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| To: | Council |
| Date: | 2 October 2017 |
| Title of Report:  | Questions on Notice from members of Council and responses from the Board Members and Leader |

# 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 will be republished after the Council meeting to include supplementary questions and responses as part of the minutes pack.
5. Unfamiliar terms may be briefly explained in footnotes.

# Questions and responses

# Board member for A Clean and Green Oxford

In the absence of Councillor Tanner, Councillor Price, Leader of the Council responded to supplementary questions.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Tanner – street cleanliness

The recent residents’ survey shows that satisfaction with the cleanliness of both residential streets and the city centre has fallen from 71% to 65% since 2014/15, particularly for those in the East and North of the city. Can the Board Member give members more information about the “redesign of street cleansing operations that is currently underway”, with particular regard to residential streets?

## **Written Response**

Restructured teams and rotas are being implemented and these give greater flexibility to respond to localised issues. There will be a greater emphasis on street inspections by supervisors to improve service quality across the City together with a higher level of mechanisation and use of technology. Changes to contractual arrangements for the workforce will allow for greater resource availability at weekends and a more even service provision over a 7 day working week.

# From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Tanner – electric charging

## Can the portfolio holder update us on progress with the delayed installation programme for on-street electric vehicle charging points?

## **Written Response**

The Go Ultra Low on street charging trial is testing new charging technology in Oxford. For this phase of the trial 35 charging points are being installed at 30 locations. To date 17 installations are fully operational. Work has started on the remaining installations which are awaiting connection to the grid by SSE and final commissioning. While there have been delays caused by a vast range of issues, this is a very complex initiative, considered a globally significant trial by our partners. The project team expect to have all charging points installed by the end of the calendar year.

# From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Tanner – air quality

## Now it has become clearer that Air Quality (AQ) will significantly deteriorate in parts of the City Centre once the expanded Westgate is reopened (though such problems were predicted some time ago in the City's own AQ management plan but ignored) what additional continuous AQ measurements will be taken and what immediate mitigating actions will be implemented on days when air quality standards are breached in order to protect those living, studying, working and visiting the City.

## **Written Response**

There is no evidence to suggest that air quality will be negatively impacted by the opening of the Westgate, the impact of the development was fully assessed as part of the planning application process. Monitoring of air quality takes place in several locations around the Westgate using diffusion tubes (details found here: https://oxfordshire.air-quality.info/). In addition to the diffusion tube network, we are monitoring air quality specifically around the Westgate using two special continuous AQ Mesh Monitors. One is currently installed on Thames Street and another is due to be installed shortly in a location yet to be confirmed. Oxfordshire County Council is the local Transport Authority and any measures related to the local road network would require their approval.

**Supplementary Question**

Why was the start of the response at odds with reports on the media and other forums which suggested there wold be a negative impact on air quality?

**Response**

Councillor Price responded that the answer reflected extensive analysis sent in with the planning application but clearly officers would have to evaluate this against what happened in reality once the centre was open.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Tanner – electric bollards on canal

## Islington Borough Council is putting £30K funding, matched by a contribution from the Canal and River Trust, towards the provision of electric bollards along a stretch of canal in Islington which will become an ‘eco-mooring zone’.

## Will the Board Member confirm that City officers will discuss match funding with the Canal and River Trust so that similar electric points can be set up along the Oxford canal, thereby contributing to an improvement in air quality and in community relations between boaters and land-based residents?

## **Written Response**

Islington Borough Council received funding from Defra’s Air Quality Grant Scheme to introduce charging points for boats in order to reduce air pollution, in what was a recognised air pollution hot spot. We have no evidence to suggest that air quality limits are being breached or that boats are causing a statutory nuisance along the Oxford canal due to the burning of fuel. We have had on-going discussions with the Canal and Rivers Trust about this issue for some time and these discussions continue.

**Supplementary Question**

As air pollution levels were below those which would allow the council to apply for a Defra grant, could the council instead use S106 funds and matched funds from the Canal and River Trust to provide points, and could the council enter discussions on this?

**Response**

Councillor Price responded that it was not possible to use S106 funds from developers for works other than those set out in the legal agreements so this was not an option.

# Board member for Community Safety

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Hayes - NAGs

The recent residents’ survey indicates that awareness of local Neighbourhood Action Groups has fallen to 10%. Meetings of some NAGs appear to be declining in number. Does the Board Member believe that NAGs have outgrown their usefulness?

## **Written Response**

NAGs were created over 10 years ago under the auspices of the Neighbourhood Policing Model. They can provide engagement with organisations and the public in a locality but some NAGs have worked better than others. In some areas they have been replaced by Have Your Say events. The Council will continue to support the police and other partners in making best use of our collective resources to provide routes through which residents can channel their concerns .

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Hayes – crime levels

## The recent residents’ survey indicates that concern about the level of crime is highest in the South East of the City. What measures does the Board Member intend to take to help tackle this?

## **Written Response**

This is a long-term feature of the survey and is reflected in our neighbourhood priorities. We are working closely with the police and partners to address these priorities, including domestic abuse and environmental crimes.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Hayes - scams

Scams are on the increase but only 5% are reported. The average age of victims of scams is 75. I am receiving requests from businesses, groups and individuals for Scam awareness training. Does the Board Member agree that such sessions might usefully be provided by the community safety team and, if so, please could he investigate this?

