

To: Council
Date: 20 July 2020
Title of Report: Questions on Notice from members of Council and responses from the Cabinet Members and Leader

Introduction

1. Questions submitted by members of Council to the Cabinet 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

Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing

No questions

Cabinet Member for City Centre, Covered Market and Culture

1. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Clarkson – Street traders

| Question | Written Response |
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| Council made the decision to ban street traders from operating in the City Centre due to concerns over social distancing. That is despite outdoor markets being allowed to | The Council has not banned street trading in the city centre. As part of the suite of measures to make the city centre safe we have not issued any daytime consents for street traders on Cornmarket Street and |

1. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Clarkson – Street traders

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| <p>trade from 1st June.</p> <p>I have received a complaint from one such pedlar who claims she was forced by Council officers on 26 June to move on and challenges the Council's right to discriminate against pedlars in this way.</p> <p>Can the Portfolio Holder please clarify the situation regarding street traders, the Council's legal powers to discriminate against them and can she assure Council that, should lock down be re-imposed, pedlars will be treated the same as outdoor markets?</p> | <p>Queen Street to prevent them causing an obstruction and ensure social distancing is possible for the public.</p> <p>The Council has also been discouraging pedlars from operating in Cornmarket Street and Queen Street for the same reason. There are no powers to ban pedlars so no discrimination has taken place.</p> <p>The pedlar concerned was operating in breach of the Coronavirus Restrictions Regulations by painting henna tattoos on people, which was not a permitted activity.</p> <p>The Council will treat pedlars in accordance with government legislation.</p> |
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2. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Clarkson – Noise nuisance and Environmental Health team responses

| Question | Written Response |
|--|---|
| <p>Will the Portfolio Holder consider an early review of the cuts to the noise service, which are leading to a reduction in quality of life for residents living in affected neighbourhoods</p> <p>How many times has The Noise App been used?</p> | <p>It is too early to consider a review of the impact of the small changes made to the out of hours service.</p> <p>In the first quarter of this year the Noise App has been used 3309 times.</p> |

Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services

3. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Chapman – Cutting grass verges

| Question | Written Response |
|--|---|
| <p>Will the Portfolio Holder agree to change the regime for the cutting of grass verges to protect biodiversity?</p> | <p>We are currently undertaking a review of grass cutting regimes to verges in the City. This review is being undertaken with stakeholders including Oxford Direct Services (ODS). The purpose is to identify areas of grassland suitable for a regime that increases biodiversity. This review will feed in to the next budget cycle identifying and costs and/or savings.</p> |

4. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Chapman – Council Tax correspondence

Question

I recently received a worrying piece of casework from a constituent who continued to receive (at her new address) Council Tax settlement letters from the City Council jointly addressed to her and her previous partner.

Despite her separation being amicable, this caused considerable and understandable distress. One can only imagine how someone fleeing an abusive relationship would have reacted.

Can this practice please end?

Written Response

I am grateful to Cllr. Simmons for giving me plenty of notice he was going to raise this matter in a formal question. I do have sympathy with his request as we want to avoid causing distress especially to people who have split up from their partners, which can itself be a traumatic event.

However, the Council is hamstrung by regulatory requirements.

That is because in a number of circumstances more than one person may be liable to pay the Council Tax on a property. This is known as having 'joint and several liability' and applies in a number of instances which include where more than one person has the same interest in the property in terms of the hierarchy of liability and for residents who are married or live together as husband and wife or are civil partners. Exceptions to this can apply if for instance one of the liable persons is disregarded for Council Tax purposes.

Joint and several liability derives from the provisions of the law (Local Government Finance Act 1992) and is not determined by who is named on the Council Tax bill. If the bill is issued in a single name, recovery proceedings can be taken against that one person. However if there is a joint liability the appropriate notices must be issued in the names of anyone against whom enforcement action is to be taken before such action can take place.

The Council will always issue Council Tax bills in joint names where there is a joint liability, as should the tax remain unpaid, the recovery process can be undertaken against all those who are liable to pay.

In this particular instance the Council Tax bill was issued in joint names, and therefore when this was closed, the closing bill was issued in joint names, one to each party at their respective addresses, as is legally required. At no point was the complainant's address divulged to the ex-partner.

Whilst the Council acknowledges that the process can cause distress, and has indeed apologised to the taxpayer for such distress, it cannot change its process, as this is clearly defined in regulations.

