

To: Council
Date: 23 July 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 is 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 Culture and City Centre

1. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Clarkson – tourism and mode of travel

The latest figures I can find for tourist visits to Oxford city centre are for 2014. These suggest the following:

| | |
|--|-----------|
| No. of overnight stay visitors from overseas | 489,000 |
| No. of overnight stay visits from UK residents (2012-14 average) | 646,000 |
| No. of day-only visits from UK residents (2012-14 average) | 5,561,000 |
| No. of day-only visits from overseas visitors | unknown |
| Total | 6,696,000 |

This averages out at about 19,000 visitors per day.

- If there are more up-to-date figures I would be pleased to have them — the trend has been increasing.

- Have any estimates been made of the mode of travel of these visitors into the city — in particular, what proportion have accessed the city by private car or by tourist coach?
- If so, what are the estimates?

Written Response

We have worked with Experience Oxfordshire to procure Oxford city-wide (not centre) estimated figures on an annual basis. These cover economic not only estimated visits, but cash value and employment impacts. These figures are published for the previous year so we also have figures for 2015 and 16. We are currently procuring the 2017 figures.

The total estimated number of trips increased to 6,594,004 in 2015 and 6,995,577 in 2016. A breakdown of key figures for 2015-16 is below and highlights the estimated increases.

| Economic Impact of Tourism – Year on year comparisons | | | |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Day Trips | 2015 | 2016 | Annual variation |
| Day trips Volume | 5,501,004 | 5,855,547 | 6.4% |
| Day trips Value | £234,659,371 | £256,988,589 | 9.5% |
| Overnight trips | | | |
| Number of trip | 1,093,000 | 1,140,000 | 4.3% |
| Number of nights | 4,577,000 | 4,764,000 | 4.1% |
| Trip value | £386,717,000 | £392,256,000 | 1.4% |
| Total Value | £799,816,000 | £831,704,000 | 4.0% |
| Actual Jobs | 13,823 | 14,328 | 3.7% |

We are not aware of any mode of travel estimates of this nature.

Supplementary question

When the zero emission zone is in place what will the policy be for tour buses coming into the city? Do they need another route in? How will you collect data and work on a solution for this?

Response

We collect the data and it shows tourist numbers are down slightly and the average stay is only 60-90 minutes. we are seeking to encourage longer stays so as to encourage coaches to park further away, enrich the experience for tourists, and enrich the economy.

2. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Clarkson - tourist tax

Since agreeing to support a tourist tax for Oxford last year has the Council:

- (1) obtained advice on the necessary legal changes required for such a tax to be imposed;
- (2) made any contacts with other local authorities believed to favour such a tax, such as Camden, Bath, Edinburgh;

(3) raised the issue with any representative of central government;

(4) taken any other steps to progress the matter.

If the answer to any of (1) to (4) above is positive please provide details

Written Response

Officers have been keeping a watching brief on the progress of Bath and others. Bath are hoping to introduce a £1 nightly surcharge per room bed tax that could generate around £2.4m a year, which would be reinvested into the local area to help maintain more than 5,000 listed assets and support the public realm, arts and culture. Previous attempts to introduce the tax on the 5.8 million tourists that visit the historic city each year had been turned down by the government. After it emerged that Birmingham might be allowed to impose such a levy to help finance the 2022 Commonwealth Games, Bath councillors decided to revive the plan. Bath publicised they would petition the LGA and Government earlier this year.

Officers continue to monitor the situation. If central government does show signs of willingness to support local areas to raise a tourism levy, this is an opportunity to be explored.

Board member for Customer Focused Services

3. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Chapman – glyphosate use

In September 2016, this Council voted down a Green Motion to phase out the use in the Council's operations of glyphosate, a weedkiller which the World Health Organisation has labelled as 'probably carcinogenic to humans' and which has been banned by some other local authorities. At the time, the portfolio holder stated that glyphosate use was limited and, in any case, the Council was planning to phase out its use anyway.

Can the current portfolio holder please indicate what the current council policy is on glyphosate use, how much glyphosate is used each year by the Council and its contractors, and what progress has been made in reducing glyphosate use?

Written Response

ODS (via a specialist contractor, Charlton Environmental) applies glyphosate in accordance with manufacturers and industry standards to all street pavements and associated hard surface areas two to three times annually throughout the city (approximately 320 litres used in total). This is carried out as a pedestrian operation and is a spot treatment only, meaning only visible weeds are targeted. We do this using controlled droplet applicators (CDA), and so very little visible residue is left behind on the street surface. This helps to minimise the volume of pesticide being applied, and is the safest method of application available for our operators and for the public. This method of application uses far less product, down from 200L per hectare through conventional knapsack sprayers, to between 15L and 40L per hectare using CDA machines. The products themselves have also changed, so that formulations are now

safer to the public, operatives and wildlife, and most are 'clean label' and do not now even carry an irritant warning.

In recent years we have also applied glyphosate around the bases of all trees, so that the need for strimming throughout the season is minimised. This was brought in due to concerns surrounding the strimming causing damage to the trees across Oxford, and is usually a one off treatment in April, or in line with the first cut of the season.

We continue to monitor any debate about the future licencing of this product and we will only continue to use it whilst it is licenced.

4. From Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Chapman – GDPR

Could the Board Member give assurance that the data images, that I understand were taken in 2014 and are currently used by planning officers to ascertain if the back garden structures are being used for housing, are being kept securely and are subject to the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) ?

Written Response

All data, including data images, stored electronically on Council computer infrastructure is held securely to national standards (Public Sector Network compliance), with annual accreditation from Central Government on those standards.

Regarding the images themselves and whether they are subject to GDPR, the answer is that GDPR relates to personal data, defined as any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person. It also includes information such as physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identities that can be traced back to a specific individual. As the back garden photographs do not include personally identifiable data, they do not fall within the scope of GDPR.

Supplementary question

As a result of viewing these thermal images how many visits have taken place and how many outbuildings have been found to be used as habitable spaces?

Response

This will need a written answer.

5. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Chapman - *Dying to Work* policy

Since passing a motion on Dying to Work on 29 January 2018, what steps has the Council taken to review its activities and policies to ensure that they are consistent with the Dying to Work Charter?

Written Response

The Council has contacted a number of similar organisations that have already signed up to the *Dying to Work* charter in order to establish what changes they had made to relevant employment policies and procedures. This process has indicated that, in the majority of cases, no major changes had been made to employment policies and,

instead, existing policy was being applied in a flexible manner to take account of the circumstances of the individual's case and/or medical treatment regime, augmented by training and guidance for line managers supporting individuals in their team facing terminal illness.

The City Council's existing leave and attendance policies currently provide sufficient flexibility to support colleagues in such situations.

The next steps will be to: identify appropriate training and guidance for managers; consult with the trade union; finalise the charter declaration; and make arrangements for the signing event in the early autumn.

It is important to note that where these circumstances have already occurred, we have adopted a pragmatic and flexible approach to meet the needs of the case.

6. From Councillor Goff to Councillor Chapman – housing benefit change of circumstances

I have been made aware of a problem arising when a housing benefit claimant notifies the Council of an increase in their income: for instance a pension increase. The process then leads to housing benefit being stopped while this is looked into, leaving the claimant with insufficient income to pay rent and bills and more likely to get into debt. This seems to be unhelpful.

Please can you explain the process?