## **Written Response**

A national awareness programme, “Friends Against Scams” is being promoted by Trading Standards. We fully support this initiative and will use our local communication channels to spread their important messages. The training is being delivered by the County Council with resources available on the friendsagainstscams.org.uk website.

**Supplementary Question**

Trading Standards offered scam awareness training to those working with or in contact with people who may be vulnerable to scammers. Could this council organise with Trading Standards some sessions for officers and councillors?

**Response**

That was a helpful suggestion and would be discussed with officers to see if these could be provided.

# From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Hayes – safe spaces for drug users

Would the portfolio holder consider holding initial discussions with key stakeholders (for example Thames Valley Police, Heath Oxford etc) on the potential merits and disadvantages of providing a safe space in Oxford for heroin users to inject?

## **Written Response**

I would be prepared to discuss all ideas partners have to address the problems of drug misuse in the city.

**Supplementary Question**

Would the Board Member be prepared to discuss and consult the public about schemes to provide safe injecting areas?

**Response**

There were a large number of factors to consider before reaching the stage of consultation not least considering the experience of places which had introduced such schemes.

# Board member for Housing

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Rowley – tower blocks

## Could the Cllr provide an update on fire safety works at Evenlode and Windrush Towers, including, if appropriate, any recent information or guidance from government, and any information about the possible cost likely to fall on this council?

## **Written Response**

The Council is continuing to take action to complete the remedial works as quickly and effectively as possible. A variation order to our contract with Fortem has now been issued, and mobilisation and supplier orders are in train. The planning application has been submitted with a determination expected by mid-October. The estimated additional costs of these works and the impact on the overall contract remains as previously reported i.e. £1m. The actual costs will not be finally established until contract end. Our actions are in compliance with Government direction and advice. Representation will be made to Government for the reimbursement of costs but current indication is that they expect Local Authorities to cover the costs which is contrary to their earlier statements.

**Supplementary Question**

Why, given that a special Council meeting was deemed necessary to promptly award the budget for this work, was the planning application not ready for determination until mid-October?

**Response**

The planning application had to be drawn up, submitted, and the statutory consultation period observed before determining this. Consideration by committee would have added to the necessary length of time and the work for officers. The frustration was understandable but due diligence and due process had to be observed.

# From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley – local connection

## Who is responsible for signing-off on whether a homeless individual has a local connection to Oxford City, and from whom does that person consider recommendations to show discretion in granting a local connection?

## **Written Response**

Homeless households in Oxford can approach the Council for housing assistance in a number of different ways. In brief:

(1) A person can apply for inclusion on the Oxford Register for Affordable Housing by completing a housing application. The Council’s Allocations Scheme sets out the policy used to prioritise households for housing and to determine who will, and will not, qualify for inclusion on the housing register. This is available on the Council Website. In summary a housing applicant will need to have a local connection established through permanent residence, employment or close family members living in the City, to qualify as having a local connection. If they do not have a local connection they will not be normally be included but the policy does allow for exceptions of this, for example, those fleeing domestic violence, ex-members of the armed forces, older housing applicants aged 60 or older, and other circumstances can be considered on a case by case situation.

(2) A person can approach the Housing Options Team for advice and assistance if they are threatened with homelessness, or are homeless. The ‘local connection’ test for a person approaching the Council as homeless, is one of the five statutory tests that a local housing authority must undertake in order to assess its statutory homeless duties, as set out in part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended; the Homelessness Codes of Guidance; and relevant case law. The criteria are similar to that set out in the Allocations Scheme. Following a homeless application, an Options Officer will undertake extensive investigations and recommend a decision to the Options Manager for approval, taking into account all the homelessness tests and requirements. Under statute, applicants have the opportunity to ask for a review of a negative decision within 28 days of the decision. There is no discretion in this matter, as it is a statutory function with a significant body of case law relating to this process.

(3) A person identified as rough sleeping in the city, by the Oxford Street Population Outreach Team can be referred to the adult homeless pathway (supported accommodation in hostels or dispersed housing) if appropriate. Persons need to have a connection to Oxford City, either a ‘local connection’ or a ‘pathway connection’. A pathway connection is a more lenient approach to establish if someone has a connection to Oxford other than set in the Allocation Scheme. Assessment and determination of a households’ local connection, and in the latter case pathway connection, is carried out by officers in the City Council’s Housing Needs Team, with supporting evidence provided by the person and/or their support workers.

**Supplementary Question**

If rough sleepers did not have a local connection where would they find the criteria for a pathway connection and how would they be assessed for this?

**Response**

The pathway connection recognised that not the local connection requirements do not fit everyone’s’ circumstances. The best way to be assessed was to go through the ‘no second night out’ pathway where officers would assess the persons’ needs and connections.

# From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley – empty buildings

Does the portfolio holder share my frustration and disappointment that despite there being several hundred empty buildings dotted around the city, that after 6 months of investigations, not a single building has been made available to help low-need individuals currently forced to sleep rough move on with their lives, and what is he personally doing to remedy the situation?

