

To: Council
Date: 23 April 2018
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

1. From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Tanner – air quality data

Will the portfolio holder make available to members the 2017 air quality data (nitrogen diffusion tube data) which it is understood has been "verified and accredited" and released by DEFRA to Oxford City Council?

Response

The data, and associated analysis, will be available in the Air Quality Annual Status Report which will be published as soon as we have approval from DEFRA, I expect this to be by the end of June 2018. We are not in a position to publicise the data until the report is final and all analysis on the data is complete.

2. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Tanner – air quality data average readings

Is the Portfolio holder aware that of the 70 diffusion tubes in the city centre, only 35 have provided contiguous data for the years 2014, 2015, & 2016, and that the average NO₂ for these 35 sites was 38.0 ug/m³ in 2014, 38.3 ug/m³ in 2015 and 38.1 ug/m³ in 2016 - meaning improvements in air quality stalled in 2014?

Can he provide the average reading for these 35 sites for 2017?

Response

Yes. I am aware of the slow-down in improvement which is why the City Council recognises that a step change is needed in order to improve air quality further. This is why we have made proposal in partnership with the County Council to introduce a Zero Emission Zone in Oxford. Air quality data from 2017 will be available in our Air Quality Annual Status Report which is due to be published by the end of June.

Board member for Community Safety

3. From Councillor Altaf-Khan to Councillor Hayes – community cohesion 1

Given past occurrences of anti-semitism in Oxford, including in student societies, what is the city council doing to allay anxieties of Jewish residents?

Response

The Council undertakes and grant funds a wide range of positive activities to support community cohesion: this ranges from community events through to sessions and activities in our community centres.

The City Council works closely with Thames Valley Police to ensure we play our part in response to hate crime and the anxieties of all communities and individuals who may be affected by it. Where hate crime does occur we work with partners to deploy a coordinated response, not only through the pursuit of the offenders by Police, but by offering target-hardening advice to improve the individuals' safety.

Thames Valley Police are in regular contact with the Synagogue and thankfully there are very few anti-Semitic hate crime incidents reported in Oxford, however if there are anxieties amongst Jewish residents which we are not aware of then we would of course seek to work with them and our partners to support them and identify opportunities to increase cohesion.

4. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Price – JSSP

Para 21 of the Growth Deal states: "...The JSSP [joint statutory spatial plan] would be prepared under section 28 of the Planning [etc] Act 2004, which enables two or more local planning authorities to agree to prepare a joint Local Plan. However, formal decision making to commence, submit and adopt the JSSP would remain with the local planning authorities individually through full council meetings."

Could the Cllr tell us exactly how this council will be asked to make that decision, and the timescales involved?

Will this council and the other districts have a vote on whether to commence, submit and adopt the JSSP?

Will all councils need to approve it for it go forward?

Will the County, as a non-planning authority, have a vote on the JSSP at the Growth Board?

If so, will the county council get a vote, or will its cabinet decide its position, as happened with the Growth Deal?

Response

The preparation of the JSSP will follow the same regulatory processes as other statutory plans under the NPPF and associated regulations. Key stages are subject to Council approval by each planning authority. The County Council is the minerals, waste and transport authority and will contribute in both areas and participate in plan preparation. The Growth Board oversight of the JSSP preparation is now proposed to be supported through a newly constituted s.28 committee. This will involve the participation of all of the local planning authorities including the county council. The plan-making authority of the individual local planning authorities is not affected by this proposed governance structure.

5. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Price – local plan timetables

Cllr Cotton said the recent rejection by South Oxfordshire District Council of his proposals for their Local Plan would put the process back by "about a year". This takes SODC right up to the deadline of April 2019 identified in the Growth Deal for submission of Local Plans. The Deal specifically says that funding allocated by government "may be withheld or clawed back" if certain targets or milestones are not met: the Local Government Chronicle has characterised this as meaning that "failure to meet milestones could result in the "cessation of further investment" or the deal being cancelled."

Can Cllr Price as chair of the Growth Board reassure council that all member councils will meet the deadline of April 2019, and explain what happens if they don't?

Is the LGC right that the deal could be cancelled?

Response

There are a number of alternative options for SODC to take forward their Local Plan; the suggested delay is not inevitable. If there were to be a delay, it will be clear from early on that this could impact on the JSSP and Growth Deal timetable and discussions would then take place with Ministry of Housing and Local Government. Progress with delivering other key parts of the Growth deal such as our house building and infrastructure projects would be key factors in determining the views of Ministers and the civil service.

6. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Price – Growth Board Scrutiny

As chair of the Growth Board, would Cllr Price give this council an update on the emerging Scrutiny function before it comes to the board later this week?

Response

A Growth Board Scrutiny Panel is proposed to be established through a protocol between the constituent authorities with the involvement of a Scrutiny Chair from each authority. It is proposed to have three representatives for each authority. It will have the same call in powers as set out in the Local Government Act 2000. However, this non statutory Scrutiny Panel does not affect the statutory scrutiny functions in each of the constituent authorities

7. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Price - revisit the apportionment of housing numbers

The cumulative total of units contained within proposals by a range of parties for housing developments at Bayswater and Wick Farm is significant. Reportedly, one possible outcome of changes at SODC is that Grenoble Rd may come back into consideration.