Written Response

In cases such as this we will suspend the payments for a short period until we are able to confirm the correct level of Benefit entitlement. This helps to prevent overpayments of Housing Benefit for the claimant.

This is a policy across all cases and is not a reflection on any particular claimant or their circumstances. If we overpay benefit in these cases, then we have to recover the overpaid Housing Benefit, placing the claimant in debt over a potentially long period of time, due to the levels of recovery we are allowed by law to apply.

We aim to work on the case as soon as possible to get the correct level of payment sent out. The increasing work load from dealing with Universal Credit cases and staffing shortages can potentially delay the process.

If a customer is in hardship because of the suspension of payments, is vulnerable or at risk of losing their home, they can contact us and ask for their case to be prioritised, and we will do our very best to help them.

When we knowingly overpay housing benefit to a customer when their circumstances have changed, there is a risk to the Council both in being able to recover the overpayment from the claimant, and the potential loss of subsidy grant, the cost of which then falls on the Council.

The Benefits Manager attended a recent Scrutiny meeting to explain the process, and would be happy to speak to Members individually if they have any particular concerns or cases they wish to see reviewed.

Supplementary question

As this process can take up to 6 weeks, even with the hardship fund people are left in penury. Can this be speeded up?

Response

In cases of hardship contact the benefits team as they can offer short-term help from the hardship funds. However we cannot realistically speed the process up for the reasons outlined above.

7. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Chapman – pest control

Note: The following questions have been raised by a resident concerned at the method(s) used by Oxford City Council, and its contractors, to manage the rat population in East Oxford. This follows the concerning incident of an (apparently) old poison box being found in an area known for its wildlife (SS Mary & John Churchyard) and another box being found near the children's play area in Manzil Way.

Given the number of questions, I would be happy with responses circulated to all members after Council and the answers recorded appropriately in the minutes.

- a) How is the size of Oxford's rat population assessed? Have any measurements been taken, what are the trends? Can these figures be broken down by geographical area?
- b) What is the total cost of pest control in Oxford in relation to specific species? Can these figures be broken down by geographical area?
- c) Are records kept of the number of rats poisoned every year in Oxford? Can these figures be broken down by geographical area?
- d) What is the nature of the poison used and at what concentration? Have there been any complaints/objections about the use of poisons from any quarter during the last 5 years?
- e) Have any alternatives to the use of poison been trialled and to what effect?
- f) Many species of wildlife and birds are now protected by law. How is it possible to know whether rat poison boxes do not poison other species (e.g. inter alia, small birds, frogs, toads, lizards, hedgehogs, snakes?) What trials have taken place to ascertain whether this is happening and how many species are affected?
- g) What steps are taken to avoid handling of the boxes by children or avoiding their being used close to where children play – for example in Manzil Way?
- h) What impact assessment has been made of the use of poisons on the environment?
- i) How is it that an old redundant black poison box was recently located on SS Mary and John churchyard? It clearly allowed for species larger than rats to enter and was therefore a threat to wildlife.
- j) Are regular reports made to the City Council on pest control activities and are they publicly available? If not, why not? When was the pest control policy and operation(s) last reviewed?
- k) Are independent inspections/audits carried out and by whom?

- l) What attempts are being made to ensure that eateries, e.g. on the Cowley Road, deal responsibly with food waste? What regulations are in place and who is responsible for inspection? What sanctions are currently in place?
- m) Have you formally consulted any animal welfare body with regard to pest control policy & measures, such as the RSPCA?
- n) Are any measures being taken to control foxes in Oxford? (foxes predate on rodents).

Written Response

As you anticipated in your preamble, because of the work involved in answering these questions and the short timescale a written answer will be provided after the meeting and included in the minutes pack.

Written response supplied after the meeting

- a) *The size of Oxford's rat population is not assessed by our team. No measurements have been taken by us nor are we aware of any information from other pest control contractors working in this area. Ultimately this is a "best guess" based only on treatments undertaken, which are as follows*

Rat Jobs raised 1/7/16 to 1/7/17 = 917

Rat Jobs raised 2/7/17 to date = 1044

Whilst there is an increase in treatments in the periods above, we cannot conclude that the rat population is changing without more trend data

The most concise information regarding this question can be found through the survey work carried out by BPCA (British Pest Control Association). The most recent completed survey can be found here:

https://bpca.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/Documents/Research/BPCA_National_Survey_2016.pdf

- b) *We don't keep species specific cost details and would only include Council activities giving an incomplete picture. The total Council budget for all pest control includes the dog warden service and is £150,000 per annum.*
- c) *No – this is not possible for the reasons outlined in answer to question (a)*
- d) *All poisons used are anti-coagulants; the concentrations are different for each poison. We are not aware of any complaints about the use of poisons.*
- e) *Poison is not the only tool available to technicians, whether to use poisons (including the type of poison used) is a decision made following a risk assessment and an environmental assessment of the property on a case by case basis.*

Any alternatives to the use of rodenticide are already part of our techniques used to control rodent pest species. Prior to operation the rodenticides are fully trialled.

In the figures given above, rodenticide was not always used on every single rat treatment. It may be that integrated pest management techniques are all that is required to deter rats from a site, for example, removal of a food source, or lethal traps were used to control rodent pest species instead of rodenticide.

- f) *We have not received any reported cases of secondary poisoning resulting from rodent treatments carried out by our team. A souring agent is utilised as a composite part of all approved and licenced rodenticide manufactured in the UK to deter non target fauna from consuming the rodenticide.*

By following best practice and adhering to the CRRU (Campaign For Responsible Rodenticide Use <https://www.thinkwildlife.org/code-of-best-practice/crru-code/>) we mitigate the likelihood of non-target species coming into contact with rodenticide.

- g) *Bait Boxes are tamper resistant as industry standard of manufacture and are designed to prevent non-target species and children from accessing the poison. They are fixed by drilling or tethered by wire at site. They are clearly labelled warning people not to touch them and that they contain rodenticide. They are placed by trained technicians and are checked regularly.*

- h) *Large numbers of assessment have been made across Europe hence the tight control on the use of rodenticides.*

See google search:

https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=impact+assesment+use+of+rodenticides&rlz=1C1GGRV_enGB751GB751&oq=impact+assesment+use+of+rodenticides&aqs=chrome..69i57.5231j1j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

- i) *The bait boxes remain in position with prior agreement with the customer. The bait boxes in question are manufactured in line with current British Safety Standard requirements and designed and manufactured and labelled/tethered as answered in above question “g”. There is no evidence that non target species have entered any bait boxes. The boxes in question did not contain any rodenticide, this was removed as soon as the rat population was controlled. The bait boxes remained in position as this particular site was prone to rat activity at random periods over the course of time.*

- j) *We are legally required to leave reports on pest control treatments carried out and this practice is maintained. These reports are not publicly available as they contain confidential information protected under law. Our pest control policy and operations are reviewed through regular team meetings, information regarding control techniques and product modifications/new product developments, attendance at BPCA seminars, ongoing training, participation to pest control industry specific continued learning as subscription to the CPD scheme.*

- k) *The Pest Control Service are audited by the BPCA* as part of their membership requirements and we comply with the Environmental Audit ISO14001 ***

**The BPCA (British Pest Control Association) is the leading trade association for the pest control industry in the UK - <https://bpca.org.uk/>*

***ISO14001 is an internationally recognised family of standards that helps organisations minimize how their operations (processes, etc.) negatively affect the environment*

- l) *Response from Environmental Health:-*

All food establishments receive a routine food hygiene inspection, with the frequency determined by the risk rating of the business (i.e. poor performing premises would be inspected more frequently than those where higher standards were noted).