## **Written Response**

It is disappointing that any properties are left empty in a city with very high housing needs. The City Council works hard to encourage property owners to bring empty properties back into use. In 2015, there were 365 long-term empty homes in Oxford (empty for 6 months or longer). This has reduced to 303 in March 2017, with less than 70 of these empty for more than two years. Last year, 22 homes were brought back into use directly as a result of a City Council intervention, and the Council is currently pursuing a Compulsory Purchase Order for one long term empty house. Further information on this area of work and intentions were provided to Housing Panel in April 2017; within the draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21, approved at CEB this month; and in the Empty Properties report taken to that same meeting. Further publicity to encourage the reporting of empty properties and their re-use, is planned for the National Empty Homes Week of 16th to 22nd October.

**Supplementary Question**

What is the Board Member doing to bring a suitable empty property or properties forward for people to use as a temporary base and alternative to sleeping rough?

**Response**

The response sets out the actions the Council is taking and I fully support officers in these. We have spoken to property owners but found nothing suitable yet. Many buildings are either not empty for long or too small or unsuitable.

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Rowley – Q1 performance and tower blocks

The Q1 Integrated Performance Report presented to CEB on September 19 states at Para 12 and 13 that the Tower Blocks refurbishment scheme will be over budget yet again due to what it describes as ‘unachieved value engineering on the contract'. Could the Cllr give more detail about what that means and how it led to an overspend of £0.290m?

**Written Response**

This projected overspend is currently considered a worst case scenario and represents 1.4% of contract value. The contract was let on a design and build basis and it was envisaged that there could be value engineering which would result in savings in the region of £290k. Despite best endeavours this has not been fully achieved and when combined with additional costs on other items this is the net projected overspend. A budget contingency also currently remains unused

# From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley – homeless budget

## For each year from financial year from 13/14 up to an including 16/17, can the portfolio holder report the size of the homelessness budget and the level of expenditure of that budget?

## **Written Response**

The budget for homelessness sits within the Housing Needs budget, and many officers work on homelessness and allocations activities, so further work would be required to accurately apportion time to determine funding for homelessness activities only.  The Housing Needs budgets and spends for the four years in question are:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **13/14** | **14/15** | **15/16** | **16/17** |
| **Budget** | £3,627,245 | £3,614,033 | £3,312,182 | £3,436,766 |
| **Net Spend** | £3,303,333 | £3,547,040 | £3,333,211 | £2,838,189 |

*Source: S13K budget figures*

**Supplementary Question**

There was a £500k underspend due to changes in plans for Simon House and funding for this is now coming from the 2017/18 budget. What happened to the £500k?

**Response**

Savings in 2016/17 were used to contribute to Oxfordshire local authorities’ pooled fund for advice services without impacting other budgets. There was now a good proposal for changes to Simon House. Officers could carry out the longer piece of work required to provide a detailed breakdown of spending.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Rowley – affordable rents

## There appears to be no reference in the Housing and Homelessness Report to the need to build housing to rent at prices affordable for key workers. Does the Board Member agree that this is perhaps the most important group of people, after those on the housing list, who are currently unable to afford to live in or even near the city?

## **Written Response**

The strategy to which Cllr Wade refers seeks throughout to address the issue of affordability for all people who either live or would like to live in the Oxford area. The definition of key workers is a very specific one and does not adequately cover the full range of lower and middle salaried workers who find renting or purchase extremely difficult. Our housing strategy seeks to stimulate and support the development of a housing stock and tenure mix which will accommodate the needs of all occupational groups.

**Supplementary Question**

Could the definition of ‘key worker’ in the response be made available for scrutiny by councillors?

**Response**

Councillors were encouraged to examine and respond proposals in the Local Plan to make key worker housing easier to develop.

# Board member for Leisure, Parks and Sport

# From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Smith – pavilion improvements

## How many of the twelve pavilions named in the Summer 2013 edition of Your Oxford as being due for improvement have in fact been improved?'

## **Written Response**

The aim of the pavilions programme was to invest £ 3 million to address the significant maintenance backlog of over £1.6 million and poor condition across the Council’s pavilions bringing them up to a modern standard over a five year period.

The plan was to use the council’s capital to find ways to bring in external funding. The amount that has been awarded from external funders such as Sport England and the Football Foundation is £782,000 which has exceeded our targets.

This means we are able to get more people active and to achieve the broad physical and mental health benefits that physical activity enables.

In regards to individual sites:

* Alexandra Park Pavilion – This is a dilapidated historic tennis pavilion and kiosk. We are currently working with the Lawn tennis association on a funding bid.
* Blackbird Leys – New build pavilion completed.
* Bury Knowle Pavilion – This is a dilapidated historic tennis / hockey pavilion. Work undertaken demonstrated no clear defined need and investment has been made by the Council to enable parks staff to use this as a facility for the ongoing upkeep of the park.
* Cutteslowe Park Lower – major refurbishment completed
* Cutteslowe Park Upper – major refurbishment completed
* Cowley Marsh – refurbishment completed
* Court Place Farm – worked with OCFC to enable the new build pavilion to serve both artificial and grass pitches at the site
* Five Mile Drive – Old dilapidated pavilion demolished and working with Summertown stars and the Girl Guides to use an existing building on the site with shared usage that meets both the needs of the club and the Girl Guides.
* Grandpont – New build pavilion completed
* Horspath – working with various stakeholders and national governing bodies of sport to attract investment and potential usage for the site (we are also building a new pavilion on the other side of the road)
* Quarry Fields – new build completes in October
* Rose Hill – completed as part of new build community centre
* Sandy Lane – refurbishment completed

**Supplementary Question**

The demolition without replacement of the pavilion at Five Mile Drive seemed to be an odd improvement?