Given that SODC never agreed to the apportionment of Oxford's "unmet need" at the Growth Board, and given that it doesn't have a Local Plan, will this council be proposing that the Growth Board revisits the apportionment of housing numbers?

Response

No.

8. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Price – tourist levy progress

Following the successful Motion in Council on 27 November 2017, can the Board Member advise what progress has been made in liaising with other tourist cities to bring in a tourist levy?

Response

No action has been taken as yet. The Council's wider policy for the future of the city centre is being developed in conjunction with our partners and will provide the basis for approaches to other tourist cities.

9. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Price – Westgate impact

Anecdotal evidence from local and independent traders (in the City Centre and in other satellite retail centres) is that since the opening of the Westgate they have started to see a drop business.

When will the City Council undertake a comprehensive survey of the impact of the Westgate on local traders?

Response

Anecdotal evidence is not the same as actual evidence. Actual evidence says that since the opening of the Westgate footfall in the city centre has increased sharply against the national trend of declining footfall.

There has been some movement of businesses around the city centre – some moving into the new Westgate, and some unrelated moves. Businesses are moving in to vacant units and a large redevelopment is proposed by Jesus College in Cornmarket.

The Council is developing proposals for an integrated city centre management structure and I expect that a review of the trading experience for the retail and food/beverage/hospitality sectors will be undertaken in the autumn of this year.

Board member for Culture and Communities

10. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Sinclair – EOCC asset of community value

I have been informed by the East Oxford Community Association that an application was made to make the East Oxford Community Centre an asset of community value in 2017.

What is the current status of this application?

Response

No application has been received to list the property as an asset of community value

11. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Sinclair – EOCC sale

A CEB report on plans for the sell-off of half of the East Oxford Community Centre site has been repeatedly delayed and now a meeting of the Council's EOCC Reference Group has been postponed.

Can the Portfolio Holder reliably tell me when the report will make it to CEB and scrutiny?

Response

A report to CEB is anticipated in July , although The County Council are currently considering whether they could provide services from a joint facility . The timing of County's work could impact upon the timing of reporting to CEB .

Board Member for Finance and Asset Management

12. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Turner – old Rose Hill Community Centre

The land on which the old Rose Hill community centre stood has been unused for a lengthy period when Oxford is experiencing a housing crisis. Can the Board Member please confirm the date on which the old community centre closed and when a planning application will be submitted to develop this land?

Response

The old community centre closed in January 2016 and a planning application for the land is expected to be submitted in July following local consultation. Clearly the Council could have disposed of the land very quickly and realised a capital receipt. Instead it chose to await the establishment of the Local Housing Company to progress the development, which we believe in the long term will give a better outcome for local people, especially with regard to the affordability of the housing. In addition, the site is linked to land close to the new Community Centre, and we have been negotiating to include an adjacent plot of land, belonging to the County Council, in that development.

Board member for Housing

13. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Rowley – Tower block leasehold charges

Will the Board Member for housing apologise for letting leaseholders in its Tower Blocks believe they would be charged up to 50K for “repairs” before the council had established what it was legally entitled to charge them for?

Response

The only way to firmly establish the legally correct distribution of cost between the Council and leaseholders was to seek a determination from the First Tier Tribunal. Any Council decision as to cost would have been subject to legal challenge by any leaseholder, so we decided to assist all parties to obtain certainty with as little delay and difficulty as possible, by ourselves asking the Tribunal for a determination. Both leaseholders and the Council now have the certainty provided by the Tribunal's decision.

14. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Rowley – tower block refurbishment update

Will the Board Member give us an update on the refurbishment of the council's tower blocks, particularly in relation to timing, costs, performance in comparison to original estimates, and the impact on budget assumptions of the recent tribunal ruling

Response

Works to all towers are virtually complete; the original cladding on Evenlode and Windrush has been stripped and is in the process of being replaced. The revised completion date for the whole project is now July 2018.

The Council agreed additional funding to replace the cladding on two of the towers following the Grenfell Tower fire. With the exception of this additional expenditure the works are currently projected to still come in within the original budget.

In our HRA business plan assumptions we did not factor in additional income from recovery of service charges so the recent tribunal hearing has not impacted adversely on the original budget.

15. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Rowley – delays at Barton Park

Residents are asking why the housing at Barton Park has been delayed. Can the Board Member please indicate the extent of the delay and the reasons for this?

Response

The first residents are now moving in to their new homes in Barton.

There have been some understandable delays because of a combination of factors which have affected the whole of Britain, most notably the exceptionally bad winter weather and the significant decline in the availability of skilled building workers.

There has also been a delay in utility connection despite considerable efforts by the contractor to press this forward with the provider. Unfortunately this is not something the Council, the LLP or the contractor can control, since the utilities are privatised companies.

Council Officers attend regular site progress meetings with the contractor to work through any issues that arise.

16. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley – alternative to St Mungo's

Is it true that St Mungo's are no longer providing specialist support for female rough sleepers who could be the victims of exploitation, and if so what alternative provisions will the portfolio holder be making?