We will continue to explore how we can reduce to a legal minimum references to former partners in our council tax settlement correspondence

5. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Turner – Exposure to a downturn in the city’s retail sector

| Question | Written Response |
|--|---|
| <p>As a result of the lockdown, many retail businesses are vulnerable and it is possible that some may have to cease trading completely.</p> <p>What is the level of the Council’s budgetary exposure (in terms of both rent and rates)?</p> <p>What strategies for protecting businesses and keeping vitality in the city are being considered?</p> | <p>The Council has budgeted income from commercial property of approximately £12.6 million per annum. The council collected approximately 60% of the first quarter’s rents on these properties by the end of June, although the collection rate for the June quarter is not likely to be as favourable. In respect of business rates, we have undertaken a risk assessment of each ratepayer (as we have for our tenants) and it is estimated that the total exposure to failing business in the city centre for the rest of the year would be around £26 million with the city council’s share of this under business rates retention being 40% i.e. £10.6 million (which, after the application of the business rates safety net of £5.8 million would be a loss to the Council against its 2020/21 budget of £3.3 million).</p> <p>Many businesses benefit from the Expanded Retail Relief Discount and consequently pay no business rates this year, but should any business go into administration then the discount is removed. We continue to work with businesses that do not qualify for relief and make arrangements to defer business rates charges. We are also working with our tenants to understand what further relief can be agreed over and above the various relief packages offered by Central Government. When a business has difficulty making a payment, we are treating each case separately in line with recent Government guidelines, the principles of which had already been adopted.</p> <p>We are pursuing various strategies to keep vitality in the city as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A re-opening the ‘high street’ programme, including one-way pedestrian flow guidance in the city centre and on Cowley Road, alongside social distancing signage, and visitor and business engagement and information. We are evolving this to now include a marketing and promotion campaign to instil confidence to encourage people back to the city centre and local centres, safely. Officers are also now working to push the Visit England “We’re good to go” guidance and promotion for visitor economy |

5. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Turner – Exposure to a downturn in the city’s retail sector

businesses.

- Working with the County Council to fund two city centre bus gates to reduce congestion, reduce bus journey times and provide the platform for re-prioritising road space to cyclists and pedestrians to get into our city centre more safely
- Made available details of unclaimed grants to ward members so they can assist in disseminating information and increasing uptake
- Also, working with County Council, to push for more tables and chairs for food and beverage businesses in the city and local centres, including where there is a lack of pavement space and there is a need to use roads
- Working with landlords, agents and would-be new city centre occupiers to develop the interest there is from national and local businesses in vacant city centre units, including building our meanwhile programme, to link businesses, community groups, social enterprises, and cultural organisations with empty space, both our own and others, in the city centre and localities
- Allocated regeneration officers to local centres to work with ward members and others to identify issues and opportunities in relation to economic recovery to feed into our planning
- Working to repurpose the closed Boswell’s department store as a hotel, restaurant and workspace
- Pushing forward with the development of city centre workspace projects at George St and Cave Street
- Developing a City Centre Vision and Action Plan to guide us through recovery, as well as a wider Economic Development Strategy for the city, that will provide a framework for building on our economic and sector strengths (e.g. green economy, science and technology, visitor economy)
- Working with OxLEP, the universities, County Council and other districts on a county-wide Economic Recovery Plan to submit to central Government, including around the areas of business support and funding, skills, sectors and inward investment.

6. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Turner – Business rates relief for language schools

Question

There has been considerable discussion recently on whether the council's discretionary powers to grant business rates relief during the current crisis extend to language schools.

Cabinet has said it does not, and has written to government asking that it should.

However, members of our community in the sector have pointed out that other cities have interpreted the available powers differently, and have granted relief to businesses of this kind, which clearly have a vital role within our city.

Could the portfolio holder please explain why this Council appears to be interpreting the same guidance differently from councils elsewhere?

Written Response

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, in the Budget on 11 March the Chancellor announced that he would increase the Extended Retail Discount to 100% and extend it to include the leisure and hospitality sectors for 2020/21, with no rateable value limit on the relief. The Council has followed the list of eligible premises in the MHCLG guidance for its own scheme, and excluded those which the guidance states should not receive relief. The Council is clear that language schools are not wholly or mainly for the provision of a service to visiting members of the public, nor do they fall into the hospitality or leisure sectors.

We have made enquiries as to how some Councils have arrived at a decision to award the discount (most we have contacted have not responded). Unfortunately the LGA initially issued some guidance, which was later withdrawn, which erroneously suggested that language schools were in scope. It is a matter for each authority to decide and to be accountable for under their discretion. There are equally Councils, including others locally that have not awarded the discount in line with their own interpretation of the guidance. If the Council made payments erroneously, these might have to be paid back to government.