**Response**

As the decision was that a full scale pavilion was not necessary there was a proposed solution for the football club to meet their needs and the Board Member was looking forward to seeing it completed.

# From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Smith - Cutteslowe

Can the councillor give details of building works planned at the depot in Cutteslowe Park?

## **Written Response**

Maintenance work will commence in early October to replace the leaking asphalt roof to the main office. Roof insulation will be added in the course of the work. Improvements to staff welfare facilities are currently ongoing to provide additional showers, drying areas and a modern mess kitchen.

**Supplementary Question**

Will this building remain as a depot as it is now?

**Response**

There are no plans for it to move out of the park.

# Board member for Planning and Regulatory Services

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth – Barton Park

Barton Park prices for the properties for sale are totally out of reach of people who are key to the functioning of Oxford – teachers, nurses, junior and not-so-junior university staff - why was this not foreseen and a plan developed to prevent it?

## **Written Response**

The Barton Area Action Plan (AAP) is the official planning policy document for Barton Park. The AAP, which was debated and adopted by Council in December 2012, establishes the mix of housing to be built by type, and by tenure. Policy BA9 says that a minimum of 40% of the housing on the entire development at Barton Park will be for social rent. The remainder will be market housing – in other words housing sold on the open market. The market housing is in effect paying for the social housing, and also for the substantial infrastructure investment required to develop the site.

When Council approved the AAP it did so believing that this was the appropriate balance to strike between social housing - which is in drastically short supply in Oxford - other forms of subsidised or sub-market housing, and market housing. The alternative, which the councillor appears to be proposing, would have been to have replace the social housing for those in greatest need with other less affordable forms of housing.

As the partner in the development company for Barton Park the City Council is able to take any residual market value left in the scheme at the end of the partnership and reinvest it in further social housing.

**Supplementary Question**

Can we use extra money from the residual market value to provide key worker housing?

**Response**

That assumes there will be sufficient money: currently after paying the costs of the site development (funded by the market housing), the partnership is projected to break even.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth – affordable market housing

## Can the Board Member advise whether the City has a strategy in place to ensure that houses to buy will be provided at genuinely ‘affordable’ levels? And how will this be protected in perpetuity?

## **Written Response**

The City Council cannot control the price of houses sold on the open market by private individuals or companies. The Council is consulting on policies in the Preferred Options of the Local Plan which would allow some flexibility in approach to the development of a range of affordable housing tenures on specific sites, but these would have to be protected by ‘affordable in perpetuity’ schemes, making use of tools such as co-operative and shared ownership models, covenants and so on.

So-called Starter Homes – announced with considerable fanfare by the Coalition Government in 2014 - offer a one-off discount of 20% to first time buyers, who can sell on the house at full price after five years. This short-term and one-off subsidy seems very poor value for money compared to the much better alternative of investing public funds in social housing, especially Council Housing.

**Supplementary Question**

**Response**

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth – key worker housing

## Can the Board Member clarify whether the new Local Plan will allow the universities, colleges and the NHS to build housing for their own employees on their own land, without the need to provide 50% general social rent properties as well?

## **Written Response**

The new Local Plan has only reached the Preferred Options consultation stage, so it is premature to say the least to suggest that specific policies are fixed: there is still further pieces of evidence base to complete and incorporate, the final proposal wording to bring forward, consult on and then submit to public examination, before Council can consider the Inspector’s report and adopt any policy.

The Preferred Options consultation, which has been available on the Council’s website for some time, says in Options 10 and 12 that consideration would be given, on certain specified sites that are linked to employers, to allowing different balances between social, intermediate and market tenures. As Option 12A explains, any such shift away from our current policies would need include robust safeguards to ensure that intermediate housing remained affordable in perpetuity, and could not be sold or rented on the open market.

Officers are current considering the responses to the Preferred Options consultation, and will weigh up those responses in developing potential policy wording to take forward at the next stage.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Hollingsworth – local plan consultation 1

I am sure I am not the only member who sent the City Council a list of streets in the ward that did not receive a Local Plan consultation leaflet through the post. Please can the Board Member indicate how many households in the City did not receive the leaflet, and set out what process has been put in place to stop this problem happening again?

## **Written Response**

Extensive surveys by the delivery company, as is usual practice, were done to confirm that households throughout the city had received the consultation leaflet. In all cases bar one small number of streets in Marston residents who were called confirmed that the leaflet had been delivered; City Council officers immediately delivered replacement copies to the affected households.

I was told by a number of people that various different streets had not received any copies of the leaflet: in all cases that were brought to my attention other than the one noted above the telephone survey provided evidence that the leaflet had in fact been delivered as it should have been.

The door to door leaflet was one of several different ways of consulting with about the Preferred Options; as part of the analysis of the responses received the nature and spread of replies will be assessed, and taken into account in planning the next round of consultation.

**Supplementary Question**

Is it possible to revisit the survey methodology as most of Old Headington and six roads in Quarry confirmed there was no leaflet delivered?

**Response**

Leaflets were delivered as was stated. The telephone survey simply asked if a leaflet was received and was carried out on the day of delivery. Redelivery was not an option unless the survey highlighted a significant issue.