Response

No it isn't. St Mungo's are commissioned by the Council to operate the Street Population Outreach Team (SPOT) contract on a generic basis. Officers will have specialist areas, to support the work of the team, but all members of the team are expected to support any rough sleeper, dealing with all vulnerabilities and needs on an individual and appropriate basis, and liaising with Thames Valley Police and other agencies where appropriate. The team have recorded over 300 positive interventions to support rough sleepers off the streets in 2017/18.

17. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley - OXSPOT number

Will the portfolio investigate why members of the public who use the recommended Oxford Street Population Outreach Team (OXSPOT) number to report rough sleepers in need of support are invariably met with an answering machine that redirects them to an organisation called 'Streetlink'. The phone number for Streetlink eventually hangs up with a 'busy' message, whilst a message directs callers to a website where they have to register before they can file a report. The first feedback they get after reporting the incident online is a request for a donation!

Does the portfolio holder think that this reporting process is streamlined, efficient and encourages high levels of reporting?

Response

Officers have received information concerning this and are working with St Mungo's to ensure effective reporting arrangements are in place.

The Street Population Outreach Team (SPOT) contract prioritises having the team undertake regular outreach work, from early morning to late at night, and does not provide for office-based administration to cover phone lines. It is also not an emergency service, and Oxford SPOT's answerphone message that emergency services should be contacted to report any immediate serious concerns regarding a rough sleeper.

Members of the public are encouraged to report concerns about rough sleepers by calling the SPOT team on 01865 304611. The expectation is that messages left on an answering machine will be responded to promptly, and within 48 hours, Oxford SPOT have maintained a response time for referrals of within 36 hours despite the fact that referrals can often be geographically very distant.

OxSPOT's answerphone message is activated after 10 rings. This has purposefully been set to this response time as the duty worker who is on that day may be out on an Outreach round, talking with a client or in a meeting, and so may need this amount of time to disengage and answer the call. This setting will give the worker a higher chance of being able to take the call.

Reports can also be made by emailing outreach.oxford@MUNGOS.org or by using the national www.streetlink.org.uk service, which will forward the report to St Mungo's SPOT for rough sleepers in Oxford City.

18. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Rowley – feedback on referrals to homelessness services

Following the recent homelessness briefing Cllr Wolff and I have diligently used the available channels to try and get support for those rough sleepers that we have come across in St. Mary's ward. Though we understand that it would be inappropriate to discuss individual cases now, we have found it difficult to find out whether, or how, those we have reported have been helped (beyond being told that they have been visited).

Would the Portfolio Holder agree that the responsibility of a Councillor for Oxford's citizens (homeless or not) doesn't end with connecting them to services and it would be useful for Councillors to get more comprehensive feedback?

Response

This reporting is welcomed, but St Mungo's do not provide further feedback to people making such referrals other than to say that they have visited. This is in order to maintain client confidentiality. Should Councillors wish to make specific enquires relating to persons in their ward, they can do so through the usual Council officer channels, and officers will endeavour to provide them with information.

19. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Rowley – casework success

These questions are often used, understandably, to criticise the operation of the Council with a view to improving our policies and processes.

But, on this occasion I would like to invite the Portfolio Holder to join me in thanking Housing Officers for responding promptly to some recent casework in my Ward – reinstating Housing Benefit within a few days.

Response

I would of course be very happy to add my thanks also to the housing and benefits staff in the critical work they do to sustain people in their tenancies. Our council staff work hard to make sure that people in the city are helped to access the benefits they are entitled to. I welcome Councillor Wolff's thanks to them.

20. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley - rolling winter accommodation for rough-sleepers

Can the portfolio holder please provide an update on plans to provide rolling winter accommodation for rough-sleepers first announced during this year's Budget Debate?

Response

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) accommodation was provided on 35 nights this winter season, assisting 141 individuals. The churches also operated a winter night shelter from 1st January to 31st March, providing an additional 10 spaces that were well used. As these services for the 17/18 winter have now ended, officers will be carrying out a review to determine whether or not changes need to be made for next winter.

21. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley – additional homeless budget spend

Can the portfolio holder provide an update on how the additional homeless budget for this year is intended to be spent?

Response

Spending on homelessness, is expected to be spent, as detailed in the March CEB report on the 'Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Funds for 2018/19'. This summarises the current position well, and highlights additional funding being made available for commissioning, and to support partnership working through the City Conversation, representing an additional £450k budget in 18/19 and 19/20 that is being made available.

22. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Rowley – Housing company business plan

Does the recent Housing company business plan allow for the provision of community-led and other alternative housing models.

Response

Not currently. The priority for our housing company is to directly deliver quality affordable housing as quickly as practicable for those in greatest housing need. However, the council's overall housing strategy welcomes community led housing projects such as co-operative house building or self build where people are able to put together proposals that work.

23. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Rowley – empty buildings reporting

What is the process for Councillors to alert officers of empty or derelict buildings in their wards which may be suitable for development as housing (given in particular the Council's budget commitment to buy up existing properties)?