The Council Leader has written to ministers asking them to extend the guidance to cover language schools. Regrettably no response has been received so far to this letter.

There are a number of other business support measures that Language Schools are able to access and details are on both our website and Gov.uk.

7. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hayes – Access to electric car charging points

Question

Many residents in my part of East Oxford are keen to switch to electric cars but struggle to find public charging points. Most don't have access to off-street parking for a home charger and what public chargers there are are run by a range of companies that use different access methods. ZAPMAP shows that there are less than 10 public chargers serving a catchment of more than 10,000 people. This includes charging points at the Council-owned Union Street Car Park, where the spaces are not dedicated to EVs and where residents have to pay to park.

Will the Portfolio Holder consider, at least until a better public charging solution is available, dedicating free car parking spaces at the Union Street Car Park (and indeed other Council car parks that have public chargers) for EVs that are plugged in and charging?

Will the Portfolio Holder update Council on plans for the installation of further EV charging facilities?

Written Response

Oxford is amongst the Office of Low Emission Vehicle's Go Ultra Low Cities, supporting other local authorities by sharing learnings generated from multiple EV projects trialled here, and thus contributing to improving the quality of charging provision across the UK.

We are currently assessing the role of carparks in the EV market together with ODS.

The Go Ultra Low On-street project is trialling on-street charging for households that don't have off-street parking. We are currently upgrading 39 chargers to permanent solutions. In addition, 4 charge points were recently installed in Manzil Way gardens for the primary use of Taxi and Private Hire vehicles, with the option to expand this to other high priority users. The next phase of Go Ultra Low Oxford (GULO) the GULO On-street project will provide up to 100 charge points in new locations across the city. GULO Taxi will deliver an addition 6 chargers for the taxi trade.

We are committed to engaging residents across the city on the question of how we allocate chargers across the city and we hold a database of residents who have expressed an interest to date, including in East Oxford.

To date 43 charge points for Oxford Residents without access to off-street parking has been delivered, with 10 of these in East Oxford.

In addition, by mid-2021, through the Energy Superhub Oxford project there will be the largest public EV charging Hub in the UK at Redbridge P&R. The Hub will have a minimum of 52 chargers, with the option for expansion of both

8. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hayes – Citizens’ Assembly progress update

Question

Following the Citizens Assembly on Climate Change, the Cabinet set out the next steps it would take. Amongst these, a number will probably have been delayed by the pandemic :

- The holding of a Zero Carbon Summit early in 2020 and the establishing of a (revived) Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership

- The creation of a Climate Change Youth Board

However, other commitments need not have been impacted by the pandemic and it would be good to hear what progress is being made with regard to :

- Procuring of contracts for renewable gas and electricity, with offsetting
- The creation of new carbon budgets within the city’s budget and auditing processes
- Assessment of housing stock for retrofit
- Development of a plan by OCHL for all new building by the Council to be much more thermally efficient, without gas heating.
- Installation of ~400 EV charging points (for which funding had been secured)
- Commencement of a process of mapping natural resources (‘Natural Capital’?)

Can the Portfolio Holder update Council on progress?

Written Response

By passing a motion declaring a climate emergency, this Council confirmed that business as usual cannot continue—we unanimously said exceptional action is needed. In the time since, this administration has moved quickly to develop our strategy for generating a zero-carbon council and city and we have done so by working with our partners and civil society and seeing democracy as part of our response to climate breakdown.

On 28 January 2019, this council approved a motion declaring a climate emergency, with Labour members providing for a Citizens’ Assembly. 244 days later, a Citizens’ Assembly—the first of its scale and complexity in the UK—met for the first time. 34 days after the close of that Citizens’ Assembly, this administration shared a report outlining in detail the findings of the Citizens Assembly. Cabinet agreed 53 actions developed in line with these findings just 28 days later and, on 28 February 2020, a further 41 days later, this Council agreed the funding for some of these actions when it approved the first Budget since the Citizens’ Assembly met. At significant pace and all the while maintaining delivery on existing climate responses, officers have moved quickly and thoughtfully to develop a strategy which is practical and meaningful, and I’m sure Councillor Wolff would like to take this opportunity to show his appreciation.