Leaflets were not delivered to any houses displaying signs saying ‘we do not accept leaflets’ or ‘no junk mail’.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Hollingsworth - local plan consultation 2

Please can the Board Member explain why the questions asked of residents in the Local Plan leaflet were fewer than and different from those asked in the online consultation?

## **Written Response**

The consultation process was deliberately designed to offer a wide range of different methods – face-to-face contact with offers, detailed online surveys, the leaflet and social media – so that respondents could choose which was appropriate in the time that they had available and the degree of detail into which they wanted to go. All of these different channels for responses were widely advertised. By making different means of response available, the consultation process was more open to the widest range of people and groups to have their say on the emerging Local Plan.

**Supplementary Question**

Was there a good response to the consultation and would any potential development sites be dropped from the lists a result?

**Response**

There were many responses and, including on social media, about 100,000 interactions. Once these were analysed and all factors considered an answer to the second point could be given.

# - From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth – Westgate parking fees 1

## In a report to its meeting on Sept 19, CEB was told that "the Westgate Alliance were required to consult the Council about their proposals for parking fees". Similarly, in his reply to a question from Cllr Simmons at July Council, Cllr Hollingsworth said "The Westgate Alliance are allowed to set parking tariffs for their car parks, while taking into account the City Council's existing tariff structures and the policies that underlie them". Could the Cllr inform Council exactly how Westgate have to take existing policies into account, and what the status of the consultation was? Does the Council have any power to recommend or enforce changes to the fees proposed by the Alliance?

## **Written Response**

The Car Park Management Plan approved as discharging Condition 18 of the Outline Planning Permission for the Westgate Development (13/02557/OUT) includes the following wording:

“The charging policy for the Car Park will be consistent with the use of the Car Park for the benefit of the Development’s customers, and will have regard to the following:

• the car parking tariffs at the following Oxford City Centre car parks: Worcester Street, Gloucester Green and Oxpens; and

• the deterrent of parking for more than seven hours during the Development’s normal trading hours.

Westgate management staff will consult with the City Council on changes to the proposed tariff and shall have proper regard to the City Council’s recommendations from time to time for any changes to tariff.”

This wording is also reflected in the lease agreement between the Westgate Alliance and the City Council, which further requires that the Alliance provides a forum for discussing matters of car park management and traffic management with the City Council.

The Westgate Alliance has been in ongoing constructive dialogue with the City Council about issues relating to parking and traffic management; in setting the initial tariffs the Westgate Alliance discussed their proposed tariffs with City Council officers, and those officers were content that the proposals were consistent with the agreement above, as was recorded in the report on the matter to CEB and to this Council meeting.

Furthermore, the Alliance has been an active participant in promoting non-car based modes of transport, and has been a vital catalyst for agreements between both local authorities and the bus companies for improvements to park and ride services, for example. As the Councillor will see from the text above, the Council has the power to recommend changes to the tariffs and those recommendations must be given proper regard.

# - From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth - Westgate parking fees 2

## Will the Westgate Alliance be free to change parking fees as and when it sees fit?

## **Written Response**

No. The response to the previous question sets out in full the obligations on the Westgate Alliance with regard to parking tariffs.

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth - Westgate parking fees 3

## Cllr Hollingsworth told council in July that "the Westgate Alliance are well aware of the need for parking tariffs to be set at an appropriate level to manage traffic", adding "I therefore expect any tariffs set by the Alliance to adopt a similar approach to the City Council's". In September CEB accepted a report which stated that "whilst the proposed parking tariff is slightly different, the ethos of the scheme is very similar to the City Council's adopted policy". In fact the proposed tariff is lower at all comparison points than the council's own policy. Would the Cllr agree that by his own criteria this will therefore tend to increase traffic? Would he comment in particular on the effect on traffic under his own analysis of two specific differences between the Westgate tariffs and the council's own policy: the flat-rate evening charge, which begins at 8.00 pm under council policy, 5.00pm under the Westgate tariff; and parking on Saturdays, which is more expensive than weekdays under council policy, the same as weekdays under the Westgate tariff?

## **Written Response**

The tariff is not lower at all comparison points. The important comparison is between the charge at the Park and Ride and the city centre car parks, which shows that the Park and Ride is still excellent value for money. I do not anticipate that the variations in charges – some up, some down, some largely the same – will have any significant impact on traffic movement when compared to the more significant changes caused by the Westgate opening for business.

**Supplementary Question**

Are the Westgate parking tariffs lower than those at Oxpens across the board?

**Response**

No: Westgate is lower than Oxpens for some lengths of stay, and higher than Oxpens for others.

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth - basements

## Did the Cllr consider including in the Local Plan preferred options a specific policy on basements, like the one adopted by Kensington and Chelsea?

## **Written Response**

The Preferred Options did not propose a specific new policy on basements, but of course the consultation may show that there is a demand for such a policy which the Council will need to consider before putting the final consultation document together.

That being said my experience is that so far the city has had very few basement developments of the type brought forward in London, and our existing planning policies have been adequate to address the issues raised.

In considering whether the City Council should consider a similar approach to Kensington and Chelsea on this matter it will be important to review how the latter’s policy has worked in practice: anecdotal evidence from a former officer of that authority suggests that the policy may have led to an increase in basement applications, and the dimensions in the policy came to be treated as a target by developers rather than an upper limit. If that is backed up by further assessment then it might suggest that it may have had the opposite effect to the one intended – a further reason for a cautious approach in Oxford.