Response

Empty or derelict buildings should be reported to the Council's Empty Property Officer via the "Report it online" section of the Council's website.

Board member for Planning and Regulatory Services

24. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth – number of dockless bikes

Can the Board Member advise how many dockless bikes are now standing on the streets of Oxford, and whether any more are to be licensed?

There is no upper limit in the Oxford Code of Conduct. Is one being introduced?

Response

Local authorities have no powers to license schemes, or to set enforceable upper limits through such schemes. However all the operators in Oxford have adhered to the voluntary Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct is under constant review, including whether an upper limit should be introduced. As the schemes expand their geographic coverage, more bikes will be required, but will be spread over a much larger area. Each time one of the three firms currently operating in Oxford has wanted to increase the number of bikes in their scheme they have consulted with the City Council as part of the ongoing dialogue between the companies, the City Council and the County Council.

25. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth – cycling stations for dockless bikes

Brilliantly coloured dockless bikes are becoming an eyesore on the streets of Oxford. What progress is being made in finding cycling stations where they can be stored?

Response

The point of dockless bikes is that that they do not have docking stations. The companies use incentives within their apps to encourage their customers to leave bikes parked appropriately. Several private landowners have agreements with the operators for bikes to be placed on their land.

26. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth – information from dockless bike hire

Dockless bikes are accessed by an app which requires credit card details. They are equipped with satnavs which permanently record bike trips.

How is this information used? How is it monetised? Are people aware of how their information can be used e.g. passed on to marketing companies?

Response

Data collected by private companies is subject to appropriate laws. The City Council is not privy to the contractual relationship between the companies running these schemes and their customers, in the same way that it is not privy to the contractual relationship between Oxford's bus operators and their customers.

27. From Councillor Goff to Councillor Hollingsworth - OUP Sports Ground and the Golf Club

Residents - of which I am one - are voicing real concerns about the future of the triangle of land comprising the Jordan Hill Estate, the OUP Sports Ground and the North Oxford Golf Club. The Estate includes 74 homes tied to OUP. OUP has refused to grant enfranchisement to leaseholders although usage no longer complies with the original terms and so it seems possible that the residents will face eviction in the next few years. The future of the OUP Sports Ground and the Golf Club, which are of huge amenity value to Oxford Residents over a wide area, is similarly unclear.

Are the Portfolio Holder and City Officers in discussions with Cherwell District Council and OUP about these sites and can the Portfolio Holder advise on the progress that is being made?

Response

The three sites referred to in the question are different, so this answer is divided into three parts.

The North Oxford Golf Club site has been proposed for development by Cherwell District Council in its Local Plan, and that Local Plan has been submitted for public enquiry. The City Council has been supportive in broad terms of development close to

the city's boundaries in preference to sites further afield, but has left the precise allocation of sites to Cherwell DC.

The OUP sports ground was allocated for residential development, subject to the retention or replacement of the cricket pitch and pavilion in the City Council's Sites and Housing Plan, which was approved after a public enquiry and adopted by the Council in February 2013. No change to this allocation was proposed in the Preferred Options consultation for the emerging Oxford Local Plan 2036, carried out last summer.

The issue of the leases held by residents of Jordan Hill from OUP is unrelated to planning policy, but is clearly a serious issue. I will ask relevant officers to take up the residents' concerns.

28. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth - hotel room policy

The emerging Local Plan identifies a need for more hotel rooms in Oxford, but does not specify where they should go, or what types are best in what places (beyond usual planning rules about types of use, district centres, etc).

Does the Board Member think we should have a policy on this?

Response

The current Local Plan identifies suitable locations for hotels, and the range of hotel types that are needed in Oxford. A more didactic approach, specifying exactly which hotels should go where, as the question appears to be suggesting, is unlikely to survive a public enquiry where such a policy would be challenged. The risk of having a policy rejected leaving a free for all needs to be weighed up against the apparent attractions of an overly-detailed policy. The Council will have the opportunity to debate the precise wording of policies in the new Local Plan later this year, and I'm sure will want to consider the balance of factors when weighing the appropriate option to put forward.

29. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hollingsworth - potholes and road maintenance

Will the Council's recent takeover of the County's maintenance contract for major roads in Oxford City mean that it is easier for Councillors to get potholes fixed on major roads and for our CIL ward member allowance to be used for repairs to these same roads (as Cllr Simmons and I have previous done for the minor roads in our Ward)?

Response

Councillors will certainly be able to put their CIL allowance towards road repair on main roads as well as minor roads, although there should have been no reason why this was not possible under the current arrangements. I am currently working with officers to design a process where it will be easier for local members to flag potholes in their wards that need fixing, but it is also important to be realistic. As the County Council recently made clear, there is a backlog of repairs on roads in Oxford and Oxfordshire that runs into the many tens of millions of pounds, and there is no likelihood at all that the County Council will be able to allocate anything like enough funds to keep with up with new repair requirements, let alone make a significant impact on the backlog. By taking on the contract, the City Council will be able to offer economies of scale and get more done for the money available, but the money available still won't be anything like enough.

30. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth – pothole repair

Given the recent arrangement between the county and city councils over road repair and maintenance, can the board member update us on progress towards fixing the many dangerous potholes on our roads?