As part of their visit the inspecting officer would assess the business's provisions for the storage and disposal of waste. If they were deemed unsuitable e.g. an accumulation of food waste stored loose that may attract pests then follow-up action would be taken. In the first instance this is likely to involve contacting the business owner to raise the issue and revisiting to assess compliance. Similarly pest activity, potential pest entry points, and conditions that may give rise to harbourage are assessed during the course of an inspection.

If conditions do not improve then action could be taken under Regulation 19(1) of The Food Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013, as detailed under Regulation E.C No 852/2004 or alternatively through The Prevention of Damage by Pest Act 1949.

In addition it is my understanding that the Community Response Team has specific powers that they may invoke where additional bins or collections are required (Environmental Protection Act 1990 or the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014).

- m) *No, we adhere to the national CRRU code of practice and follow all relevant legislation relating to pest control including the Animal Welfare Act 2006.*

- n) *No*

Board member for Finance and Asset Management and non-statutory Deputy Leader

8. From Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Turner – insurance claim

Will the council's insurance cover the costs of replacement of a new see-saw in the Margaret Road Play Area, in Quarry?

Written Response

Playground equipment belonging to Oxford City Council is insured under the All Risks section of our Insurance policy.

This covers damage by Fire, Lightning, Explosion, Aircraft, Earthquake, Riot and Civil Commotion, Malicious Damage, Theft or Attempted Theft, Impact by any road vehicle or animal, Storm and Flood.

However, damage as a result of wear and tear or a lack of maintenance, corrosion, erosion, rust, wet or dry rot, dampness, mould, dryness, marring, scratching, vermin or insects is not covered.

The Parks Team, who removed the damaged see saw in Margaret Road Play Area, have advised that the damage was due to normal wear and tear and not as a result of an insured peril.

The new parts for the see saw have been ordered and it will be returned to the Margaret Road Play Area as soon as repairs have been completed.

Therefore, I regret that our Insurers will be unable to assist with the costs incurred on this occasion.

Supplementary question

Can we be assured that any future maintenance checks identify this type of wear and tear correctly - it did look like the see-saw had been deliberately cut?

Response

I will check with officers about the details of the damage.

Board member for Healthy Oxford

9. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Upton – ‘stop smoking’ services

A recent survey of local authorities by Cancer Research UK and anti-smoking charity ASH worryingly found that – as a result of funding cuts - around 40% did not provide a universal specialist service for smokers in line with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines.

Can the portfolio holder provide Council with an update on the funding situation in Oxfordshire and the City and what measures are – and can - be taken to maintain funding and service levels on this important public health issue?

Written Response

A smoking cessation service is provided by Oxfordshire County Council. There was a consultation on cessation services by the County Council in 2017 and the following option (3) was agreed;

- To commission a combined service based on a model which would incorporate Local Stop Smoking Service with open access and referral to face to face services,

targeted outreach for priority groups, an online/telephone offer and prevention education. Increase wider tobacco control activity/investment (*for example funding initiatives to control tobacco advertising*).

A new contract was awarded to Solutions4Health Ltd. (trading as SmokefreeLife Oxfordshire) which commenced roll out of the new model from 1st April 2018. The contract value is £575k across the county (including performance/target related awards that may mean the total figure is less) across 3 plus 2 years. More information on the service can be found [here](#). This service meets the NICE guidelines for a universal specialist service for smokers.

Recent data is available via the [PHE Fingertips Local Tobacco Control profile](#) which was updated last week to include 2017 data for smoking prevalence. Confidence intervals have also been recalculated for previous years' data.

In 2017, smoking prevalence in all adults in Oxfordshire (10.7%) was significantly lower than England (14.9%). Smoking prevalence in the Routine and Manual occupation group in Oxfordshire (24.4%) was statistically similar to the national average (25.7%).

The City Council recognises the importance of this service and will continue to highlight this through its membership on the stronger communities group, Health Improvement Board and Health and Wellbeing Board. We will continue to play an active role, offering support and challenge to ensure the service delivers for residents of Oxford.

10. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Upton – cycling improvements

What specific projects is the Council planning to complete in the next 12 months to improve facilities for cyclists in Oxford?

Written Response

While we are delighted that the National Infrastructure Commission recommended spending £150 million pounds on cycling infrastructure we have no idea whether any money will be forthcoming from the government in the next 12 months. Thus, although we have a long list of projects, including many small ones identified by the Oxford Cycling Forum that I chair, I am afraid that we can only deliver those projects funded locally, either by the Highways Authority, ie the County Council, or ourselves. It is important to have projects lined up as government funding tends to come through in bursts and at short notice.

Funding for cycle routes promised in the Growth Deal will be decided by County Council officers. They are looking at a number of schemes and I know that they have been in contact with City officers regarding the canal towpath from Aristotle Lane to Elizabeth Jennings Way, Boundary Brook path and Cuckoo Lane.

I continue to encourage ward councillors to commit funds for extra bike parking stands building on our successful partnership with the social enterprise ParkThatBike through which we have installed 44 stands (88 spaces) recently.

11. From Councillor Goff to Councillor Upton – cycling signage

Council will be aware that shared cycle paths can cause serious problems for all concerned, particularly where there are hidden pedestrian entrances and bus stops to contend with. Could some of the recently awarded cycling grant be used to look into and provide suitable signage?

Written Response

Concerning both the cycle route funding in the Oxfordshire Growth Deal and the £150 million pounds recommended for cycling infrastructure by the National Infrastructure Commission (if it materialises) I will be lobbying for best practice to be observed in setting out all our cycle paths so that they are as safe as possible for people both on foot and on bikes. If signage would help, then I would certainly include that.

For locations within the remit of the City Council, we adopt a risk-based approach based on the number of recorded incidents / accidents. If Councillor Goff could highlight specific locations, officers can review the signs and lines in the vicinity.

Supplementary question

I can highlight several places in my ward which are in need of improvement. Would you be willing to visit to see these for yourself?

Response

Yes I would be please to arrange to visit your ward and see these places with you.

12. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Upton – 5ml Drive pavilion

Can the councillor confirm the timing for the installation of the permanent portakabin promised by her predecessor in Five Mile Drive? Can the board member now guarantee that the pavilion will be operational in time for the beginning of the Summertown Stars season in September?

Written Response

We are currently firming up the quotes that we have received for two portakabin options. The typical installation timescales for these type of facilities are about 12 weeks from the order being placed. Once we have the information in the next couple of weeks, we will then set up a meeting with the local councillors and the club to talk through the options including any interim measure such as portaloos.

Supplementary question

Can more funding be provided to meet any shortfall?

Response

All available funds are now committed to project but I will be discussing with Summertown Stars and the ward councillors how to meet any shortfall.

13. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Upton – sports involvement

Will the Board Member join me in warmly welcoming the joint initiative to replace the astro surface at Phil and Jim’s school, and in congratulating the parents, school staff and governors and committee members of Summertown Stars football club for their hard work on this, and on the success of the club and the Aristotle cup in getting many young people from a wide range of areas and backgrounds actively involved in sport?