**Supplementary Question**

The option to review the need for a policy was welcomed. Are problems in devising a workable policy an argument for a better policy rather than for no policy?

**Response**

The number of applications is not a decisive factor. The current policy seems to work and the council need to be aware of the consequences (intended or otherwise) of blanket directions orders. We needed to consider in light of our intended outcomes what approach was best or whether the existing policies are adequate.

# From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth – camper vans P&R

## Is the Portfolio Holder aware of measures by Canterbury Council to encourage visitors in camper vans to use their Park & Rides by providing dedicated charging and waste disposal facilities (at premium rates) outside the height restricted portion of the car park; a measure which is proving both popular and revenue generating? Will he consider something similar for Oxford?

## **Written Response**

I am not aware of such a policy, and while I can see the advantages for Canterbury given the proximity to the channel ports, I am not sure that such a policy would be desirable or successful in Oxford. The Park and Rides are generally full or nearly full, and recent occupations of the Water Eaton car park by large groups of caravans and camper vans would suggest that there might be considerable drawbacks to the Canterbury approach.

**Supplementary Question**

Was it possible to arrange a trial of this to see what interest and income was generated?

**Response**

A trial would not be appropriate and it was not considered a good idea. It would be raised with County Council colleagues who may wish to consider taking this forward.

# - From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth - East Oxford Controlled Parking Zone

## Could the portfolio holder outline if/how City Council officers are working with the County to ensure the extension of the East Oxford Controlled Parking Zone happens quickly and meets the needs of local residents and businesses?

## **Written Response**

The implementation of Controlled Parking Zones is entirely within the remit of the County Council. That being said I am well aware that in recent years that the County has struggled to find the resources to progress schemes, even when funding has been available. This issue was raised by me with my counterpart on the County Council, Cllr Constance, and we are both committed to working together to explore options for making faster progress on these much needed schemes. Officers of both authorities are working closely together to identify the best ways to fund and resource CPZs, particular in relation to pre-planning applications discussions.

# From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Hollingsworth – Queen Street

## Following the recent works in Queen Street the roadway has been left in an appalling state. What steps is the portfolio holder taking to ensure that the surface is properly reinstated with the costs covered by those responsible?

## **Written Response**

The area in question, outside the Metro Bank development at 5 Queen Street, is part of the highway. The Highway Authority, Oxfordshire County Council, would have granted a licence to the developers to occupy the highway during the duration of the works. Whether the developer can be required to make good the road surface to a better standard than it is at present will depend on the precise terms of the licence agreement between the developer and the County Council.

City Council officers have raised concerns with both the developer and the County Council, and it will be for the latter to pursue any potential action for breach of the terms of the licence.

# From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Hollingsworth – social housing units

During the lifetime of the current housing strategy, how many additional social housing units would have been built had in each instance the developer met Oxford City Council’s 50% social housing criteria?

## **Written Response**

The City Council does not have a 50% social housing criteria. The current planning policy is that 50% of housing units on sites above a certain threshold of units should be affordable, and of that 50% four-fifths – or 40% of the total site - should be social housing.

There are only two instances since the adoption of the policy where the 40% social housing criteria has not been met after the developer was able to demonstrate by an independently verified viability test that to do would render the site undevelopable.

One of these is the Jericho Boatyard, where the 40% figure would have been 10 units (plus 2 shared ownership units to take the total to 50% affordable units) but 9 social rented and no shared ownership units were agreed, a reduction of 1 unit of social housing.

The second is the Templars Square development, where 40% of the total number of units would have 90 social rented units, and an additional 18 shared ownership units to take the total to 50%. Faced with independently verified evidence that the scheme would not be viable, officers followed the process clearly laid out in the Council’s policies and negotiated the maximum number of affordable housing units that was possible, a total of 31 social rented units and 20 units of shared ownership housing. As the report to the EAPC and the publicly available viability report made clear, the scheme would not have gone ahead at all if the 40% figure had been insisted upon – or rather, the developer would have gone to appeal and no doubt won that appeal, with the considerable risk of both costs being awarded and a reduction in the affordable housing figure obtained.

#  From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth - number 3 bus

## Will the portfolio holder agree to join local Councillors in adding his weight to the campaign to reinstate the extended number 3 bus route to the rail station (a service ‘temporarily’ withdrawn by the bus companies several years ago due apparently to congestion due to developments in the City Centre but never reinstated)?

## **Written Response**

I am happy to convey to the bus companies the need for the number 3 bus to be (re)extended to the station.

#

# From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Hollingsworth – grass verges

What statutory protection can the City Council provide, if any, for grass verges on residential streets to prevent them from being concreted over or otherwise damaged?

## **Written Response**

Very little, unfortunately. This is a perennial problem across much of the city, and verges damaged by parked cars are a blight in many areas. However there are examples of best practice across the city, where the use of barriers, judicious and appropriate use of grass-crete and redesigned parking areas can help to restore or prevent further damage.

# Board member for Young People, Schools and Public Health

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Tidball – children’s centres

At Budget time in February, Council agreed to set up a £50k fund to assist groups to retain some of the services lost when children’s centres were closed by the County Council. Another £20k was added later. There has never been any information about how this fund might be accessed.

Could you please explain:

* how the fund is to be distributed
* what the criteria are for a grant to support open access children’s services, so sadly lost earlier this year?