Can he/she let us know if there is an agreed schedule of works for the worst-affected roads, and if so where members of the public can find it?

Response

The new arrangement, whereby the City Council takes over as contractor for repairs and maintenance on major roads for the County Council, has not yet come into effect as the legal agreement has not yet been finalised. While the legal arrangements are being confirmed I have asked the lead officer to prepare a clear schedule of works that will be publicly available. It is important to note that areas in need of major reconstruction – as opposed to in need of repair – will be excluded from the schedule, and will be dealt with separately by the County Council. This schedule of exclusions, which was highlighted in the recent CEB report, will also be publicly available.

31. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth – stop coach lay-overs on St Giles

Currently the 'Drop off and Pick up' stop outside the Taylorian Institute in St Giles is being used as a lay-over by a large number of tourist coaches for long periods, often with their engines idling.

Can the Board Member advise what steps are being taken to ensure that this practice is stopped?

Response

Both City and County Council staff regularly advise drivers that their engines must be turned off. The two authorities are currently discussing ways of increasing staff on the ground in St Giles, both to advise and enforce where necessary. The intention is to have this in place within a few weeks.

Deputy Leader of Council, Board member for Leisure, Parks and Sport

32. From Councillor Azad to Councillor Smith – cemetery service volunteers

Thank you for the good news about Cemetery Service that they will be launching a new scheme working with trained up volunteers from Muslim Community groups to provide a 7 days a week short notice burial service for the community and volunteers will work with council staff.

How many volunteers have been trained up so far and how will the success of the scheme be appraised?

Response

20 volunteers from the Muslim community have been trained. With regards to appraising the system, we have asked both the Duty Supervisors and Muslim community for feedback when a short notice burial at a weekend occurs. At moment there has been no need for the service. When the service is used if any issues or glitches are reported back to us we will provide a suitable solution to ensure the system works and continues to work.

33. From Councillor Pressel to Councillor Smith - Cutteslowe Park 'Park Run' track

Every Saturday at 9am hundreds of people of all ages and abilities take part in the wonderful Park Run in Cutteslowe Park.

The track they use in winter unfortunately gets really muddy.

Please can you tell me when Parks will be able to improve the surface?"

Response

Works to re-surface the footpath that runs along the rear of the Parks Depot from the duck pond are in our current work programme. We intend to start the work in July. Works will be phased and this will be subject to a detailed site survey when works commence.

34. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Smith – Stadium: Greyhound and speedway

What evidence is the Board member using to support her belief that greyhound racing and speedway are commercially viable on a valuable site within the city?

On the same day her view was expressed the Oxford Mail carried reports of a motocross event just down the road in Culham. Doesn't this show that activities of this kind are better accommodated outside the city, and that this is a prime example of land within the city which should be used for housing (as stated in the LibDem response to the Local Plan), thus relieving pressure on less suitable sites elsewhere?

Response

The City Council have just published a recently commissioned research study into the commercial viability of these activities and it's on our website/here's the link. The study will be an evidence document as part of developing the new local plan policies, ensuring that all relevant factors are taken into consideration as we look at sites within the city.

https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/4517/stage_1_report_on_commercial_viability_of_oxford_stadium

35. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Smith – Five Mile Drive portakabin

Could the board member update Council on timing and location of the proposed Portakabin for Five Mile Drive?

Response

We are currently working through the proposal to develop a dual use small pavilion (small social space, toilets and kitchenette) which will double up as a polling station and have developed a Project Initiation Document which is currently being reviewed. We are speaking with local contractors to understand the viability of achieving what we want within the budget we have. We are also working with colleagues from our electoral services team to ensure the specification will meet our requirements for a polling station.

We are proposing the location will be the same as the previous pavilion, although we will factor in the guidance from the contractor as to the financial impact of the location of the building, in particular the impact of the connection of services and the base upon which the unit would sit.

If the project is viable we would aim to have this in place by September 18.

36. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Smith - Five Mile Drive rec new equipment

Could the board member give details of proposed new or renewed equipment for the Five Mile Drive children's recreation area?

Response

Looking after our parks and play areas is so important and we have a regular programme of investment in our play areas in order to keep them in great condition and encourage children and families to use our parks. After all, outdoor play is fun, healthy and free to enjoy.

The city council is halfway through a ten year £1 million investment programme which sees £100k a year spent on improving and refurbishing play areas across the city.

This year, approximately a third of the annual budget is planned to be spent on upgrading Five Mile Drive recreation ground. The plan is to install a new multi-frame piece of play equipment which will replace the existing worn slides and climbing frame. Work will also be carried out to install a new self-closing gate on the play area and hoggin footpaths will be improved.

There is also a plan to install goal posts and basket ball hoops on the existing hard surface area, but only if this area is not required for the new facilities which the council is working with Summertown Stars FC to provide to support football.

37. From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Smith - concessionary rate for Fusion Leisure

Can the Portfolio Holder please explain the sudden, above inflation, increases in the concessionary 'Bonus' rate for using Fusion Leisure facilities. For example, the £1.30 session cost has increased to £1.50 and there is now a new 'peak period' charge of £2?

