westminster initiative is scrutinised when the pilot has been concluded. Since the first Oxford Transport Strategy in 1972 this Council has always recognised the importance of encouraging vehicles out of the city and the latest proposal to expand Seacourt Park & Ride reaffirms our commitment to this policy.

4. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Tanner – turning off engines

Poor air quality is a significant concern in the City and in St Clements. S.42 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 sets out the legal requirement for drivers to turn off engines in stationary vehicles on the public highway. It is the responsibility of councils, not the police, to enforce this. Following the example of Islington, should leaflets be produced by the City Council to make this clear to drivers?

Response

Whatever steps we take to tackle pollution in Oxford must be effective and focus on what will do the most good. Encouraging drivers to turn off their engines is certainly part of this package but not necessarily the most crucial part. However I will investigate and see what can be done. Our main focus is on creating a Zero Emission Zone with the County Council and encouraging the take-up of electric vehicles.

Supplementary question

Would you agree that coaches running their engines in St Giles were causing air pollution and should these be asked to turn their engines off, perhaps with the threat of penalty fines?

Supplementary Response

These created a noisy environment as well, although the air quality in St Giles was not particularly bad even with the coaches. It was a question of where to best target resources but we will consider what action to take.

5. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Tanner – air quality measurements

What air quality measurements will be taken to provide evidence of impact on air quality once the new car parking (*at Westgate*) is opened?

Response

We have carried out air quality monitoring around the Westgate Shopping Centre for a number of years utilising several diffusion tubes at eight locations. Air quality monitoring will continue at and around the New Westgate Shopping Centre when it reopens. Full results of the air quality monitoring around the Westgate and across the rest of Oxford can be seen here: <https://oxfordshire.air-quality.info/>

If levels of pollution are above safe levels the City Council will insist that action is taken to bring those levels below the legal maxima.

Board member for Community Safety

6. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Sinclair – PSPO review

When will the council advise on the PSPO review and what opportunities will there be to partake in deliberations on the report?

Response

Following my press statement last week I am seeking to bring forward the CEB report to April from its current scheduled date of May. Councillors can input into the report through the scrutiny process and via briefings to Groups. We are writing to the consultation respondents to inform them of our proposed way forward.

Board member for Culture and Communities

7. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Simm - Chinese Community Advice Centre's grant

Many here will have enjoyed the Chinese New Year celebrations which were somewhat marred by the cut in the Chinese Community Advice Centre's grant. What is the reason for this?

Response

There were a number of reasons why funding was discontinued for the Oxfordshire Chinese Community & Advice Centre at the end of the 2010/11 three year grant programme. At that point, all funded organisations were written to reminding them that their funding ended 31.03.11 and that there would be a new programme from April 2011.

It was a time when we were also waiting for decisions on funding cuts from the Coalition Governments Comprehensive Spending Review.

The decision not to fund the Oxfordshire Chinese Community & Advice Centre (OCCAC) for their advice work from April 2011 was due to the level of competition we had from other organisations bidding for grants.

Between 2012/13 to 2014/15 the OCCAC received a total of £6,020 through the open bidding and small grant programmes for a variety of health and active community initiatives plus contributions towards room hire for their New Year celebrations. We have not received any application since.

8. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Simm – EOCC capacity

Based on information provided by the architects involved in looking at options for the East Oxford Community Centre redevelopment, supplemented by my own research, I have calculated that the Council's preferred Option 3 (which involves building a small new two-storey building behind the existing Fusion Arts building and selling off the north side of the EOCC site, the East Oxford Games Hall and Film Oxford) will result in a 45% loss of internal gross floor area for community use (or more if the loss of external space is also taken into account).

How does this square with the Council's aims as set out in the recent consultation that it wants to 'increase usage', 'offer a better multifunctional capacity' and appeal to a 'wide variety of groups' ?

Response

Whilst Option 3 would represent a net loss of floor space over the 3 existing community facilities, the intention is that the re-provided facilities could accommodate all of the existing activities (excluding the sports hall uses which could be accommodated in existing local sports facilities) in an improved environment, offering far greater flexibility and comfort of use.

Although the consultation supported this option, we are working in partnership with key cultural organisations to see if the scheme could attract funding from the Arts Council which could enable an amended scheme to be developed.

Supplementary question

Will there be time at the next reference group meeting to discuss 'option 3+'?

Supplementary Response

We are in discussion with two groups to see if we can raise funding to provide more community space and develop an imaginative scheme to make best use of the site and provide an efficient, enjoyable and usable space for the community. We are continuing to discuss proposals with the community association.

Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services

9. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Brown– contractors’ taxation

What has been done to assess the extent of the Council's potential exposure under the proposed changes to tax arrangements for off-payroll working in the public sector (Schedule 1 of the Draft Finance Act 2017)?

How many contractors are working off-payroll on engagement to the Council (either directly or via agencies) and who may need to be assessed to see whether these provisions apply? To what extent has such assessment been completed?

What approach is the Council taking to ensuring compliance with the proposed legislation and how far are measures in place to ensure such compliance?

What additional costs are anticipated as a result of the Council complying with this legislation (including, but not limited to the cost of additional Employer's National Insurance)?