## **Written Response**

Oxford City Council is committed to making Oxford a great place for all children and young people to grow up in. We allocated a budget of £50,000 for 2017-18 to support a network of community-led Children’s Centres across the City. Our aim is to use this budget to have a long-lasting effect, to add capacity to Children’s Centres and to develop Oxford City Council’s vision for children aged 0-5.

£10k of the funding is being used for a 4 month project (August to November) in order to:

1. develop a comprehensive 0-5 offer for children in Oxford City, based on research evidence;
2. develop a shared impact framework for Children’s Centres, ensuring there is a common approach to measuring outcomes;
3. develop an operational plan that can contribute to increased capacity in the area of 0-5 provision in Oxford City;
4. utilise these findings to produce a fund raising strategy that will then be implemented to try to bring additional resources into the centres and deliver the operational plan.

At Full Council in July, Council voted to support a public petition which urged us "the City and [the] County Council, to work together to keep Florence Park Children's Centre as a community asset and open to all". Council voted to support this petition. Following this Full Council meeting, Aspire approached Oxford City Council with the request to use some of this sustainment funding to make an in principle matched contribution of £15k if their application to the County Council if successful. Florence Park Children's Centre had provided a good service to the totality of children and families in the surrounding locality with of Sure Start funding. Aspire’s detailed bid demonstrated extensive consultation, engagement and development with local families and a range of other local partners. Last week the County Council awarded Aspire £30,000 in transition funding and a licence to occupy the Florence Park to run open access children's centre services along with nursery and childcare provision. The City was pleased that this support will ensure Florence Park Children Centre will open again and serve the totality of children and young people in this locality.

This has left £25k for a fixed term fundraising post to develop new income streams and deliver the operational plan in order to enable the continued sustainment of the remaining community-led Children Centres in the City.

**Supplementary Question**

How much of the original £50k funding was uncommitted; what were the criteria for accessing this; and what other projects were due to start?

**Response**

This money was specifically for the children’s centres and was not a grant giving ‘pot’. There was a clear framework for what the children’s centres can achieve and a strategy to garner future funding. We want to ensure further long-term and stable funding. The County Council also have some transition funds available. At the last full council meeting we agreed to support the Florence Park initiative and are pleased to have been able to work with the County Council to take this forward.

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

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Turner – are we value for money

The recent residents’ survey shows that 21% of respondents disagreed that the City Council provides value for money, at a time when council tax was increased. This seems to be a significant proportion. Could the Board Member please indicate what measures are being taken to address this concern?

**Written Response**

Oxford City Council has sought to deliver value for money by finding new ways to deliver and fund services, in the face of a 47% reduction in our central government grant since 2010. Reductions in local government funding means that we are continually reviewing our services to make best use of our resources, find new ways to improve services and safeguard those most vulnerable to cuts in services.

This is reflected in numerous awards for our services, including achieving ‘Customer Service Excellence,’ the UK’s gold standard award for customer service delivery across all Council departments and high levels of satisfaction with services (84% are satisfied with their local area as a place to live).

We continue to increase external revenue and reduce costs to help maintain services with modest Council Tax increases. This is in line with the responses from residents to the budget consultation 2016/17 where there was more support for increasing Council Tax by 1.99% (the equivalent of an extra £5.67 per year for each band D tax payer) to help us to protect frontline services, than for the option to freeze council tax and cut services.

The council achieved £8.5 million efficiency savings in the last 4 years and wants to achieve a further £7million over the current MTFS. In addition to delivering efficiency savings we are providing services in which we excel (commercial waste, building works, and engineering) to external partners and creating a council owned trading company to generate additional revenue to reinvest in essential services.

We have increased our income from the Town Hall by 13.9% compared with last year. We have launched a new website where over 30% of all customer transactions are performed online again helping to reduce our running costs and increased e-claims for housing benefits and payments by direct debit, making payments more efficient and cost effective.

Whilst the percentage of residents who agree that Oxford City Council provides value for money has remained consistent with the last survey, the percentage of residents who disagree has slightly increased since 2014/15 from 17% to 21%. IpsosMORI advises that individuals’ own personal circumstances is a key driver for perception around value for money in the delivery of council services, which in turn is a key driver for overall satisfaction. The Residents’ Survey found the proportion of residents’ who feel that their personal financial circumstances will get worse has risen from 19% to 23% this year.

Frankly, I think considered in the round the council’s record is impressive, and I would hope councillors of all parties are willing to promote the positive achievements of our excellent workforce, achieved at a time of these disastrous cuts to funding, first by the Tory-Lib Dem coalition, and now by successive Tory governments.

# From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Turner – digital currency

Would the portfolio holder look in to the feasibility of launching a local digital currency in Oxford to support local businesses and the local economy. Now would be an ideal opportunity to support local businesses with the opening of Westgate.  Such a scheme was launched recently in Liverpool and has over 17,000 subscribers. [1]

[1] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-40728550>

**Written Response**

This is an interesting idea, although at the moment promotion of it is not factored into our budget or corporate plan. One useful starting point might be for scrutiny to look at the costs and benefits of such a proposal, although obviously it is for scrutiny to consider its work-plan and decide whether that can be factored in.

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

#  From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Price – canvas form error

Please can the Board Member explain to members how the error on Household Enquiry Forms *(these are electoral canvas forms)* was not spotted before they were sent out and set out what process has been put in place to stop this happening again?