Written Response

I am delighted that Phil and Jim’s school are close to reaching the target for raising money to replace and upgrade their Astroturf this summer and turn it into a centre that the whole community can use. Due to the sterling efforts of the school’s fundraising team, and an innovative partnership with Summertown Stars they are very close to their £115k target. Local councillors, including me have offered contributions from their ward budgets.

This will not only benefit the school but also the wider community as it will be available for local sports clubs to hire in the evenings, and at weekends. There is a real need for all-weather training surfaces within Oxford, not least by Summertown Stars, with over 45 teams at all levels, so I am delighted that this is a joint initiative that will see the Stars make a hefty contribution in return for extensive use of the facility outside of school time.

It will allow Phil and Jim’s school to link with local clubs to increase participation in other sports and to continue to host their highly successful inter-school events.

Board member for Housing (Building better homes)

14. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Rowley– building control for Council’s new housing

Without wishing to prejudge the final conclusions of the inquiry into the Grenfell Tower disaster, enough is already known about the failure of the privatised building standards system to mean that the City Council can have little confidence in any advice or certification it receives from the industry and government agencies regarding the quality of new builds that we have commissioned at Barton Park and elsewhere. Their failures with regard to advice on cladding have already cost the City Council millions.

Issues that are already widely reported include :

- inadequate materials testing, commissioned and paid for by manufacturers themselves (the Building Research Establishment itself no longer being fully independent but competing with other companies to win testing contracts)
- outdated building regulations and a drive towards light touch regulation

- a seriously compromised inspection regime in which inspectors are commissioned and paid by the builder, not the property owner

When things go wrong it is understandable that angry people want someone to blame, and one lesson from Grenfell is that the City Council runs the risk of being blamed for the inadequacies of a failing building industry over which it seems we have little control. In Kensington & Chelsea that blame culture in turn seriously undermined the efforts of the local authority to help the survivors of the disaster.

Many of the housing units being built at Barton Park will be for our own tenants. Although it would clearly have been better if our own building inspectors had carried out the statutory inspections, the City Council was not awarded the contract by the developer.

For inspection to be adequate it needs to be conducted at regular intervals throughout the building process, not after floors, ceilings and walls have hidden everything from sight. Also, it is clearly in the interest of the City Council and for our future tenants for things to be put right before tenants move in rather than afterwards.

For the reassurance of our council tax payers and future tenants, could the portfolio holder tell us what steps the Council could take, and will be taking, to provide full independent assurance that our new-build housing will be safe, properly and completely built and free of defects before handover?

Written Response

The Council has and will continue to engage independent project management teams that include a Clerk of Works to ensure that our new homes are inspected at stages during their construction to ensure they meet the quality standards required by building regulations and our design specification. The first homes at Barton Park have been subject to planned inspections at key stages and this will ensure that homes are handed over in a suitable condition for our tenants. There may be some small snagging items in the early stages of occupation and these will be dealt with and remedied under our contract with the housebuilder. In addition, although the City Council is not providing services to the housebuilder as Approved Inspector, it remains the case that the homes will have to comply with Building Regulations (which also includes staged inspections).

Supplementary question

At what stages will the inspections be carried out and what will these cover? Who carries these out for the Council and are they truly independent of the developer and responsible to the Council?

Response

I will supply a written response.

15. From Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Rowley – tower block charges to leaseholders

Could the Board Member explain why the figure of almost £50K communicated to tower block residents as their liability for works was so wildly divergent from the eventual figure of £2.5K? Will he acknowledge that very real stress, inconvenience and worse was caused by this error? Will he apologise to residents?

Written Response

In any major works project, there is often an element of discussion, between the landlord and the leaseholders about what their contributions should be.

It should be noted that the council is under a fiduciary duty owed to its tenants - whose rent money paid for the works - to maximise recovery of costs in these instances so had no choice but to charge leaseholders for the works.

The value of the leaseholder contributions were calculated by removing elements that were known to be improvements, such as external parking areas and canopies, leaving what the Council considered to be repairs which would be deemed rechargeable to the leaseholders.

In order to avoid protracted debate and leaseholders having to undergo hearings, the Council proactively sought a Determination from the First Tier Tribunal as to the reasonableness of the charges so that there would be certainty as to how much leaseholders would have to contribute towards the works on the tower blocks, and thus try to minimise any distress to leaseholders.

The Tribunal ruled that most of the elements of the work were in fact improvements, not repairs. The Council's current lease provides that the cost of repairs are recoverable but improvements are not, leading to a much reduced service charge bill for leaseholders who have benefitted significantly by the improvements to their properties, including new windows, enclosed balconies, heating, ventilation and sprinklers.

The Council acknowledges that this process was always likely to be stressful for leaseholders but it was unavoidable if we were to carry out the works.

Supplementary question

Will the councillor now apologise to leaseholders for putting them through this stress?

Response

The process is unfortunately inevitably longer and more stressful than any of us would like. We referred ourselves to the tribunal to speed this up. We have a duty to our tenants to maximise the return to them from their rents. So we had to start from that position and then go through the First Tier Tribunal process, the length and location of which are not within our control.

16. From Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Rowley – tower block refurbishment costs

The Council has recently completed refurbishment of its Tower Blocks. We welcome this and congratulate officers. We note that the budget increased more than once during the course of the works.

Now they are complete, can the Board Member give a total cost, together with the original estimate, and the reasons for the change?

Written Response

I thank Cllr Roz Smith for her question and also pass on my thanks to officers that have overseen the tower block refurbishment project. Final completion works remain

ongoing to Plowman Tower and Windrush Tower and these works are scheduled to be complete in the coming weeks.

In terms of the increased budget the Cllr will be aware that we brought forwards necessary funds for the replacement of the cladding at Evenlode & Windrush towers which are situated in the Blackbird Leys area. The Cllr will be aware that the Council took the proactive measure to replace the cladding as soon as it was aware that it was of the MHCLG guidance.

Relating to further cost increases, the delivery team has successfully overcome challenges in terms of the programme and delays in achieving necessary planning approvals and complex legal agreements such as costs associated with access to Hockmore Tower which involved access over land leased to a third party which all added to the contract sum.

The overall budget figure for the scheme as approved in 2015 was £20,108,308.00. The current approved budget is £22,000,308.00. As works are not yet complete I cannot confirm a final cost figure however we are working within this current budget allocation.

Supplementary question

Does this sum include the legal costs of the tribunal case, which was in fact held in Cambridge

Response

I believe this is included and we have no control over the location of the tribunal.

Board member for Planning and Transport

17. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hollingsworth – South Kennington site

The planning application for the South Kennington strategic site is being considered. This site is assigned in the Vale of White Horse Local plan as one of those contributing to Oxford's unmet need.

What efforts are the City Council making to ensure that the mix of size and tenure of the houses provided does in fact meets Oxford's needs e.g. on affordability?

Written Response

The premise of the question is incorrect, although it does raise issues that it is helpful to address. In fact, the South Kennington Strategic site is allocated in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 1, which deals with housing need for the Vale of White Horse, and specifically does not address Oxford's unmet housing need. This is because the Inspector for the Local Plan Part 1 considered that the apportionment of 2,200 homes for the Vale was agreed at the Growth Board meeting in September 2016 came too late in the process to include in the Part 1 Plan. As such, the Vale of the White Horse is addressing Oxford's unmet housing need through the production of a Local Plan Part 2.

The Vale's Local Plan Part 2 specifically seeks to address the Vale's agreed apportionment of Oxford's unmet housing need - 2,200 homes - through the allocation of additional sites to meet Oxford's unmet need within the Vale in the Abingdon-on-Thames and Oxford Fringe Sub Area, an area that is close to and has good accessibility to Oxford.