Response

The consultation on the legislation for HMRC proposed changes for “off-payroll” working in the public sector (IR35) only closed at the end of January 2017. Whilst the legislation is not yet finalised, it is expected to come into effect from 6th April 2017.

At the moment council officers are still working out how this legislation will impact on the council and specifically the potential number of contractors working for us who would be covered by the new legislative provisions. Officers in HR, Payroll, Procurement, Legal and Reed our temporary staffing provider are currently working together on this.

Officers have attended several seminars run by industry professionals to improve understanding of the implications for us. We anticipate that by the end of February 2017 we should be clear about which of our contractors are affected, what our ongoing procedure will be for managing these circumstances and any potential financial implications. What we know at present is that the majority of our “off-payroll” workers are placed via an agency, and we anticipate that this legislation will only affect a minority of these people.

Supplementary question

Given that this can have serious consequences for us, can we be assured that officers will explore in detail potential exposure to risks because of our agency staffing arrangements?

Supplementary Response

Yes but we consider the risk low as we do not have many agency staff.

Board member for Housing

10. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Rowley – Gatehouse grant

The Gatehouse in St Giles had an average of 335 visits each week during January. 49% of the visitors were rough sleepers and this percentage is increasing every quarter. The Gatehouse offers food, clothing, referral onwards and general support

unconditionally. The Gatehouse anticipates a deficit this year of £17,000 in excess of income, owing to a decrease in income from a number of sources including the City Council. At the same time as the number of homeless people has increased, staff costs have had to increase to cope with additional regulation and supervision. This is despite the fact that the service is totally reliant on the commitment of 300-400 volunteers.

Will the Portfolio Holder undertake to look at how the £5,580 grant to the Gatehouse can be increased?

Response

The Council balances a number of priorities through its commissioning framework for rough sleeping in order to achieve the most favourable outcomes for homeless persons. A key priority for commissioning going forward is to prioritise bed provision in response to cuts from the County Council. It is therefore likely that many organisations currently funded will see reductions in the coming years.

The Council reduced the funding to the Gatehouse through mutual agreement with the organisation from £9,502 per year in 2013/14 to £5,860 per year from 2014/15 on, and it is not proposed that this is increased. A report to City Executive Board on 9th March 2017 will set out spending plans for 2017/18.

The Council is not one of the main funding sources for the Gatehouse, and their most recent accounts show the charity has assets in excess of £1m and around £200,000 cashable savings in reserve, which suggests that they are able to absorb this annual revenue deficit and continue the good work that they undertake.

Supplementary question

Were you aware that despite the apparently healthy position of the Gatehouse, they do not have enough reserves to continue long-term?

Supplementary Response

The grant was based on the accounts supplied but if the position is worse than we understood then this can be reviewed for the final report due for the Executive Board's consideration on 9 March. The Gatehouse is welcome to contribute to that and come to speak.

11. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley – Home Building Fund

How is the Council responding to the opportunities offered by the Government's new Home Building Fund (announced October 2016) which is intended to help, amongst others, small and community builders and regeneration specialists?

Response

The Home Building Fund is intended to provide development finance for private sector organisations to undertake development of five homes or more. As both the Council and its wholly owned housing company are classified as public sector organisations, we are not eligible to apply for loans from this funding source which in any case would be at commercial rates and therefore more expensive than finance raised from the Public Works Loan Board. However use of this fund will be considered when we are working with private sector partners on development and regeneration schemes along with other funding sources, to maximise viability where possible.

12. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley – Community Housing Fund

How is the Council responding to the opportunities offered by the Government's new Community Housing Fund (announced December 2016) which is intended to help, amongst others, community-led housing projects?

Response

The City Council has been awarded a total of £54,859 in Community Housing Fund, and we are now considering how this might be most effectively used.

Discussions have taken place with the DCLG to establish further guidance, and an appropriate specialist community-led housing adviser has been allocated to explore options. Following this, Officers will then formulate an informed approach and communications plan.

13. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley - community based housing

With the formation of our Housing Company, the availability of Council owned sites, and funding to support community-based housing schemes, will the Council be embracing this moment to promote and champion a pilot community-based housing project and work with Oxford's community-led housing experts.

Response

The award of £54,859 is not a significant amount of funding, given the affordability issues and high land values in Oxford. As ever, site availability is the key issue and main barrier to development. Given this, the Council will need to work in partnership to maximise the opportunity that this funding presents and will work with stakeholders and community-led housing groups to deliver affordable and tangible outcomes within the available resources.

Supplementary question

Could council owned land be made available for a pilot scheme?

Supplementary Response

The option is always there and we will continue to explore options but a viable proposal has not yet been found.

14. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Rowley– rough sleeping beds

Can the Board member please supply the following information on provision for rough sleepers and homeless people:

- (a) How many temporary beds does the City currently provide for them?
- (b) What measures has the council taken since January 2016 to increase this figure?