On 24 March 2020, the Government announced a lockdown of the country. Just 34 days had passed since the approval of the Budget. The City Council, along with so many others, have focused on responding to the public health crisis, with staff and resources being redirected to support the most vulnerable in our communities. The working arrangements of this Council will be familiar to the councillor. Despite this unprecedented emergency response, work has proceeded on a number of areas:

- Plans are being developed for a Zero Carbon Summit later in 2020, which will most likely be held in a virtual format.
- This Council has purchased 10% green gas, with

8. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hayes – Citizens’ Assembly progress update

an announcement on offsetting to follow shortly;

- This Council is working to ensure all of its council homes are EPC C where this is feasible. We have already implemented large scale fabric insulation (external and cavity insulation) and solar PV programme on 176 properties (including sheltered accommodation). Tower blocks have been upgraded. There are ongoing loft insulation, boiler replacement, and electric heating upgrade programmes. This Council has two energy advice officers assisting with repairs, energy saving advice and energy tariff changes.
- Oxford City Housing Limited (OCHL) is progressing all new build to an aspiration target of 70% carbon reduction from Building Regulations standard and is moving away from gas heating to electric. Other low carbon housing options such as Passiv haus and Zero Carbon are currently being scoped for feasibility. Oxford Direct Services are currently building 8 off site manufacture zero carbon bungalows and the team is trialling a service to help reduce any performance issues as airtight buildings with energy efficient technologies are known to be difficult to get right through the design/construction
- Work is progressing on the installation of over 150 chargers as part of GULO and ESO to provide residents and businesses with EV chargers, with over 30 chargers installed at ODS in the last few weeks.
- Working with partners to explore solutions to natural capital mapping, including close working with district partners.

I recently invited Councillor Wolff to a briefing with myself and officers to discuss his recent public repudiation of the air quality report published by this Council, the data for which had been ratified by the Government's appointed contractor and the findings of which have been approved by DEFRA. I would be happy to broaden that meeting out and discuss these matters in greater detail if the councillor wishes, so that citizens reading local media in the future are able to have trust in the evidence-based arguments made by their democratically elected body.

Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks

9. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Linda Smith – Deterring littering

Question

In view of the deaths of two cattle and injuries to several horses on Port Meadow after widespread, serious littering, would the councillor explain why a pre-existing anti-litter poster campaign successfully used in locations as varied as York, Bath, Bradford, Liverpool, Guildford, Northampton, Dorset, Braintree, Cheltenham, Epsom, Australia and New Zealand (using posters headed 'Don't be a Tosser', and aiming to use slightly ribald humour and ridicule to target potential litterers) was rejected, and explain how else the City Council is going to take urgent action to deter further littering in the course of the summer?

Written Response

The death and injury of livestock on Port Meadow through littering is intolerable and it demands action. Council and ODS (Oxford Direct Services) officers have formed a new multi-agency group with TVP (Thames Valley Police) to tackle the problem and there are four work strands in progress.

- Review of bins and litter collection.
- Community Engagement.
- Enforcement
- Communications – including signage.

I share the view of some of your Liberal Democrat colleagues representing wards near the meadow, that we in Oxford can do much better than the “Don't be a tosser” campaign used elsewhere. We will have a strong local campaign. **focused on the harm to animal welfare and the possibility of fines being issued for littering.**

10. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Linda Smith – Port Meadow littering

Question

I was shocked, as I am sure many other Councillors were, at the state of Port Meadow following the easing of lockdown which coincided with a period of good weather. The litter and rubbish were an eyesore and a hazard to humans and animals alike.

Can the Portfolio Holder tell us what measures have been put in place to both keep Port Meadow clean in the future,

Written Response

Port Meadow is an attractive and popular destination which has seen an unprecedented number of visitors during lockdown as other venues for recreation have been closed.

Council and ODS officers have formed a new multi-agency group with TVP to tackle the problem and there are four work strands in progress.

1. Bins and litter collection: Capacity of Bins and frequency of collection have been increased and will be kept under review.
2. Community Engagement: litter picking, intelligence sharing, distribution of refuse sacks

10. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Linda Smith – Port Meadow littering

what monitoring is in place, and what efforts are being made to identify and fine those responsible?

and education.

3 .Enforcement: more joint work with TVP, targeted enforcement patrols.

4. Communications: To focus on threat to animal welfare and our enforcement activity with potential of fines.

Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery

11. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hollingsworth – Accurately defining zero carbon homes

Question

I welcome the building of eight new highly energy efficient Council homes at Bracegirdle Road/Chillingworth Crescent, Mortimer Drive and Broad Oak. However, a press release issued by the Council incorrectly referred to these as ‘zero carbon homes’ – generally understood to refer to a home meeting Level 6 of the original Code for Sustainable Homes. That is, a home which generates sufficient renewable energy to meet the entire operational needs of the house thereby being net zero. The UK Green Build Council and others are seeking to take the definition even further, to include the impacts of construction.