During the production of the Local Plan Part 2, Vale Planning officers shared their progress with City Council planning officers, prior to the publication of each consultation stage. The City Council made representations on the plan at both consultation stages regarding several issues, one of which was affordability.

The Vale Local Plan Part 2 is currently at Examination. Prior to the hearing sessions, the Vale of White Horse District Council signed a Statement of Common Ground with the City Council, which included a section on affordable housing. As part of this statement, the Vale agreed to deliver 1,100 affordable homes and agreed that their Housing Officers would work with Oxford's Housing Officers to agree a way forward to ensure that the right tenure and mix of housing come forward on sites for Oxford's housing need. Officers are in similar discussions with each of the Oxfordshire District Councils in relation to the details for the provision of housing to meet Oxford's unmet need.

City Council Planning Officers have attended the appropriate hearing sessions to make the City Council's case to the Planning Inspector to ensure Oxford's unmet housing need, particularly in terms of tenure and mix, is delivered on sites coming forward in the Vale of White Horse, allocated for Oxford's unmet housing need.

18. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hollingsworth – population assumptions for the Local Plan

The assessment of Oxford City's future need for the allocation of employment land is at least partly based on assumptions about our population's natural growth rate — that is, population growth not resulting from people moving into the region but new people being born within the city outnumbering those residents who die.

According to the Office for National Statistics, a major reason why the UK population is increasing is because people are living longer, although births are still outnumbering deaths. The increasing older cohort will not need employment land allocation.

In Oxford, however, property prices have risen to the extent that young people cannot afford to live in the city, even if they continue to be employed here. By allocating land for employment, we may well simply be planning for a growth in commuting.

Is the portfolio holder able to explain what assumptions have been made about the future size of Oxford's native-born working-age population as we draw nearer to publication of our revised Local Plan?

Written Response

Data that separates people born in the city from those born elsewhere does not exist. The census data does include country – as opposed to city – of original, which shows that Oxford has a very high proportion of its population born outside the UK. An unscientific sample of the population, the City Councillors of Oxford, would suggest that a fairly low proportion of Oxford's population is born in the city rather than moving here from elsewhere.

Current Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and the Government's consultation on a standardised methodology for assessing housing need put great importance on the use of official population and household projections and set out that these should be the starting point for the assessment of housing need. The most recent sub-national projections are a 2014-based set published in Spring/Summer 2016.

In October 2017 the ONS published a new set of (2016-based) National Population Projections (NPP). These project notably lower population growth than in the previous (2014-based) set, with the UK population projected to be 2 million fewer in mid-2041. This national decline is driven by lower assumptions about future birth rates and international migration, and an assumption of a slower rate of increase in life expectancy. The key differences are:

- the ONS long-term international migration assumptions have been revised downward to 165,000 pa (beyond mid-2022) compared with 185,000 in the 2014-based Projections. This is based on a 25 year average.
- The latest projections assume that women will have fewer children, with the average number of children per woman expected to be 1.84 compared to 1.89 in the 2014-based Projections; and
- ONS is no longer assuming a faster rate of increase in life expectancy of those borne 1923–38. This is based essentially on more recent evidence. Life expectancy still increases, just not as fast as previously projected.

In due course, the key assumptions at a national level will be translated into the next Sub-National Population Projection. Since the latest (2016-based) National Population Projections have made changes to assumptions about birth/ death rates and international migration, adjustments will be made to the projections in Oxford to take account of the fertility/ mortality assumptions.

In the meantime, the roll-forward of the 2014 Oxfordshire SHMA to calculate the Objectively Assessed Housing Need (OAN) for Oxford to 2036 is being carried out, based on the latest population statistics. Its analysis of demographic trends takes into account the latest sub-national and household projections and the latest national population projections, which have been adjusted to take account of Oxford-specific trends. Therefore, the assumptions that underpin the future size of Oxford's native born working-age population draw on the latest Sub-National Population Projections (2014-based) and are informed by the 2016-based National Population Projections. Technical adjustments are made to ensure consistency between national and local projections.

Supplementary question

What is the increase in the native-born working-age population? It would be helpful to include this in the Local Plan.

Response

Unfortunately we cannot include this information as it simply doesn't exist in this form.

19. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth - population of Oxford

The ONS has recently said that official calculations of the population of Oxford have been revised downwards by 6,000 [22 March 2018:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2012tomid2016#main-points>].

How will this revised number be factored into calculations of housing need?

Written Response

In March 2018, ONS published a revised set of mid-year population estimates (MYEs) for the period 2012-2016. This revised ONS population data is mainly based on changing measures of international out-migration (emigration) at a national level. When this national trend is extrapolated to Oxford it appears to have a significant impact, because such a large part of Oxford's population in-migrates and then out-migrates each year. This then appears to reduce the 2016 population level by about 6,000 from previous estimates.

The Councillor may be aware that following the 2001 Census the ONS produced similar extrapolations of population based on national trends which were then applied across the board. The result at that time was a supposed sharp drop in Oxford's population, along with the populations of other cities and local authority areas with a high proportion of particular transient groups of citizens. The City Council, together with the County Council and a number of other authorities, successfully challenged the ONS and the Government and ensured that a more accurate process was used.

At that time the main incentive was to restore the level of Revenue Support Grant lost because of the population decrease, and now that the City Council is soon to lose all its RSG there is less incentive to launch a formal challenge to these estimates. But given the history of errors caused by the extrapolation of national trends to Oxford's somewhat unusual demography (very high proportion of citizens born outside the UK, high proportion of students, high proportion of younger people) I am personally deeply sceptical that the city has really seen a reduction in its population of 6000 people. It is worth bearing in mind that Oxford is one of only four authorities to have seen such a reduction – the others are Westminster, Cambridge and Haringey, all authorities with a similar demography. It is further worth bearing in mind that these are exactly the authorities that the City Council worked with in the successful challenge after the 2001 Census.

Nonetheless, the MYEs when projected forward result in changes post-2022. As part of the work on the Local Plan and the JSSP a longer-term reduced migration scenario specifically for Oxford and Oxfordshire will be modelled and tested (with a number of other scenarios) and compared to a core scenario which links to the 2014-based Sub National Population Projections with adjustments for relevant 2016 mid-year estimates. The roll-forward of the 2014 Oxfordshire SHMA to calculate the Objectively Assessed Housing Need (OAN) for Oxford to 2036 is based on the latest population statistics.

20. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth – email alerts for planning

A resident has reported to me that he is signed up for email alerts to planning applications, but receives alerts only for new, not revised applications.

Could the Board Members confirm if this is the case, and, if so, whether he thinks it should be changed?

Written Response

The email alerts system for planning application is provided through the Planning Finder, which is a third party service, not one over which the City Council can exercise direct control.

The alerts are sent based on changes to the 'status' of an application. These changes would be when a new application has been added or when a decision has been issued. If documents or comments are added / amended on applications then this would not necessarily trigger a status change, so an alert would not be sent.

We have asked the Planning Finder service provider if they can widen alerts to pick up this information. They have said they are unable to do so at the moment but will look to whether the service can be updated. I have asked officers to see if creating a new status for 'updated plans received' could be added, so that this could trigger an alert, thus avoid the situation where alerts were sent whenever any new document or comment was uploaded to the system.

21. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth - Northern Gateway AAP

In 2015 Council was presented with the Area Action Plan for Northern Gateway, personally signed by Cllr Hollingsworth and then-Councillor Price. The Foreword stated that "Northern Gateway will...provide affordable new homes and offer more people better housing options...will also help to unlock funding and resources to improve the local highways and footpath/cycle network to tackle congestion and traffic...[and include] links to the new Oxford Parkway railway station".

The recent masterplan for the site fails to deliver on these commitments: the link to Parkway station has disappeared; the developer made a derisory assessment of the achievable level of affordable housing, raised to a paltry 25% because of external funding; there is no attempt to address the housing needs of specific groups currently excluded from Oxford's housing market; 1,500 parking spaces attached to the employment element will clearly create traffic, not reduce it; traffic between the A40-A44 is directed right through the middle of the site. Regarding the effect on the wider area: no account is taken of the cumulative effect of proposed large-scale development nearby; the Loop Farm link road is not secured; Yr-1 Growth Deal funding to improve sustainable transport links on North of Oxford Corridor Routes is 1.5m out of a full cost of 65.9m, clearly not sufficient to deliver any improvements in the appropriate timescale.

In 2015 Labour councillors accepted the assurances in the AAP and voted (unanimously, from memory) to support it. Liberal Democrat councillors expressed considerable reservations about whether the undertakings given around infrastructure and other elements would give residents the reassurance they need and deserve, and (mostly) did not feel able to support the AAP in the form in which it was presented to council.

Who was right?

Written Response

The AAP is an adopted document that went through public examination. It forms the basis against which the City Council's planning Committee(s), and any appeal process, will judge the proposals at Oxford North. Those proposals have yet to be submitted as a full planning application, and it is perhaps unwise of the Councillor to run the risk of pre-determining them.

The Masterplan is being proposed by Thomas White Oxford, and has been subject to pre-application discussions with a number of parties all of which are seeking a comprehensive development that delivers the terms of the AAP. The City Council is party to those discussions, and those discussions are as yet not complete. It is ultimately up to the developer when they wish to submit an application, and it is clear that if such an application departs from the policies set out in the AAP then that will form a critical part of the decision-making process.

However it is incorrect to say that the effect on the wider area or the cumulative effect of the proposed large-scale development nearby is not being taken into account. The application will be accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment which considers exactly those issues and the application will be accompanied by technical data to set out how these matters are considered. In highway terms there have been significant discussions with the County Council and Highways England to understand what traffic generation will be created by the development and also what infrastructure works are required on the road network.

The Loop Farm Link Road on the northern side of the A34 would lie outside the site boundary and also the city council's administrative boundary. This matter was discussed during the examination in public of the AAP and it was agreed and accepted that it was not required to deliver the Northern Gateway development. Therefore it has not formed part of the discussions for these proposals. The Loop Farm Link Road has always been a scheme that the County Council have been looking into delivering irrespective of this development.

22. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Hollingsworth - Oxford North proposals briefing

Why were councillors in wards directly affected by the Oxford North proposals (most obviously Wolvercote and Summertown) not informed of or invited to the briefing on the proposals which took place on July 2nd?

Written Response

The briefing was one arranged by the developer, Thomas White Oxford (TWO), and they issued the invitations, so any such question might better be put to them. The briefing was held immediately prior to the opening of the public exhibition at the Town Hall and

was attended by 6 members of CEB along with officers, and consisted of the same material as used in all the public consultation events. All Oxford City Council members were informed in advance of the dates and times of the TWO pre-application public consultation events by the Head of Planning. No information was shared beyond that captured in the public exhibition at which TWO representatives were on hand to answer questions.

TWO also held an exhibition at the Jury's Inn, Wolvercote, on 4 July. TWO is running an online public consultation from 26 June to 22 July at <https://www.oxfordnorth.com/> giving all those with an interest the opportunity to contribute?

Supplementary question

I understood that TWO had contacted officers to ask them to issue the invites – is this usual practice?

Response

It is not commonplace to have briefings by developers for councillors. When they do happen, it is not unusual for developers to contact officers to ask that they send invites to, or supply contact details for, councillors.

Board member for Safer, Greener Oxford

23. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Hayes - Zero Emission Zone

Prior to the announcement of the Zero Emission Zone:

- (1) what consultations did the Council undertake with businesses in the affected streets?
- (2) did the Council consult DHL, UPS, TNT or any other courier company as to whether they would be willing to deliver to the affected streets using electric vehicles?

Written Response

Proposals for a Zero Emission Zone in Oxford have been jointly developed by Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council. Officers from both Councils met with a range of businesses in the area impacted from 2020.

Further details can be found in the [consultation response](#).

The Council has been in conversation with zero emission delivery companies over a number of years, for example, Gnewt Cargo and Pedal & Post, who deliver in London and Oxford using only electric vehicles and bikes respectively. TNT have run Smith Newton EV vehicles since 2008 in Oxford which are regularly seen in the Cornmarket and thus already delivering in the area impacted in a zero emission vehicle.

Board member for Supporting Local Communities

24. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Tidball - Minimum Income Floor

Under the new Universal Credit system, self-employed people are required to demonstrate that they have earned over the government's Minimum Income Floor in any given month, otherwise benefit is suspended. Some self-employed people are self-employed in name only, since some employers use it as a means of bypassing employment rights; in fact they are in precarious employment in the 'gig economy', and sometimes their work is seasonally variable.

- a) Do we have any assessment of how many Oxford residents are at risk of being driven into poverty and potentially homelessness as a result of Universal Credit rules on 'self-employment', and if so, what is it?
- b) Will you consider specifically reviewing the application of a Minimum Income Floor with regard to the City's own Council Tax Reduction Scheme (which currently mirrors the floor in Universal Credit)?
- c) If you agree to conduct such a review how will you engage and consult self-employed people?

[Note: In the report by the Special Committee for Work and Pensions on MIF, it was pointed out that, "45% of self-employed claimants with children need to work around childcare or other caring responsibilities, and 30% have a long-term physical or mental health condition" and "Several self-employed people, and organisations supporting them, told us that the consequence of the MIF for them would not be increasing their income or taking an employee job (which they felt was unviable), but unemployment or a major shortfall in income."]

Written Response

The City Council values self-employed workers, their skills, the flexibility of this type of work and the important role they play in our local economy. In regard to the specific aspects of this question

- a) Universal Credit (UC) is assessed by the Department of Work & Pensions. Limited statistical information is published by DWP in relation to UC claimants so we don't know how many self-employed people in Oxford are claiming Universal Credit. We are, in a motion brought at this Full Council, calling for improved data collection by the DWP. The Council's own Housing Benefit records from March 2018 show that there were 398 households who declared earnings from self-employment, and of these only 26 were earning in excess of the Minimum Income Floor. The remaining 372 households could therefore be at risk of seeing their income reduce as they move to UC. In addition to these there will be some self-employed people already in receipt of UC.

The Council's Welfare Reform Team, provide a Springboard service for people migrating to UC. This aims to help people make the transition to the new benefit and provides support for people who are struggling financially.

- b) The Council Tax Reduction Scheme is something we continue to be fundamentally committed to. Although it is not something we are required by government to provide, as a local authority, we see as very important and we have funded it with nearly £2 million per annum to support people on low incomes with their council tax payments and to enable their financial inclusion. The Council introduced a MIF in order to provide some consistency in the way self-employed people are treated in the benefits system and reduce the amount of administration involved in dealing with self-employed Council Tax Reduction claims by making the rules easier to understand for self-employed applicants. As with any new scheme, we have kept it under review and want to make sure it works well in practice on the ground for self-employed people in the City.