Response

The County Council has to date funded support provision for the adult homeless pathway. This has funded 286 bed spaces, of which 252 are in Oxford. This funding is being cut (to zero by April 2019) and reduced provision will be funded going forward, through joint commissioning from April 2017 to March 2020. This is as set out in the report to CEB on 15th Sept 2016. The first change to this commissioning and the number of beds is on 1st June 2017. The City Council also intends to directly commission some support to maintain a target of 150 supported bed spaces available

to Oxford City connected clients. This will be further set out in detail in a report to CEB on 9th March 2017.

15. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley – homelessness budget

Is it true that the City Council is actually on-track to underspend its homelessness budget this year to the tune of around £150k? How does the portfolio holder justify this, and the £900k homelessness reserve at a time when there are increasing numbers of rough sleepers on Oxford's streets that need our support?

Response

The expected final spend for 2016/17 and commissioning plans for 2017/18 will be set out in a report to CEB on 9th March 2017. Services for rough sleepers and single homeless persons are going through a period of unprecedented change, and the Council has agreed some joint commissioning with partners to protect some services, and will directly commission to protect others. To date, there has been no loss of bed spaces in the adult homeless pathway, and the Council is taking a prudent approach to sustainably support services in the long term. As such, the Council will be re-focusing much of its commissioning in this area from 'wrap-around' services to bed spaces. Funding has been deliberately underspent in 2016/17 to provide additional funding in 2017/18 and 2018/19 as services transition.

The £900k homelessness reserve is a provision by the Council to provide a contingency, should it be required, over the term of the MTFP, for increased homelessness pressures. It is not earmarked to rough sleeping & single homeless services in particular. It is more prudent to use this fund to mitigate any increased cost pressures for statutory homeless provision, including temporary accommodation for persons to whom the Council has, or may have, a statutory duty. Nationally homelessness has increased, not least in response to benefits cuts, austerity, rising rents etc. To date however, our key performance measures for homeless acceptances and households in temporary accommodation are being maintained.

16. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley - Iffley Open House

Will the portfolio holder join me in welcoming initiatives, such as the Iffley Open House, a group of volunteer housing campaigners who are working with residents, leaseholders and property owners to turn the empty car showroom on Iffley Road into temporary accommodation for the homeless?

Response

I welcome the fact that a group of homeless people are under cover and not subject to the extreme vulnerability of sleeping on the streets in winter. I was happy therefore to support the request for the owners to work co-operatively to prevent anyone being ejected back on to the street.

Having said that, the Iffley Open House is not a sustainable initiative that will provide accommodation for homeless people for anything but a short period. It is not linked into the wider network of commissioned services. The Street Population Outreach Team has visited the premises and made contact with the occupiers.

I am concerned for the welfare of the occupiers, particularly as related to the security of the building, and I have made these views known to those involved in the occupation and urged that they work with professional support services

I would welcome the provision of new affordable housing units that meet housing needs, and would seek for such accommodation to be well managed and to meet all relevant housing, welfare, health and safety, and planning requirements. There is no information to suggest that this building complies with these requirements.

17. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley - Iffley Open House

In the light of Iffley Open House, will the portfolio holder agree to look into developing an Empty Space Protocol covering issues such as legal rights, property management, safety and insurance to encourage the safe use of empty properties to temporarily house the homeless, in particular over the cold winter months?

Response

emergency accommodation provision for rough sleepers in exceptionally cold weather (usually where forecasts predict that temperatures will fall to below zero for three consecutive nights), and this year is working with new providers that are considering opening up new venues under this protocol, making effective use of volunteers.

The Council does also have an Empty Property Strategy focused on bringing un-used properties back into effective use.

Developing an additional Empty Space Protocol is not considered an effective use of Council resources. It is incumbent on anyone proposing to operate a property to ensure full compliance with all relevant legislation and guidance, and where necessary, to seek the relevant permissions and licences from the Council.

18. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley - Iffley Open House

Will the Council be doing outreach work with Iffley Open House residents to ensure that they don't have to rough sleep on the streets again after the empty car showroom is eventually demolished?

Response

The Street Outreach team has already visited the premises and made contact with the occupants, and has also been in touch with Wadham college.

As with any rough sleeper across the city, Oxford SPOT operates an assertive outreach service through its early morning and evening street shifts (not more than 48 hours apart) and seeks to engage with clients to end rough sleeping. This of course depends on the team securing access to the property however.

The Council would welcome initiatives from the Iffley Open House team to help support clients leaving this provision to move into suitable and sustainable accommodation.

19. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley - Severe Weather Emergency Protocol

How many times has the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol been triggered since the end of October 2016?

Response

In this winter period, SWEP first opened on 29/11/16. It has been open for 18 nights, providing a safe and secure space for between 5 and 27 clients a night, and a total of 313 unique stays during these periods, across 5 venues.

Dates open:

29/11/2016 to 30/11/2016

26/12/2016 to 27/12/2016

02/01/2017 to 05/01/2017

12/01/2017 to 13/01/2017

19/01/2017 to 26/01/2017

Supplementary question

The SWEP was triggered for 2 nights but the temperature fell below freezing on 9 nights. Why was the protocol not triggered for 9 nights?