## **Written Response**

We have had discussions with the printers about the two errors in the Householder Enquiry Forms that went out this autumn. They have admitted responsibility and have made financial compensation to the Council. The Electoral Services team have decided to alter its proofing procedures to ensure that similar errors will not occur again. This involves a step-by-step proofing form, which will be double-checked by another member of the team before the approval to go to print is given. The errors do not seem to have led to a reduction in the response rate, and reminder forms with the correct details have been distributed over the past two weeks.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Price – fall in satisfaction

The recent residents’ survey shows that overall satisfaction with Oxford City Council has fallen from 71% to 65%, and this fall is most prominent in Cowley and the South East. To what does the Board Member attribute this?

## **Written Response**

IpsosMORI, which conducted the research, said overall satisfaction level of 65% in the 2016/17 Oxford Residents Survey remains high relative to many other authorities and that the 71% score in 2014/15 was one of the highest they had seen for any council in recent years. As IpsosMORI has only undertaken these two survey using its new methodology, it advises that either result could be anomalous and it is not yet possible to determine a clear trend.  However, it offers the following explanation for the likely factors for the decline:

* The proportion of residents’ who feel that their personal financial circumstances will get worse has risen from 19% to 23% this year. This is a key driver of perception around value for money in the delivery of council services, which is in turn a key driver for overall satisfaction
* ‘Visual’ factors are another key driver of overall satisfaction there was a decline from 71% to 65% in the percentage of residents satisfied with the way the Council keeps the streets clear of litter. Recognising the need for improvement, the City Council is introducing a redesign of street cleaning that will extend the presence of operatives on City Centre streets across the day to recognise increased footfall and the growing night-time economy
* IpsosMORI advises the third key driver of overall satisfaction is residents’ satisfaction with their own local area. This increased from 81% to 84%

Focusing on the South East and Cowley areas individually:

South East

* Levels of personal financial security in South East were lowest in the City, with 31% of residents expecting their financial circumstances to get worse compared with 23%  for the City as a whole. Personal financial security is the key driver around perceptions of value for money in the delivery of council services
* Satisfaction levels around cleanliness of the area in South East were in line with the City average
* Residents’ satisfaction with their local area in South East was the lowest in the City, with 15% dissatisfied and 74% satisfied, compared to 8% and 84% respectively for the City as a whole. The two key issues cited by residents needing improvement were the level of crime (29% vs 20% citywide) and activities for teenagers (28% vs 18% citywide). Echoing these sentiments residents in the South East are also significantly less likely to feel safe after dark in their local area 36% vs 19% citywide), and are less likely to feel that there is social cohesion in the area (56% agree vs 71% citywide).
* Lastly, dog fouling stands out as a concern among South East residents (40% vs. 28% citywide)

Cowley

* Cowley has the second lowest level of personal financial security in the City after South East, with a net 13% expecting their financial situation to get worse, compared to a net 8% citywide.
* Satisfaction levels around cleanliness of the area in Cowley were in line with the City average
* Residents’ satisfaction with their local area in Cowley were the second lowest in the City, with 12% dissatisfied and 80% satisfied. The key issue cited by residents needing improvement was sports and leisure facilities (27% vs 15% citywide) – which may well have been driven by the closure of Temple Cowley pool.
* Lastly, car-related issues are a cited as a problem by Cowley residents, including cars parked inconveniently, dangerously or illegally as a problem (56% vs. 38% overall), and speeding or dangerous driving (53% vs. 41% overall). IpsosMORI advises that residents rarely make the distinction between the City Council and County Council as service providers

The findings of the 16/17 Residents Survey will be used to inform development of Council services in the future, alongside numerous other sources of user feedback.

**Supplementary Question**

Are there any plans to address the apparent need for sports and leisure facilities in Cowley?

**Response**

The new sports park at Horspath Road is under construction adding to the potential number of sporting venues that people can easily access from Cowley.

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Price – second deputy leader

At its meeting in July Council heard details of a plan to appoint a second Deputy Leader of the Council and to ask the Remuneration Panel to consider the appropriate level of allowance. Could the Leader update Council on the progress of this proposal?

## **Written Response**

The additional deputy Leader will be appointed imminently, and arrangements for holding a meeting of the Remuneration Committee will follow.

**Supplementary Question**

Given the announcement that Cllr Brown will become the Deputy Leader and Cllr Turner will step into the second deputy role, has this negated the original justification for this new post

**Response**

No: this gives more councillors the chance to participate in and share the work of the leader and provides succession planning. The Remuneration Panel can consider this and is also able to have wider discussions around allowances.

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Price - city centre movement and public realm study

## On September 9 the Oxford Mail reported that consultants have been appointed to do 'a complex piece of work' on a ‘city centre movement and public realm study’, commissioned jointly by the City and County councils. Cllr Price said, according to that report that "the city council's share would be paid for from the local plan budget". Could he inform Council of the overall cost of the study, the proportion falling on the City Council and what proportion of the Local Plan budget this represents?

## **Written Response**

The City Council and County Council are sharing the costs of the study equally. The total cost of the study is £77,060, with the City Council’s share being £38,530 (there are also potential additional survey costs). The Local Plan budget for this financial year is £130,000, so the City Council’s costs for the study represent 30% of that.