When our own Local Plan requires all new homes to be ‘zero carbon’ from 2030, would the Portfolio Holder agree that our own use of such term needs to be carefully moderated to ensure that we set a good example?

Written Response

The current definition of Zero Carbon homes was established by the Government in 2011 in its ‘Plan for Growth’ to mean emissions that can be regulated by the Building Regulations, something that was subsequently confirmed in the consultation on the Future Homes Standard consultation run from late 2019 until February this year. This is the definition that the Council has used in the new Local Plan, as is made clear in its glossary. The new homes built by the Council comply with this official definition of Zero Carbon, and the press release was therefore not inaccurate.

The 2011 ‘Plan for Growth’ foreword by Secretary of State for Business and Skills Vince Cable and Chancellor George Osborne made clear its disdain for “pointless barriers” to enterprise and “the forces of stagnation” who objected to the removal of these ‘barriers’ ; it was in this political climate that the Code for Sustainable Homes definition was swept away. Speaking personally, I don’t agree that setting the highest possible standards for zero carbon homes was “pointless”, and far from being the forces of stagnation those that objected and still object are the forces of reason and progress.

I am therefore sure that the councillor shares my view that the superseded 2006 Code for

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Sustainable Homes was a better document and that the level 6 definition within it set a better benchmark for a Zero Carbon home, but since there is a now a new and nationally applied standard I am also sure that the councillor will agree with me that it is important that the Council consistently uses that national standard both in its Local Plan and its press releases, rather than any different one that he and I might prefer.

12. From Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Hollingsworth – Landlord Accreditation Scheme

Question

How many landlords are registered with the City Council's Landlord Accreditation Scheme?

Have any been struck off in the last 12 months?

Written Response

There are 148 landlords and 19 letting agents registered with City Council's Landlord Accreditation Scheme.

In the last 12 months 1 landlord has had their accreditation revoked and 8 applications have been refused.

13. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth – ‘Doughnut’ economics framework for sustainable development

Question

The Cities of Amsterdam and Copenhagen have adopted the ‘Doughnut’ economics framework for sustainable development: a new approach to urban planning and development originated here in Oxford by the economist Kate Raworth.

A recent online talk by Dr. Raworth – looking at how the model could be adapted for Oxford – attracted more than 500 people.

Will the Portfolio Holder consider the Doughnut framework for the next iteration of the Local Plan?

Written Response

Dr Raworth’s ‘Doughnut’ tool is a profoundly useful way of visualising the challenges for urban planning at a local level as well as an economic at a macro-economic level, and is certainly something that can form part of the range of ways of identifying and addressing the challenges facing Oxford now and in the future, not just as a city in isolation, but as part of the wider local, regional, national and global environments.

As Dr Raworth herself noted in launching the model for Amsterdam, “this city portrait is not a report and assessment of Amsterdam: it is a tool and starting point, ideal for using in workshops to open up new insights and bring about

13. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth – ‘Doughnut’ economics framework for sustainable development

transformative action”. Planning is a process, and one that has always had to find balances between a wide range of competing and often contradictory pressures – any new tool that helps to bring those pressures out more clearly, and enables the widest range of people to engage with and appreciate those pressures in seeking new and innovative ways of addressing them is to be welcomed.

14. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth – Policy making in planning

Question

Does the Cabinet member agree with me that, when planning authorities act responsibly and in the interests of residents, policy-making in planning works best when it sits at the most appropriate level in relation to residents, citizens and voters, and that the guiding principle should be to keep decision-making as close as possible to our residents?

Does he also therefore agree with me that any moves by central government in the direction of centralised, top-down control over, for example, “zoning”, Permitted Development rights and other matters could potentially weaken that principle, would not be welcome and should be resisted?

Written Response

Yes.

To expand, the thesis that ‘planning’ is an obstacle to development, new housing and economic growth is demonstrably false, as has been shown repeatedly by studies commissioned by Governments of all political colours. That the Prime Minister saw fit recently to perpetuate the falsehood that housebuilding is prevented by ‘newts’ is typical of someone whose relationship throughout his career with the truth has been marginal at best.