Response

The schedule of fees and charges including the price of activities in our leisure centres was consulted upon as part of the public consultation on this year's budget between 21 December and 28 January. The fees and charges were then agreed by the City Executive Board on 13th February and by Full Council on 19th February. The new concessionary charge of £1.50 off peak and £2 peak for holders of a Bonus card still represents a very large discount on the full price and excellent value for money. For comparison the normal price for swimming is £4.70, for a swim and sauna £8, for an exercise class £6.60 and for a visit to the gym £8.30. This means that a Bonus Card holder pays only 18% of the regular price off peak and only 24% of the regular price at peak times for gym access.

These fees and charges agreed by council are the maximum prices that Fusion Lifestyle can charge under our contract with them for the operation of our leisure services. Fusion currently offers a monthly membership for Bonus Card holders for only £19 a month. This equates to £4.38 a week for unlimited access to our leisure centres and demonstrates the commitment shared by this council and Fusion Lifestyle to inclusive and affordable leisure facilities for all residents of this city

Leader of Council, Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services

38. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – ICT restructure

This council has undertaken a significant restructure of its IT provision, involving a significant budget commitment and impacting a number of members of staff.

Could the board member provide a progress report on the implementation of the restructure, particularly in regard to the impact on the council's employees?

Response

A total number of 25 staff were directly affected by the IT restructure. All have roles in the new structure. The restructure created a number of wider skill-based jobs allowing staff to re-position themselves in roles that better reflect their individual skill sets and aspirations. The appointment process, which was supported by staff and by the unions, gave staff the opportunity to apply for new roles/promotions on a ring fenced basis to IT staff initially and then offering opportunities to staff more widely from outside the IT function for vacancies left at the end of the internal recruitment process. As an example, the IT Service Desk management role has been filled as a six month secondment opportunity. Having completed the placement of existing IT staff, the next step is to advertise both internally and externally as we look to fill those vacancies remaining.

39. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Brown – UC emergency fund

Can the Board Member advise the initial figure in the emergency fund for Universal Credit claimants, and how much of it has been paid out?

Response

Prior to the rollout of Universal Credit full service in Oxford, the Council set aside £50,000 to support customers migrating to Universal Credit in 2017/18, and a further £25,000 for 2018/19. As of 17th April 2018, payments have been made to 22 customers, totalling £1,015.

Since Universal Credit full service was rolled out in Oxford, a number of significant changes have been made by the government to support residents who are moving to the new benefit. The changes are as follows:

- A full month's payment can be obtained as an advance whilst people wait for their first UC payment, it was previously half a month's payment
- The seven waiting days which were applied to some claims were removed, reducing the time taken to receive the first payment from 6 weeks to 5 weeks.
- From this month, anyone moving to UC who was previously receiving Housing Benefit, will receive an additional 2 weeks' worth of Housing Benefit in addition to any housing costs they receive in UC

These changes have all reduced the potential demand for emergency support.

40. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – Green Belt and Growth Board

The Prime Minister has once again reaffirmed the central importance of Green Belt and the strictness of tests required to encroach on it.

Can Cllr Brown explain how the approach taken by the constituent members of the Growth Board is consistent with this approach?

Response

Development in the Green Belt is justified in 'exceptional circumstances'. The new National Planning Policy Framework launched by the Prime Minister states that 'where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and / or is well served by public transport', and this will guide our approach.

In respect of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, it is proposed that the new homes will be delivered on a range of land supply sources including public and private land, on former greenfield sites, brownfield land, in our garden towns and villages, in existing towns, villages and within Oxford City.

41. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – housing numbers in Oxfordshire

The government's own housing minister has pointed out that local authorities in Oxfordshire are working to housing figures which are in excess of identified need.

How can this council justify its continued use of figures which even the housing minister recognises as inaccurate?

Response

The government is introducing a new standard methodology for the calculation of housing need in the development plan system. The methodology is not in the adopted NPPF yet and consultation is still underway on the draft methodology contained in the National Planning Practice Guidance. The actual numbers for Oxfordshire's future housing need that may come from the proper application of the new methodology are as yet unclear and are a matter of speculation. This methodology will be relevant for the new joint statutory spatial plan for Oxfordshire covering the period from 2031 onwards.

The Oxfordshire Growth Board and the government have signed a housing and growth deal based upon the housing needs identified in the Oxfordshire SHMA 2014. These needs have been translated or are being translated into a suite of local plans covering the district and city areas of Oxfordshire up to 2031/2033 and 2036.

42. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – Growth around Kidlington

In its recent bid to the Housing and Infrastructure Fund the Growth Board placed housing around Kidlington third in order of priorities. The project was turned down. Funding for infrastructure through the Growth Deal is inadequate, and the Chancellor made clear in the Budget speech that, far from the deal being a down-payment on further funding for Oxfordshire, it should in fact be seen as a down-payment on the whole Ox/MK/Cambs arc- in other words, infrastructure funding for this project is far from secure.

What guarantees can Cllr Brown give to the people of North Oxford and beyond that they will not be faced with large-scale house-building without infrastructure in place?