One consequence which has emerged is that there are a number of self-employed career options, and individual circumstances, which make it difficult for people to increase their self-employed income which means they have no option to mitigate the impact of the MIF. We have, therefore, decided to undertake a consultation on the MIF later this year to look at ways we may need to adapt the scheme and work closely with this group to resolve this situation. A report proposing consultation on the 2019/20 CTR scheme will be tabled at CEB on 18 September 2018, with consultation planned to take place from the following week for 8 weeks. Following consultation, amendments can be made to the scheme, and there is an opportunity to amend or remove the MIF depending on what this public consultation shows.

- c) Consultation will be promoted by the Council's communications team, and self-employed people in receipt of CTR will be written to, inviting them to respond to the consultation. In the meantime, where self-employed people's earnings are actually less than the Minimum Income Floor, or there are any unforeseen adverse consequences of the Minimum Income Floor's implementation, we have put safeguards in place and self-employed workers in difficulties can apply for support through our City Council Hardship Fund.

Supplementary question

Will the proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme be sent to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration?

Response

Yes it is on the Scrutiny Work Plan to go to Finance Panel

Deputy Leader of the Council; Board member for Leisure and Tackling Homelessness and Improving the Private Rented Sector

25. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Linda Smith - pool covers at the Barton and Marston Ferry Pools

Can the portfolio holder please update us regarding the pool covers at the Barton and Marston Ferry Pools which, I am told, have not been working for 8 months in one case and 18 months for the other? As she will be aware, correctly installed pool covers can reduce energy use and the associated carbon emissions.

Written Response

The pool covers at the sites mentioned have come to the end of their natural lives. Funding bids have been made to replace these and these have been successful to the Salix fund. Fusion are currently waiting for an installation date from the suppliers.

Supplementary question

When will the covers be replaced – what is the installation date?

Response

I do not have a date yet for these replacements but will keep you informed.

26. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Linda Smith - pool cover at the Hinksey Pool

I am reliably informed that there are problems with the pool cover at the Hinksey Pool. It does not completely cover the pool and animals have been found dead or dying in the pool in the mornings. Could the Portfolio Holder let us know what she is going to do about this?

Written Response

There isn't a pool cover at Hinksey due to the size and shape of the facility as well as what is a high risk of drowning if there is unauthorised entry at night into a pool with a pool cover on. Given its outside location there is always some risk to wildlife with the pool, but we don't believe a pool cover would stop any issues. The pool has a chlorine system that helps disinfects the pool should there be any contamination within it.

27. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Linda Smith - Fusion Leisure

Given the alarming downturn in performance against contract by Fusion Leisure in 2017, what contingency plans does the council have in place if this trend continues?

Written Response

Leisure centres across the country are experiencing declining usage. This is partly due to increased competition, but it is also because people are choosing increasingly diverse ways to keep fit. We are proud to host a wide range of ways to keep fit in Oxford, including sports sessions at our recently-refurbishment pavilions, dance and activity groups at our 19 community centres, council-organised activities and fitness trails at our 300-acres of parks and open spaces, and the soon-to-be-open £5m Oxford Sports Park.

Oxford City Council's leadership in this area has seen fitness levels across Oxford increase significantly in the last decade. Use of our leisure centres has increased by 22.6% from 2008/09 to 2016/17, and Oxford has gone from being named by Sports England as having one of the lowest levels of activity in the country in 2007, to being crowned the fittest city in the UK in 2016.

The Council will continue to work hard with Fusion regarding the performance of the contract and early signs this year are more positive. The contract has been a positive one in general terms with participation before the contract at 845,000 in 2008/9 to a significant increase of 1,030,000 in 2017/18. The cost of the contract has also significantly reduced from £2 million per annum before the contract to around £100,000 per annum now. Ultimately the financial risk for the contract lies with Fusion if performance does continue to decline. However we will continue to monitor the contract to drive innovation and ensure that Fusion are marketing effectively and have embedded customer engagement and insight.

28. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Linda Smith – emergency accommodation

If an ultra-budget hotel were to open in Oxford, would the council consider using it as emergency accommodation?

Written Response

The Council seeks to provide self-contained property (with separate kitchens and bathrooms) as temporary accommodation, and will only use 'B&B' accommodation for very short term use and where other options are not available, which is very infrequently. The Council constantly reviews such arrangements to ensure effective value for money, whilst ensuring accommodation is good quality and readily accessible as required, and may consider other providers of accommodation if new accommodation opens up.

29. From Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Linda Smith - Oxford Stadium

The Councillor is quoted as believing that greyhound and speedway are commercially viable at Oxford Stadium.

What evidence is there for this claim, given recent trends in both sectors?

What has been the cost to the council of consultants in respect of plans for the stadium, and what is the estimated cost of the further consultancy work planned by the council?

Written Response

As part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan 2036 the City Council commissioned a report from Five Lines consulting to test the commercial viability of returning the Oxford Stadium to a greyhound and speedway use, and to better understand what other commercial leisure, community and or residential uses maybe required to enable this to take place. Stage 1 of this initial high-level assessment has been carried out and published (March 2018) on the City Council's website. The overall conclusion reached by the consultants was that the Oxford Stadium has the potential to operate as a commercial leisure destination (offering greyhound and speedway racing) on a financially sustainable basis.

Stage 2 of this commercial viability assessment seeks to explore in greater detail some of the key underlying assumptions concerning land value, potential development profit, car parking provision and the mix of the 'enabling' residential development. Work is well advanced on Stage 2 and a summary of the findings of this report will be published shortly as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan 2036.

Stage 1 of this assessment cost approximately £18,000 and Stage 2 £20,000 the total cost therefore of the commercial viability assessment will be about £38,000.

30. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Smith – short-term lets sector

Following the briefing to members a few weeks ago from a company operating in the short-let sector here in Oxford (and elsewhere), could the board member inform us of progress on council plans to make this sector work better?

Written Response

It was clear from the briefing that national legislation is required to give councils the powers to make the sector work better. Whilst it is possible to use existing powers to deal with anti-social behaviour issues, there are no controls over the change of use to short lets or over who is managing and controlling them and so they are largely unregulated. We have contacted a number of local authorities who have similar concerns to Oxford and have approached the Local Government Association to identify what level of support exists for lobbying government to introduce new powers to help the Council deal with the growth and impact of the short-let sector. A report on the short-let market by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Tourism, Leisure and the

Hospitality Industry is due out shortly and we will be reviewing its recommendations to identify how best to target our lobbying activities.

Leader of the Council, Board Member for Economic Development and Partnerships

31. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Brown – 5ml Drive polling station costs

What was the cost to the Council of installing a temporary polling station at Five Mile Drive recreation ground for the City Council election in May?