The planning system is designed to strike a balance between individual rights to private property and the responsibility to past, current and future generations to be protected from the wholly unfettered exercise of those rights. In effect the planning system puts the rights of the community and the environment in which that community lives on a par with the rights of the individual. It is a difficult balance, and it is not always easy to get it right, but however imperfectly it can at times operate I think that largely the system works.

The recent adoption of the City’s Local Plan was the culmination of a long process of consultation, policy development and testing, and finally challenge through the public enquiry process. The Plan sets out a balanced set of policies that address the needs of the whole city and the communities within it, and shows the importance of having different policies set at the right scale – not at such a small scale that the voices of the dispossessed can be ignored, and nor

14. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth – Policy making in planning

at such a large scale that the interests of whole cities can be lost in a remote bureaucracy governed from afar.

What is being floated as ‘Planning Reform’ (sic) appears to be a massive tipping of the scales away from our collective responsibilities to current and future generations. It has been clear from recent months that within the current Government there is an ideological drive against any set of regulations or behaviours where the interests of the community might take precedence over the rights of the individual. After all, if you believe that ‘rules’ simply don’t apply to you, then it is very short step away from getting rid of those rules entirely.

The Permitted Development regime has already led to the building of homes with no windows, and offers a way for developers to completely evade any responsibilities for social housing, locally set environmental standards and the like. The most recently announced PD right, to allow the building of additional storeys on flats without planning permission, will over-ride this Council’s longstanding and vitally important protections for the world-famous views of the dreaming spires.

In describing what the Government is doing to the planning system, I recently used some robust Anglo-Saxon to a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee. While I won’t commit similar terms to paper in this written answer, I would say in reiterating my agreement with the Councillor’s question that these are profoundly damaging proposals, driven by an ideology that says that ‘rules are for others, not for us’ and backed up by falsehoods from a Prime Minister with a long and dishonourable tradition of lying whenever it suits.

15. From Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Hollingsworth or Chapman – Tree protection for a specific tree

Question

A Sandhills parishioner recently wrote to the City Council requesting a prominent tree in Delbush Avenue be given a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). This was unfortunately rejected.

Written Response

The process for TPOs is set down in law, initially in the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act, and as subsequently amended.

That process involves the quasi-judicial

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Having received several emails of support for the tree having a TPO, the Risinghurst & Sandhills Parish Council is considering its own letter to the City Council, requesting a reconsideration.

Would the Cabinet member agree that trees are essential assets for local air quality, and that TPOs are an important part of protecting local residents' access to clean air?

Will the Cabinet member also agree to re-consider the request for a TPO on **that** particular tree, and (more generally) to improve tree protection in neighbourhoods facing significant traffic and development pressures?

planning regime, and is not one that a Cabinet member could or should interfere with.

The Council values trees as a both local assets and as part of the broader amenity of the city.

Oxford City Council, as Local Planning Authority, has powers to make a TPO where it is expedient in the interests of amenity; both the amenity and expediency (threat) tests must be met before a TPO is made. In this instance while it was considered to have moderate amenity value, the tree – which is managed by Oxford Direct Services on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council – was felt to be under good arboricultural management and not at risk of removal, thus not passing the threshold for the ‘threat’ test to justify a TPO.

Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthy Oxford

16. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Upton – Cycling without Age group

Question

Will the Portfolio Holder join me in welcoming the establishment of an Oxfordshire chapter of Cycling Without Age, whose volunteer ‘pilots’ take local elders and care homes residents out on specially adapted ‘trishaw’ cycle rides.

Will the Council be exploring ways it can assist CWA in its mission?

Written Response

I was delighted to attend the recent Cyclox meeting which heard from the founder of Cycling without Age - the obvious physical and mental benefits for both volunteer riders and elderly passengers were wonderful to see. I have since been in touch with the local group and I hope we can help them to expand.

<https://cyclingwithoutage.org>

17. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Upton – Active Travel funding Tranche 2