Supplementary Response

The protocol is triggered when the temperature is below freezing for 3 nights in a row. There is some discretion on this so we can review the policy and its application.

20. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley Severe Weather Emergency Protocol 2

During January 2017 there were several nights when temperatures in Oxford dropped to well below freezing. Do you agree that in cases of such low temperatures, the Council should be taking a more 'common sense' approach to triggering the SWEP (as recommended by Homeless Link and others) rather than waiting for three consecutive days of sub-zero weather?

Response

SWEP is opened on forecasts, not after three consecutive days of sub-zero weather. Discretion is also applied, for example, where forecasts are variable and near to zero, or where exceptionally bad weather conditions prevail. This discretion was applied to at least one of the periods SWEP was opened in January.

21. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley - No Second Night Out

Does Councillor Rowley accept that because of No Second Night Out policy, many of Oxford rough sleepers deliberately evade the official rough sleeping count, and official figures therefore significantly underestimate the extent of Oxford's homelessness issue?

Response

No. I see no correlation between the 'No Second Night Out' approach that is designed to provide prompt assistance to rough sleepers to get them off the streets as soon as possible, preventing further detriment to their well-being, and 'deliberate evasion' of the count. In any case, the official rough sleeping count is separate from the street outreach work of the Oxford SPOT team.

I am aware that some rough sleepers do seek to avoid notice for various reasons, not least because people sleeping rough have in the past been victims of unprovoked violence in Oxford. I certainly do not blame them for this, but I am certain that it has nothing to do with the NSNO approach, which makes efficient help available to rough sleepers wherever they are in the City.

The count operates under very strict protocols and with a DCLG verifier on the count itself. The count covers all parts of the city, including open ground, with a focus on all

sites where there have been reports of rough sleeping. It takes place in the hours after midnight on the night selected for this.

The Oxford City count this year (Nov 2016) was 33, compared with 39 in 2015. The Council also undertakes an estimate, using nationally agreed methodology, and that was 47. On any one night, it is expected that some people will have found a place to sleep off the streets, or who have not bedded-down at all.

There is a large and visible street presence of individuals in some parts of the city at present, although some of these persons have accommodation that they can access.

Supplementary question

If I can arrange a meeting with rough sleepers to explain how 'No Second Night Out' impacts them will you come and speak to them?

Supplementary Response

Yes. 'No Second Night Out' helps most people but I am aware it isn't suitable help for everyone on the streets.

Board member for Leisure, Parks and Sport

22. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Smith – Florence Park

Given that the council is reluctant to put up signs in Florence Park (the response to an earlier question to Council), would they consider painting a request to cyclists to cycle slowly and safely on the surface of the paths in the park at all entrances?

Response

We will talk about cycling in the park through at the next Friends meeting and then take a view on what may need to be done.

23. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Smith – Alexandra Park

At Council in December Cllr Smith provided a welcome update on plans to move part of the fencing around the grass tennis courts in Alexandra Park, Summertown. The Councillor said the work would be carried out "in the New Year". Could she provide an update and more detailed timing?

Response

The works are scheduled to start in March and complete in April 2017. We are currently in the process of procuring the new fencing.

Board member for Planning and Regulatory Services

24. From Councillor Goff to Councillor Hollingsworth – parking at JR

I recently had occasion to attend an outpatient appointment at the JR and experienced first hand the difficulties many are currently experiencing gaining access to the hospital due to an acute parking shortage, it took the 700 bus 40 minutes to get up the hill. On returning the next day by car things were much the same. This of course not only

directly affects ambulance admissions but plays havoc with clinic times and clinic transport. Can the member give an assurance that the City Council and Executive Board are doing as much as they can to bring pressure on the County Council, the bus operators and the Oxford Universities Hospitals Trust to improve access for patients and visitors?

Response

As I responded to a previous question, the Trust is currently developing a masterplan for its sites in Oxford, and the City Council has been in contact with them while that document is developed. When the Trust publish their plans, which we hope to happen soon, we will be working closely with them to make sure that the masterplan and the City Council's Local Plan align.

The problem of parking on the JR site is one that the Trust is looking to manage, and it is important that they use the limited parking spaces on the site to give priority to patients and their visitors.

Supplementary question

Is there scope to improve the 700 bus service eg extend it to weekends, reduce fares, make it more useful for hospital staff.

Supplementary Response

I am willing to consider options but there will then be costs to meet. All large employers need to consider how to get their staff to and from work. It's regrettable this wasn't tackled earlier.

25. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Hollingsworth – park and shuttle for JR

Would the City Council be prepared to play a strong/ leading role in developing a "park and shuttle" package for hospital staff to free up car parking spaces at the JR.

Response

The primary responsibility for managing staff car parking on the JR site is the Trust. Current Local Plan policy SP23 governs the John Radcliffe site; that policy requires the Trust to "minimise car parking spaces on site", a policy designed to reduce the impact of traffic congestion on Headington and Marston. The City Council will of course discuss options for better management of staff parking on the Trust's sites in Headington, and help to bring together interested parties, but in the end the decisions about managing the issue must rest with the management of the Trust.

26. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Hollingsworth –Seacourt P&R

Has the City Council undertaken a traffic management plan for the proposed expansion of Seacourt park and ride, and would increasing the capacity not lead to further congestion at the west end of Botley Road and elevated interchange with the A34?

Response

Yes, a detailed traffic management assessment has been undertaken and these were submitted as part of the planning application. In response to comments on the application further analysis has been undertaken which assesses the impact of additional trips on the network, including those trips resulting from the Westgate development, with and without the proposed expansion at Seacourt park and ride.

Information regarding this new work will be submitted to the Planning Authority in due course.

The models for the proposed scheme showed some minor increases in queueing times (of about six seconds) on the slip road in the morning, with decreases of 28 seconds for inbound traffic coming from West Way, making an average reduction in journey time of 0.5 seconds per vehicle. In the evening there is a small additional journey time of 10 seconds outbound along the Botley Road.

By contrast, without the scheme, there will be significant (measured in minutes not seconds) increases in journey times and queueing in all directions in both the morning and evening peak periods, with some modelled scenarios not able to accommodate all the traffic (indicating queues that would extend well beyond the junction, including onto the A34 and back into the city centre).

In summary, due to development in the city and the general increase in journeys associated with that the status quo ante is not the marker against which the proposed scheme should be assessed. Particularly since the park and ride site is already at capacity, the traffic management assessments of the proposed development should be compared with the 'do nothing' scenario, where additional trips must drive into the city centre due to lack of capacity at Seacourt park and ride.

27. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Hollingsworth - expanding Seacourt

What analysis of demand for car parking has been undertaken to justify expanding Seacourt, while proposing to lose capacity at Redbridge?

Response

The demand analysis is based on current usage data, and is published as part of the planning application. This shows that Seacourt is currently operationally full much of the time; demand will increase significantly when the Westgate opens, not least from the staff employed there. Redbridge, which serves traffic from a different catchment area, is currently rarely operationally full, and is judged likely to remain so even with increased demand from Westgate.

28. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Hollingsworth – smart signs

Why don't we have smart- signage around the city informing the motoring public about capacity in park and ride car parks around the city?

Response

This would be a County Council responsibility as highways authority. However the City Council would of course support such provision.

29. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Hollingsworth – Westgate car park charges

Will the car park at Westgate be cheaper than car parking at the City park and ride car parks?

Response

The Westgate Alliance has not yet announced the charges that they will implement at Westgate. However they have been in very regular contact with the bus companies, the City Council and the County Council, and are well aware of the importance of the park

and ride system in getting staff and customers to the new centre. This was something that was a critical part of the original planning application. It seems highly improbable therefore that they would now pursue a policy of undercutting the park and ride car park system.

30. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Hollingsworth- Westgate buses

Will the Board Member be minded to influence bus operators or Westgate operators to provide any kind of shuttle service from any of the existing park and rides to the Westgate Centre?

Response

The bus routes around the Westgate have been subject to extended deliberation over some years, and the provision of a bus priority route around the development, with extensive stops, has occupied an enormous amount of time and effort by City Council planners, County Council officers, the bus companies and the Westgate Alliance. The new centre will be served by very regular services from three of the Park and Ride sites.

31. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth - local plan

Could the Councillor give council an update on emerging thinking around preferred options in the local plan consultation? Could he confirm if the proposed timetable for the second round of consultation is likely to be met? Could he also confirm if he is happy with the reach of the first round of consultation?

Response

Taking each of these three questions in turn:

- a) It would not be appropriate to speculate on what might or might not be preferred options for particular sites until the whole preferred options document is published this summer. However I hope that this first draft of Oxford's new Local Plan will reflect this Council's commitments to housing, to a successful economy, to the environment of our city and to the health and wellbeing of the people that live here.
- b) At present I believe that the proposed timetable will be met.
- c) I am broadly content with the reach of the first round of consultation, whose aim was not to be exhaustive but to go out to seek the views of those many of Oxford's residents who do not often engage with consultations on strategic planning. Combining different approaches, in particular social media and outreach work by our planning officers, the City Council was able to hear and take into account the views of many hundreds of people beyond the amenity groups and associations - who of course ably, readily and productively engage with consultations of this sort.

Board member for Young People, Schools and Skills

32. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Kennedy – programme assisting teachers with housing

The cost of housing continues to thwart efforts by Oxford's schools to attract and retain high calibre teachers. Why does the uptake of our programme to assist teachers with housing costs remain so poor and what more can be done to improve uptake?

Response

Current uptake

The teachers' loan scheme has been extended since it opened in 2014 to include secondary schools and wider eligibility for teachers for financial help. Although the scheme was slow to pick up in its initial form, since it was extended in December 2015 there has been a marked increase in activity.

To date, two loans have been completed and there are four live applications: three of these applicants are looking for property to buy and four teachers have discussed their housing options with Catalyst with a view to formally applying.

Improving uptake

Catalyst, who are responsible for publicity as well as administration, are active in keeping up the profile of the scheme with the schools. They regularly send publicity material to schools and hold drop in sessions to answer questions and take expressions of interest. So far, after school sessions have been held at Oxford Academy and Oxford Spire and they are looking to do more, particularly with the primary schools.