Written Response

The costs to the City and County Councils of hiring a temporary building, ramp, generator and portable toilet at Five Mile Drive Recreation Ground are:

| Election Date | Cost | Election Type |
|---------------|-------|---------------|
| May 2018 | £2875 | City |

32. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Brown - 5ml Drive polling station cumulative costs

In broad terms, what has been the cumulative cost to the council of installing temporary facilities at Five Mile Drive recreation ground to serve as polling stations since March 2013, when the council committed in writing to replacing the redundant facility there? (There have been eight elections in that period: 2013 county council elections; 2014 city council elections; 2015 General Election; May 2016 PCC elections; June 2016 referendum; May 2017 county council elections; June 2017 General Election; 2018 city council elections)

Written Response

The costs to the City and County Councils from 013 of hiring a temporary building, ramp, generator and portable toilet at Five Mile Drive Recreation Ground are as follows:

City Council - £5,323

County Council -£4,856

PCC and EU -£5,053

Parliamentary - not known

Five Mile Drive falls in the Oxford West and Abingdon constituency for parliamentary elections. These polls are run by the Acting Returning Officer for Vale of White Horse Council. All costs for parliamentary elections are reimbursed by Government.

The costs of the EU referendum were also reimbursed to the Council by the Government.

Where polls are combined (as in 2014 and 2016) the City Council pays half the costs, the Government reimburses the other half.

33. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – retail sector difficulties

Combibo's coffee house in Gloucester Green has recently closed, citing a "loss of sparkle" in the city centre, for which it explicitly blamed the policies and actions of this council. In my own ward another coffee shop has closed suddenly, several retail properties have stood empty for months and even years, and, worst of all, the much-loved Book House has closed. Retail is of course always fluid, but there is a worrying trend here.

What ideas does the city council have to address this?

Are current planning policies around mix of use in district centres fit for purpose?

Written Response

Oxford City Council continues to monitor the ever changing retail environment very closely and recognises that High Streets of the future are moving to be less about retail alone and to include more leisure and service businesses. As online shopping trends continue to grow towns and cities need to be more of a community hub incorporating health, housing, arts, education, entertainment, leisure, business/office space as well as shops. We are therefore currently exploring how we can work with landlords of commercial premises (which includes the City Council) to generate a much more co-operative approach in creating opportunities for our city and district centres to take on more of this form. We will also have opportunities as part of the local plan process to rethink some of our retail space.

The City Council hosts a monthly forum for city centre businesses called Talk of the Town. These meetings are well attended and continue to provide traders with help and advice in terms of collaborative opportunities to be involved with key annual events such as Alice's day, St Giles Fair and the Christmas Light Festival. We also discuss how to increase footfall in their stores, promotion and diversification of their businesses along with advice around business regulation and how to deal with and/or report anti-social behaviour. This information is also provided through regular email communications and 1-2-1 meetings with traders.

It is worth noting that we monitor the vacancy rate of shops in Oxford monthly and we are still below the national average. There are many businesses who are keen to locate to the city centre. The main barrier is actually a lack of space and suitably sized units. The Westgate is now 95% let and it is not anticipated that any more businesses from elsewhere in the city will relocate there. Empty shops as a result of such relocation are either being redeveloped, new tenants are going in or have plenty of interest, according to regular updates from landlords and agencies.

A city centre commission made up of key stakeholders from the public and private sectors will hold its first meeting in September to help shape the city centre's future and further develop its offer.

It is important that Oxford’s draft Local Plan 2036 (due to be published for consultation in November) provides for anticipated retail demand. The Retail and Leisure Study 2017 assesses retail needs by considering local and national retail trends:

https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/3762/oxford_retail_study_main_report

The report concludes that retail needs can be met within existing centres. The Local Plan aims to strike a balance between flexibility and protecting the needed amount of retail in the city centre and district centres such that they remain vibrant shopping destinations that meet people’s needs. The Retail and Leisure Study 2017 also includes health check assessments of the city centre and district centres, and recommendations from these are incorporated into the draft Local Plan. The Local Plan vision and strategy anticipates that centres will become more diverse, as they will be central to delivering for a wide range of needs in a sustainable way.

34. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – Deputy Leader SRAs

In February 2018 Council voted (without opposition support) to pay an additional SRA to the non-statutory second deputy leader. The additional duties identified included:

- i. “maintaining effective working relationships with opposition groups, committee chairs and other elected members”
- ii. an enhanced role in partnership working
- iii. communicating “council achievements” to staff and members

I am not aware of any activity by the non-statutory Second Deputy Leader under i (though there has been much constructive engagement from his colleagues).

On ii, officers have supplied the following list of CEB appointments to partner bodies, which appears to suggest that far from doing more partnership working than his colleagues, the non-statutory Second Deputy Leader is not in fact doing any.

Partnerships:

| | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Community Impact Group | Councillor Marie Tidball |
| Growth Board | Councillor Susan Brown |
| Growth Board Housing Advisory Sub Group | Councillor Mike Rowley |
| Growth Board Infrastructure Advisory Sub Group | Councillor Linda Smith |
| Growth Board JSSP Advisory Sub Group | Councillor Alex Hollingsworth |
| Growth Board Scrutiny Panel | Councillor Andrew Gant |
| Growth Board Scrutiny Panel | Councillor Craig Simmons |
| Growth Board Scrutiny Panel | Councillor David Henwood |
| Health and Wellbeing Board | Councillor Louise Upton |
| Health Improvement Board | Councillor Louise Upton |
| Low Carbon Oxford | Councillor Tom Hayes |
| OSP Economic Growth Steering Group | Councillor Susan Brown |
| Oxford Safer Communities Partnership | Councillor Tom Hayes |
| Oxford Strategic Partnership (OSP) | Councillor Susan Brown |
| Oxfordshire Environment Partnership | Councillor Tom Hayes |
| Oxfordshire Partnership | Councillor Susan Brown |

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| Safer Oxfordshire Partnership | Councillor Tom Hayes |
| Stronger Communities Steering Group | Councillor Marie Tidball |
| Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel | Councillor Tom Hayes |
| The Oxfordshire LEP (OxLEP) | Councillor Susan Brown |

Could the Leader supply a detailed account of the additional duties undertaken by the non-statutory Second Deputy Leader since January 2018, over and above those undertaken by his Board colleagues, with particular reference to partnership working?

Response

An answer will be given at the meeting.

Response given at the meeting

I think this refers to matters since annual council, a couple of months ago. Since then, I have asked Cllr Turner to have primarily an internal focus, in particular in the areas of the council budget and MTFS, and also in the reconfiguration of our property portfolio. Some of these discussions have been with other bodies – for example engagement and meetings with health stakeholders about sharing of assets, also the engagement with a community association about an ongoing asset issue with the council, on a similar basis with the Arts Council.

He has also played a hands-on role in helping us move forward towards our proposed link with Wroclaw.

In the recent past, Cllr Turner has worked very extensively on partnership working – for instance on the Health Inequalities Commission with the CCG and follow up, in working with the County Council, CCG and other districts on the homeless pathway, and in helping to support the extension of fraud prevention work to other districts.

He has also worked very extensively within the Local Government Association in the development of its housing policies – I would note that the long-standing concern with the HRA borrowing cap, for example, was reflected in the LGA's lobbying and is now seeing some progress with the government. However, his consistent focus remains on finance and budget issues, and I would note that under his leadership in this area the council has put itself in the position where it has retained frontline services, invested significantly in its assets, and proposed balanced budgets in spite of government cuts starting from the time of the coalition government.

Supplementary question

Are these not the duties normally expected of our hard working Executive Board members? These do not show that the duties meet the extra responsibilities envisaged for the role. Do they adequately reflect the special responsibility allowance?

Response

Yes these duties are extra responsibilities and are reflective of the special responsibility allowance

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