| Question | Written Response |
|--|---|
| <p>The County bid for so-called Shapps Tranche 1 Active Travel funding, supported by the City, failed to impress Government who claimed it simply wasn't ambitious enough, failing to meaningfully reallocate road space to cyclists and pedestrians. Only half the allocated funding was awarded.</p> <p>What is the City Council doing to ensure that the application for the second Tranche of funding is more successful?</p> <p>And will the Portfolio Holder be consulting other Councillors on the list of ideas to be submitted for Tranche 2?</p> | <p>The City Council has been working to influence the submission for Tranche 1 funding. However, the inclusion of items for submission was not the decision of the City Council, but that of the County Council as Transport Authority.</p> <p>The City Council is keen to progress measures which support active and sustainable travel. This is why we have ourselves funded the installation of 130 additional cycle parking spaces at Park and Rides.</p> <p>The Department for Transport (DfT) has now provided the County Council with the criteria for Tranche 2 bids, with a deadline for the funding submission set for 7th August 2020. The County Council will again make the final decision on what is included in their Tranche 2 submission. However, the City Council, along with other districts, will be engaged in this process through an established governance framework set up by the County Council.</p> <p>Please email me directly with suggestions for further consideration. Proposals will need to clearly satisfy the DfT criteria for inclusion in the Tranche 2 application, to add to the City Council's own priorities. Proposals must therefore reallocate road space to cyclists and pedestrians (both groups, rather than one or the other), meaningfully alter the status quo on the road, include segregation or point closures to through traffic, have a short lead time and demonstrate that the funds can be spent, or fully committed, in this financial year.</p> <p>I will also be listening to cycling groups in the city who have a lot of expertise to share.</p> |

18. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Upton – Reducing drug-related deaths

| Question | Written Response |
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| <p>Drug-related deaths are at a record high in England and Oxford has not been immune from this tragic loss of life.</p> <p>Will the Cabinet member commit to lobbying the Government for a pilot study into the effectiveness of a Drug Consumption Room set up in the city where illicit drugs can be safely used under the supervision of trained staff?</p> | <p>Oxfordshire County Council's Public Health Service are the lead agency in Oxford for providing services to help people affected by drug problems and so it would be for them to develop such a proposal.</p> |

19. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Upton – better local COVID19 data

Question

Will the Portfolio Holder join me in calling for more accurate local COVID data to better inform service provision and protect staff?

Written Response

I agree there is an urgent need for more accurate local COVID data. As has been reported in the press, councils and the LGA have been calling for better sharing of COVID data with councils and particularly Directors of Public health who are leading on the Local Outbreak Plans.

In response to these calls, government have published data at local authority level and said they will make more granular data available to councils. At the time of writing this depends on them getting the right data sharing agreements with councils in place.

The Test and Trace system is being led and implemented centrally by Public Health England. It is a source of great frustration that we are not able to put to greater use the proven tracing expertise of our environmental health officers

20. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Upton – LGBTQ citizens access to health services

Question

Oxford's LGBTQ people should feel safe to be themselves – without shame or stigma – and should have access to healthcare that genuinely safeguards their wellbeing.

Does the Cabinet member, agree that so-called “conversion therapy” poses a real danger to LGBTQ people, and that central government is taking too long to ban this discredited and dangerous practice?

Are Oxfordshire's health service providers doing enough to ensure that our LGBTQ citizens are able to receive the health services they actually need, free from prejudice (and the fear of prejudice)?

Written Response

“Conversion therapy” is a discredited and discriminatory practise that should have no place in our society. I refer the questioner to the answer to Q. 21 which outlines the ways in which the City Council is currently supporting LGBTQIA+ people. I have written to our local NHS Trusts to ask them to confirm that they do not endorse “Conversion therapy” and are committed to treating everyone equally regardless of their sexual orientation.

In terms of LGBTQ people's ability to access health services and other services free from prejudice, this was recently discussed at the Children's Board, which heard from the County Council's Children and Family's team that the young LGBT community are reporting that they feel a lack of support from services. There has also been an increase in in mental health referrals for these young people.

We will work with the county and health partners to find solutions to these issues and explore what more our Youth Ambition Programme can do to encourage LGBTQIA+ people to access services they need.

As Cllr Tidball sets out in the answer to Q21, we will continue to challenge stigmatisation and to support LGBTQIA+ groups.

Cabinet Member for Supporting Local Communities

21. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Tidball – LGBTQ rights

Question

Oxford's LGBTQ people should feel safe to be themselves – without shame or stigma – and should feel affirmed by wider society.

Does the Cabinet Member for Local Communities agree that the central government's ambivalent position on trans rights, and failure to act on previous commitments (such as the commitment to ban "conversion therapy"), send worrying signals, and risk perpetuating trauma for too many people?

What measures will the City Council take (beyond existing measures), to actively challenge stigmatisation and ensure that our city's LGBTQ people can remain safe in our communities?