Both Catalyst and the Council are aware that the scheme eligibility criteria should help teachers meet their individual housing needs and aspirations and this is particularly so with house prices so high.

Features like the value limit for property purchase and areas where teachers are able to buy are set so that applicants have a reasonable choice of types and prices of housing. These will be kept under review to ensure that teachers can take advantage of changes in the local housing market.

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

33. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Turner - Standingford House

Does Council have any plans for Standingford House, Cave Street and the neighbouring Council-owned building?

Response

Yes. As part of the Council's current capital programme, budget has been made available to invest in our commercial portfolio to both generate additional income and deliver economic growth. A project is underway with the objectives of both improving the existing building but also extending it to provide more space for small businesses.

Supplementary question

Is the intention to retain the building or sell it?

Supplementary Response

The intention is to retain the building, improve it and expand the provision of small units.

34. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Turner– cost of Seacourt expansion

What is the total estimated cost of expanding the Seacourt Park & Ride (including both planning and preparation costs to date and future budgeted costs)?

Response

The figures are in the table below:

Seacourt Park & Ride Extension	
Capital Cost Additional 668 Spaces with Waiting Facility	
	£
Spend over life of project to December 2016	294,122.68
Anticipated cost to complete project	3,941,781.00
Total cost of project	4,235,903.68
Expenditure by year to date	
2014/15	40,071.80
2015/16	214,662.27
2016/17	39,388.61
	294,122.68
Revenue Implications	Base Budget
	2016-17 2017-18 2018-19 2019-20
Parking Charges Income	(83) (166) (447) (447)
Revenue Costs	22 45 89 89
Interest Charge	11 21 40 39
Contribution	(50) (100) (318) (319)
As per MTFP (Revised Base Budget)	(50) (160) (320) (320)
Appendix 3 annual increase in contribution	(110) (160)

35. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Turner – NHS motion results

Further to the motion proposed by the Green Group, and passed with amendments by this Council, regarding the Council's views on the NHS Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire Berkshire West (BOB) Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) can the portfolio holder please update Council, and put on public record, the following:

- a) Has a reply been received from the Secretary of State for Health and other relevant government ministers?
- b) If so, what was that response and has it been published, discussed in any forum or replied to?
- c) If, and when, a response is received what is the suggested forum/timescale for discussing it?
- d) Has a reply been received from either of the City's MPs?
- e) If so, and as above, how has it been disseminated and responded to?
- f) Does the Council intend to submit its own response to the phase one consultation on the BOB STP (due to end April 2017)?
- g) If so, how will the response be formulated?

h) What more could the Council do to highlight the potential damage to local NHS services in as a result of the changes proposed in the BOB STP?

Response

To date there have been no responses received, and we will seek replies. We intend to submit a response to the phase one consultation on the BOB STP, which will reflect the sentiments of the motion agreed by Full Council. We will consider how best to highlight the consultation and the potential impacts of the proposed changes through our website and news releases.

36. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Turner – trading companies competition

In developing city owned trading companies - what measures will be used to prevent monopolies and unfair pricing developing?

Response

When a local authority forms a company to enter into competition with the private sector in regard to selling services to third party customers it immediately becomes subject to a wide range of new legislation and controls. For example, a local authority is prohibited from providing unfair financial or other advantages to its companies under the State Aid regulations (which are designed to eliminate any State-funded anti-competitive distortion of the market). In the unlikely event that a local authority company was ever able to obtain a very significant market share, it would be subject to the Competition Act 1998, which contains measures aimed at preventing abuse of a monopoly position. Furthermore, such advantages as are enjoyed by local authorities, eg in regard to Corporation Tax, immediately come to an end. It must face the full rigour of the tax regime. In this way, a local authority company must indeed compete on a level playing field with its competitors, and it will only achieve the market share it deserves.

In addition, as any City Council owned company will be subject to the governance provisions set out in its Shareholder's Agreement and its Articles of Association, the City Council itself will always be in a position to exercise a significant level of control over the nature of the trading undertaken.

37. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Turner - budget consultation

As the Board Member will be aware, the consultation on the draft budget for 2017/18 started on 19th December and ended on 27th January. One batch of consultation alerts requesting people to participate was emailed out on 20th January: this meant that the residents alerted in that batch have only had 7 days to read through the substantial documentation and make comments, yet the website shows the consultation period to be 39 days.

Can the Board Member please confirm the date on which the last batch of consultation alerts were sent to those who "have previously expressed an interest in receiving consultations related to Council Budget and Priorities"?

Response

The budget consultation period ran from 19th December 2016 to 27th January 2017. The consultation was promoted via our website, Facebook and Twitter. Unlike in some previous years where there has been quite targeted consultation which has been

costly, this year it was decided that it was more important to keep costs down and ensure the consultation provided value for money.

The budget consultation runs through the Christmas holiday period and it is always difficult to engage people in the survey when it opens as it is so close to Christmas so most responses come in after the New Year. We monitored responses on a weekly basis and saw by early January there were only 3 responses.