What course of action will she be recommending to the Growth Board if the full costs of infrastructure to support the proposed homes around Kidlington are not fully secured within the very tight timeframes contained in the Growth Deal and Delivery Plan?

Response

The Housing Infrastructure Fund bids (Forward Funding projects) were submitted by Oxfordshire County Council with the support of the Oxfordshire Growth Board partners. The ranking priority order of the bids was in part based upon their assessment against government guidance and the number of units they would help deliver. It was not anticipated that all three Oxfordshire HIF bids would be successful in the first national funding round where they were competing against other bids from around the country. Two bids were successful however, and are moving into the next stage of the process. Oxford North has not been turned down – it just has not been funded yet. These projects are competing for funds from a national funding pot and the project will be resubmitted to later bid phases when these open up.

The HIF bids are intended to operate as a means of forward funding facilitated by the County Council. They are to accelerate homes coming forward and assist in unblocking barriers to development. The HIF funds are not expected to be grant funding but may contain a component of that if viability issues mean that is the appropriate way of enabling development to proceed. Cherwell District Council has investigated the viability of the North Oxford proposals and has satisfied itself that the development is deliverable with the identified infrastructure requirements. This will be a matter that is considered at the examination of the Cherwell partial review local plan later this year so these are questions that would perhaps be better put to Cherwell District Council – obviously that is more difficult for your party as there are no Liberal Democrat councillors at all in Cherwell District.

The Oxford North proposals are not expected to start delivering new homes until the early 2020s - at the end of the current growth deal period. Infrastructure will need to be planned and delivered as it arises. This will be overseen through the planning process and the joint working arrangements facilitated under the Growth Board.

43. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – Growth Board representative

Could Cllr Brown tell us who will be this council's next representative on the Growth Board? How will our representative be chosen? Will council have a vote?

Given the increasingly important executive function of the Growth Board, and given that my request to this council for a report back from our representative as a standing item at meetings of this council was rejected, could the Leader tell us how our representative will be answerable to this council for decisions taken on our behalf at the Growth Board?

Response

The representatives of the Growth Board must be a member of the Executive: this position will therefore be decided alongside other executive positions after the election. To date the councils have been represented by the Leaders of the councils and it is likely that this will continue.

As confirmed in answer to Cllr Gant's earlier question, the revised Terms of Reference for the Growth Board proposes a Scrutiny Panel made up of representatives from each of the councils. This is intended to avoid multiple and duplicative scrutiny processes, however the existing rights of the council's Scrutiny Committee to call in Growth Board decisions will remain. Updates on progress at key milestones will be reported to council.

The reason your request was rejected is that there is already a standing item on the Council Agenda under Part 2 for reports about Outside Organisations which will allow the Growth Board representative to report to this Council.

44. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – vision for Oxfordshire

Will Cllr Brown join me in welcoming the new leader of South Oxfordshire District Council, and ask her to use the opportunity of her election to join us in pursuing a vision for Oxford and Oxfordshire which provides the right housing for the right people in the right places with the right infrastructure, and maintains the clearly-identified benefits of the historic and natural environment of our city and its surroundings?

Response

Yes. I do welcome the new leader of South Oxfordshire District Council and look forward to working with her along with the other Oxfordshire Leaders to pursue a joined up approach to planning for infrastructure, housing and growth, not least through their new Local Plan and the JSSP our councils have signed up to.

45. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – unified park and ride charges

Cambridge City Council has recently reduced car-parking charges at its park and rides from £1 to zero.

Would the Councillor join me in noting that Cambridge has the freedom to set policy as a direct result of all its park and rides being controlled by a single authority, rather than the sort of absurd and costly bickering we saw between this council and Oxfordshire county council over Seacourt?

Would he/she regard a similar approach as a legitimate long-term aspiration for Oxford?

Response

Had Councillor Gant taken the opportunity to read the details of the recently approved budget, he would have observed that the charges and terms and conditions for all of Oxford's Park and Rides have been made identical. This is one of several concrete achievements of the parking steering group established last year, which has identified ways of saving the two local authorities significant sums through sharing back office functions and coordinating different services. This is an example of the success that can be achieved quickly, by having the two authorities collaborate informally and effectively.

In relation to Seacourt, the County Council as Highways Authority was rightly consulted as part of the planning process, and its views considered and taken into account. Irrespective of the ownership or control of the park and ride car parks, exactly the same process would have been followed in order to ensure the integrity of the quasi-judicial planning process.

46. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – unitary council

Would Cllr Brown join me in congratulating the people of Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, whose councils will reportedly soon be achieving savings of respectively £18m (according to the county council's own independently-verified options document) and £29m per year (according to Ernst and Young) on service delivery as a result of Secretary of State Sajid Javid's decision that he is "minded" to implement unitary councils?

Will the Councillor also note that this council's own independent report into proposals for unitary government in Oxfordshire identified similar significant levels of potential saving, with huge potential benefits for the people of our city and county, and urge the Secretary of State to take that fully into account when he considers proposals for Oxfordshire?