Written Response

It is now two years since Theresa May committed to ban conversion therapy and a year since a consultation on the subject was promised. It is, therefore, very concerning that the current Equalities Minister has recently indicated that this government has not decided how to proceed and that they are still trying to understand the problem. Let's be clear, this is an appalling practice that causes shame and stigma and one which NHS England described as "unethical" and "harmful" back in 2014. The government's failure to deliver on this promise is mirrored in their failure to deliver on its 2017 commitments to reform the Gender Recognition Act, in order to better protect the rights of trans people, and they now look to be resiling from these promises

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/07/12/liz-truss-scrap-self-identification-plans-next-days/>

Trans rights are human rights and the Equality Act 2010 should be upheld in its current form.

So yes, I do agree. The City Council welcomed the statement issued by Instagram on 10 July 2020 that they will block LGBTQIA+ 'conversion therapy' services – see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53339589>

We will continue actively to raise awareness of and challenge stigmatisation and promote the rights of LGBTQIA+ people in Oxford e.g. by continuing our work with LGBTQIA+ people and organisations across the city, including Oxford Pride, to collect, exhibit and tell the stories and histories of LGBTQIA+ people in Oxford. We are delighted that this 'Queering Spires' exhibition project has recently been shortlisted for a prestigious national heritage award – see

<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/news/six-projects-chosen-sustainable-project-year>

We provide support to young LGBTQIA+ people through our Youth Ambition programme and will also continue to provide support for LGBTQIA+

21. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Tidball – LGBTQ rights

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| | <p>groups such as LGBT+ Oxon and the Arc-T Centre who connect people within community and provide services and ‘safe space’ for LGBTQIA+ people.</p> <p>We will also continue to work with the LGBTQIA+ community to support and promote unity initiatives such as Oxford Pride.</p> <p>We are committed to being an inclusive and diverse organisation that challenges discrimination of all forms across the city. Therefore, we are now developing a refreshed equalities action plan that will be influenced by the rich diversity of Oxford, and informed through a range of specific focus groups, including LGBTQIA+/young people so that everyone can fulfil their potential.</p> |
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Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Partnerships

22. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – Pre-determining potential planning matters

| Question | Written Response |
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| <p>A number of councillors recently signed a letter calling for the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes in the High Street, despite knowing that any move to do so would be the subject of a planning application to this council, and that in publicly supporting one outcome from any such application they were therefore excluding themselves from serving on any committee hearing any such application. Doing so in such large numbers therefore placed considerable extra responsibility and pressure on their council colleagues who chose to behave differently.</p> <p>Does the Leader agree with me that councillors who signed acted irresponsibly in terms of their duties, both in pre-determining their view on any planning application, and in placing an extra burden on their colleagues and on officers?</p> | <p>Councillors who feel very strongly about an issue will often express views. It is clear that labour colleagues feel strongly about racism and some felt that publically supporting the Rhodes Must Fall campaign was an important demonstration of solidarity with those working for change.</p> <p>This Labour council does not hide from aligning itself with local people who campaign for an anti-racist city. Indeed we want to work to achieve that. Keeping quiet on issues of racism is not something for any political party to be proud of.</p> <p>In respect of planning committee activity, as always it is for individual councillors of any party to judge their eligibility for any particular case that comes forward in the future.</p> |

23. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – Principles for reorganising local government

Question

Does the Leader agree with me that priorities guiding any future re-organisation of local government in our county and region should include:

- Simplicity (so residents know who to go to and access services easily)
- Efficiency, cost saving and enhanced service delivery
- Increased democratic accountability
- Truly local decision making and connection with voters (no to additional layers on top of accountable bodies)
- Opportunities to collaborate and reach consensus on issues like climate emergency, transport, health, economy that are cross border.
- A fair voting system, preferably STV
- A lower voting age of 16

Written Response

The first and over-riding priority for government at all levels right now must be to support our local communities and economies to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and to recover from it.

Local residents in Oxford and local businesses are depending on us to continue delivering services for them and to work with our partners in their interests. Therefore my first principle and priority at the moment is that, and I do not support anything that currently distracts focus from this vital work. This would particularly be true of any sort of reorganisation at this point.

I agree that good access to high quality services, efficiency, democratic accountability, local decision making and collaboration are all important priorities for local government and feature strongly in this council. I also believe that democratic institutions should be close to the people that they serve and that the boundaries should be comprehensible and recognisable to local people and based on a shared community. Again, this is to be found in the current City Council boundaries.

I don't think that votes for 16 year olds are likely to be included in the package that government may propose, as that would be extending democracy. Everything that I have heard so far suggests that they are seeking to stifle democracy and centralise power away from people.