Therefore in the new year we continued to promote the survey and then decided to email people that had ticked 'Council Budget and Priorities' as an area of interest on the registration forms when they signed up to the online consultation portal. We didn't do this at the start of the process as members sometimes get 'consultation fatigue' from being sent too many consultation alerts, this is particularly the case by the end of the year, so we try to only do this when we think our other means of promotion such as the website, Facebook etc. are not reaching sufficient people. The last batch of alerts were issued on 20th January but as stated above the survey had been promoted widely before then.

Supplementary question

Should we review the consultation process and methods to get a better response?

Supplementary Response

We have tried various methods with mixed results. It can require a disproportionate effort to elicit informed responses to decisions on spending £5.50 per week per household.

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

38. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Price– planning training

In view of the inconsistent voting by some members on the East Area Planning Committee at two meetings on an identical application for change of use of the downstairs space in respect of Unit 5 Ashfield Way, does the Board Member believe that additional planning training is required for members?

Response

Members of Planning Committees reach decisions on the basis of the reports before them and the oral contributions from officers, together with the discussion that takes place among the members themselves. It is thus entirely possible that in cases like this, where there are number of planning issues to weigh up, members may come to different conclusions on the basis of the way in which the issues have come out. The Head of Planning and Regulatory Services has already set up a programme of four member development sessions and a planning members tour for the coming municipal year.

Supplementary question

Is there enough space in the city for community use generally?

Supplementary Response

We have a steady stream of requests for community space but the only way to address this is through the local plan.

39. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Price– trading companies scrutiny

With the development in new city council owned trading companies, how will opposition Members be able to partake in city council decision making and scrutinise operations?

Response

The trading companies owned by the Authority will be subject to their own Articles of Association and their respective shareholder’s agreements, these being the principle governance mechanisms by which any “parent” authority exercises control over its subsidiaries. As the sole owner of the housing and the proposed direct services companies, the Council will, of course, exercise real control over its subsidiaries, as the directors remain employees of the Council. The Council’s interests as shareholder will be formally represented by the members of the City Executive Board, whose decisions will be subject to scrutiny in exactly the same way as any other Council decision-making body.

40. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Price – structure of the housing company and the direct services company

Could the Leader provide council with information on the structure of the housing company and the direct services company (who the shareholder(s) is/are, membership of the board, reporting, monitoring etc)?

Does he think there is a case for having one or more elected member on each of the boards, possibly including one not from the ruling party group?

Response

The housing company (Oxford City Housing Limited) already exists, but the formation of the proposed direct services company is yet to be agreed. In both cases, however, the companies would be wholly owned by the Council, and so both companies would be obliged to act in the interests of its shareholder, the Council. The board of the Housing Company is made up of three senior Council officers, who must report, and are formally accountable, to the shareholder (represented by the members of the CEB). There will be regular formal meetings between the company directors and the shareholder.

As the directors of the company will be responsible for its day to day operation, it is currently considered that the individuals best placed to act in this essentially operational role are senior Council officers who have experience and expertise in the relevant operations. Indeed, in many cases they are simply continuing the work they currently perform for the Council. In any event, the directors are, of course, fully accountable to (and may be removed by) the shareholder.

41. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Price – tourist levy

The Portfolio Holder will be aware of the London tourist tax proposal by Mayor Sadiq Khan at a cross-party event on 27 January 2017. He proposed that London Local Authorities should be given the option of imposing a tourist levy which would be used to pay for infrastructure and environmental improvements in the city.

Will the Portfolio Holder undertake to explore this tax-raising measure, perhaps at a rate of £1 per tourist per night, which could fund improvements to our beautiful but sometimes threadbare city?

Response

This measure has been explored by a number of local authorities and by the LGA, but the Treasury has been adamant in rejecting the suggestion. The devolved powers of the Mayor of London are more extensive than those available to other authorities but there continues to be interest in securing Treasury agreement to implement this type of tax and the City Council will continue to support any lobby grouping that takes up the cudgels.

42. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Price - 1 Day Without Us

The 1 Day Without Us national day of action is going to be held on 20th February 2017 to celebrate the contribution of migrants to the UK, to coincide with the UN World Day of Social Justice. Various ways to support this include wearing badges and lanyards, posting pictures showing support on social media, having a meal or social event with migrants who are friends, work colleagues and neighbours, or attending meetings, marches or rallies.

Can the Leader please indicate whether he supports this day of action and indicate in what way(s) the city council intends to promote it?

Response

The Lord Mayor is holding a lunchtime event on that day in the Town Hall. Members of the public are welcome to join the celebration; a press release will be sent out and the event will be widely publicised on social media.

We would of course be happy to promote and publicise other ways in which the day could be marked. The City Council has already placed on record its appreciation of the massive role that migrant workers currently play in our city, whether in the universities, hospitals, high tech businesses, restaurants, cafes and hotels or the retail sector. And it is worth remembering that the growth of the car industry in the city in the inter-war period was extensively fuelled by migration from Wales, Ireland and Scotland; many of these families still live in Oxford. The Council continues to work closely with a range of voluntary and charity groups through the Refugee and Asylum Seeker Coordination Group to support migrants who need help and guidance to rebuild their lives.

43. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Price – encouraging school visits

There has been a reduction in the number of visits by school and pre-school groups to cultural attractions in our city. Could the Portfolio Holder advise what is being done to encourage young people through their schools and pre-school playgroups to visit the museums, colleges, cathedral and other cultural attractions in this city at a time when funding for schools and pre-schools is falling?

Response

It is not clear on what evidence the claim of a reduction is based. Our own evidence does not bear this out and in fact museums in Oxford appear to be bucking a national downward trend. The Museum of Oxford's attendance figures from pre-booked groups have been fairly consistent year on year – averaging around 1460 per year. To mitigate any potential decline the Museum has been working with between 8 and 10 'relationship' schools to encourage pupils to visit for family activities outside the formal learning programme. This approach has resulted in consistently high attendance at family activities - 1789 people attended events in 2015/16, and the projected figure for 2016/17 is 2000. The Oxford University Museums have had consistent primary and secondary school attendance for the past two years with 84,348 in 2015 and 84,355 in 2016. Christ Church has recorded increases in their school attendances from 1100 in

2014/15 to 2216 in 2015/16, and 1452 to date in 2016/17. School children visiting The Story Museum increased from 5,422 in 2014-15 to 7,935 in 2015-16.

The City Council uses its service level agreements with organisations that we grant-fund to encourage engagement with young people. For example the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra has provided 40 free tickets for their concert in February aimed at children aged 8-12 years old.

As well as encouraging young people to visit cultural organisations and events, the City Council and its cultural partners are taking opportunities into the environments where young people live and learn.

Oxford Playhouse, for example, is delivering positive cultural experiences within local primary schools through the Primary Playmaker scheme, a writing project for Yrs 5 & 6. Each participating pupil works with a professional playwright to write a short play, some of which are then selected to be performed by professional actors. This year Oxford Playhouse is working with 6 schools (around 150 children), 5 of which are in East Oxford in key target areas. Oxford Playhouse is also currently working with up to 15 young people in Littlemore aged 12-16 each week during term to develop play-writing skills. They plan to extend this programme in the coming years to other areas in Oxford. Fusion Arts are delivering a programme of drama sessions on the subject of Healthy Food and Food Sustainability for school children at Bayards Hill.

Supplementary question

Could these figures be examined in more detail – for example by cohort, visiting group, and place of visit? For instance the costs of visits can be prohibitive when a £60 fee for the Natural History Museum is added to coach hire. Is there ringfenced funding for school visits?

Supplementary Response

Charging fees for things that were previously free is concerning but another way of filling the funding gap for the universities. I'm not aware there was ringfenced funding in school budgets and we have no control over these. I will ask for more detailed figures.

44. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Price – Christmas decorations

Does the council think that the standard of Christmas decoration in the City was high enough and can we look forward to better quality Christmas lights and decorations in the city centre next year?

Response

This year's budget for our Christmas lights was £40k pa, covering installation, removal and hire. Personally, I thought that they brought a welcome level of Christmas cheer to the city centre, but clearly a bigger budget could have purchased a more elaborate set of decorations. Our current suppliers underperformed in the installation of the lighting scheme this year and we have negotiated a reduction in their fee to reflect this. This was the last year of their contract.

Officers have undertaken the following actions which we expect to lead to an improved scheme in future years:

- negotiated a partnership with the Westgate Oxford Alliance so that we tender for our scheme in conjunction with their tender for Christmas Decorations in the new Westgate Centre. Their budget is substantially higher and will bring more value to

the city council's contract, by creating synergy between the two schemes and creating one customer journey through the city over the festive period

- designed the contract so that city centre businesses will be able to enhance the scheme if they choose to participate.

The tender returns for the new contract/scheme for 2017-19 are currently being evaluated.

45. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Price – Westgate opening

Is the City Council able to advise on the opening date for Westgate Centre?

Response

As far as we know, the early part of October 2017 is still the estimated opening period.

46. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Price – Article 50 vote

Cllr Price and I recently heard Andrew Smith MP explain that he would vote to trigger article 50, whether or not amendments were added to the bill in Parliament. Does Cllr Price think this course of action is in the best interests of the people of Oxford? If not, would he join me in urging Mr Smith instead to support the amendment tabled by his party colleague Heidi Alexander MP, which calls for a second Parliamentary vote and a referendum once the terms of Brexit are fully known, and in likewise urging Mr Smith to vote against article 50 without such an amendment?

Response

'Caveat emptor' is wise advice. In the context of the vote to trigger Article 50, it would be wise to know in advance what policy priorities and preconditions are being proposed by the government before deciding whether to cast a vote for or against the initiation of the negotiating process. There are a number of amendments proposed to the draft Bill setting out such preconditions eg on the rights of current EU citizens working and living in the UK, employment and equality rights, environmental protections and a second Parliamentary vote which, if they are not agreed, would lead me to vote against the Bill if I were an MP. Leaving the European Union remains, in my view, an economic folly on a scale equivalent to the return to the Gold Standard in 1925; well described by Keynes in 'The Economic Consequences of Mr Churchill'.