Response

I don't think the people of Northamptonshire would wish to be congratulated on the situation they find themselves which according to independent auditors is a result of the County Council not managing its finances appropriately. The wholesale decimation of services that is resulting from the situation and the imposing of a structure that no-one locally has voted for or particularly supports does not seem to me to be a matter for celebration. I would also note that government direction for local government restructuring in Northamptonshire has specifically ruled out a County wide unitary.

Cllr Gant will also note the subsequent report in response to the Unitary proposition for Oxfordshire which demonstrated how considerable savings can be made without the disruption and cost of local government reorganisation and note that Oxfordshire County Council have since identified other means of delivering savings.

I think that in Oxfordshire we can congratulate all local authorities on the progress we have made in collaborative partnership working which is has been successful in securing significant investment through a deal with government to support housing, infrastructure and economic growth. This is a top priority for Oxford and Oxfordshire.

That investment would be put at risk of derailment by local government restructuring and I would urge the Secretary of State to take that into account when considering proposals for Oxfordshire.

47. From Councillor Altaf-Khan to Councillor Brown – Town Hall hire by BME groups

Can the Board Member give details of the breakdown of Town Hall room hire by BME groups over the last 12 months as a percentage of the total number of hire transactions by non-council groups?

Response

All council facilities are equally accessible to the entire community and our bookings include a wide range of people from all ethnicities and backgrounds.

To ensure inclusivity and that the wider community can benefit from the Town Hall, bookings on Tuesday and Thursday daytimes are free for community groups. The usage on these days has increased to over 25 bookings a month, these bookings

include groups such as the Diamond Way Buddhism Group and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

The Councillor also attended the recent meeting of the Association of BAME Councillors. This meeting in our Town Hall was organised by Cllr Jamila Azad and the Lord Mayor and I were also there to welcome people.

We do not categorise Town Hall bookings based on ethnicity as each booking tends to include a range of people so we do not have this breakdown.

48. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Brown – GDPR

What is the Council doing to prepare for the General Data Protection Regulations, aimed at protecting personal data, which come into force end May 2018?

Response

GDPR awareness sessions and briefings to senior managers commenced early in 2017 and a project team was established in August to implement the GDPR action plan across a number of workstreams including communications, training, policy development, processes and systems, information asset management and contract management.

The Head of Law and Governance has been identified as the Council's statutory Data Protection Officer and the project team has participated in a regional GDPR networking group (including neighbouring local authorities and partner agencies) to share learning and ideas in advance of 25 May.

Since commencement of the project to ensure compliance with the new legislation, actions completed include:

- 2 officers have completed certified training as GDPR practitioners;
- implementation of a comprehensive internal communications plan;
- training to all staff delivered, tailored according to function;
- establishing an intranet page with training guides, FAQs, online training module;
- updating of policies and documentation including the Data Protection Policy, Data Sharing Policy, Privacy Notices and Privacy Impact Assessments
- reviewing and updating of various council processes, including Subject Access Requests
- the completion of an Information Asset Register for all services
- Guidance developed for Councillors (awareness sessions to coincide with issue of new devices following May elections)

A review of the GDPR project by our internal auditors (BDO) confirmed that the project plan was comprehensive and progressing well. A gap was identified in the detail of the Privacy Impact Assessment that has now been addressed.

Work continues in a number of areas such as ICT patching security, consent management and data retention.

The Information Governance Team will continue to monitor and deliver improvements to our Data Protection processes and procedures on an ongoing basis.

49. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Brown – community post office

Given that the Post Office has now been advertising for a business to take over from the closed Cowley Road PO franchise for more than a year now (with no interested parties coming forward), will the Portfolio Holder consider using Council resources to explore with Post Office Ltd the opening of a community post office on the Cowley Road (using the model developed by Esmée Fairbairn Trust in collaboration with Locality), a model which may also benefit other parts of the City where post offices are under threat?

Could the use of East Oxford Community Centre as a site for a community post office be considered as part of the study?

Response

If there is a business case for such a proposal and support by the community and the Post Office we would consider what we could do to help. We have consulted widely on options for the East Oxford Community Centre and such a proposal has not been put forward.

50. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Brown – Tackling Oxford's Unaffordable Private Rented Sector

In a question to Cllr Bob Price (April 2016), I referred to a Green Party motion entitled 'Tackling Oxford's Unaffordable Private Rented Sector' (passed by Council Feb 2016) which had not yet been enacted.

Cllr Price's response to my supplementary question stated that the motion would be 'addressed through our housing company'.

Can the current Leader update Council on progress now that the housing company has been formed?

Response

Solving the problem of high market rents is not within the City Council's gift. However we are focusing our efforts and significant investment on planning for and supporting development of more housing, particularly affordable housing and improving standards in the Private Rented Sector. We are also working together with our neighbouring local authority partners to meet Oxfordshire's housing need and good progress having secured £215m government investment in infrastructure and affordable housing through the Housing and Growth Deal and are on track to secure further funding through the Housing Infrastructure Fund later this year.

Oxford City Housing Ltd is making good progress with the first phase development programme with 159 new homes about to enter the planning process, planning permission granted for development at Bracegirdle road and the first phase of handovers at Barton Park due to begin in August 2018

This page is intentionally left blank