

To: Council
Date: 25 January 2021
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 was 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 and Housing the Homeless

1. From Cllr Simmons to Cllr Rowley – rough sleepers

Question	Written Response
I recently passed on to the Portfolio Holder two reports of rough sleepers who claim to have had their belongings removed and destroyed by people working for, or on behalf of, Oxford City Council.	I can confirm that the Council does not, and will not destroy the property of rough sleepers. Detailed responses have been provided in respect of the two queries raised. In one case, after a thorough investigation by officers involving all relevant council departments, no evidence could be found that the individual had had his possessions removed by the council. For the second case, the individual was accommodated, and had chosen to sleep out for a single

1. From Cllr Simmons to Cllr Rowley – rough sleepers

Can the Portfolio Holder please confirm that this is not the case and provide members with an understanding of how rough sleeper's belongings (which may indeed have been reported by members of the public) are handled?

night, and again none of his items had been removed by the council.

There may be occasions when items are removed because they appear to be abandoned. Belongings that appear to be abandoned in public areas are stored safely, and every effort is made by Council teams to identify the individual and let them know where it is. To assist this officers may photograph the items and return in the following days to see whether they have moved, in order to conclude that they are not abandoned. Items left on private land are a matter for the landowner.

Every effort is being made to support rough sleepers at the moment. This winter has already seen the longest continuous period of our severe weather accommodation operating and some of our most entrenched rough sleepers are being accommodated for the whole winter period. The council is committed to working with rough sleepers in a positive and respectful manner to help them find safe and secure accommodation.

2. From Cllr Wolff to Cllr Rowley – Floyd's Row centre

Question

There seems to be some uncertainty around the future use of Floyd's Row post-pandemic. Writing about the centre in October 2019, the Council said that; "Once fully operational, Floyds Row will provide assessment services and shelter for 56 people experiencing homelessness or at risk of rough sleeping." Indeed this was the basis on which members approved the expenditure with many of us seeing it as a much-needed replacement for the demolished 61-bed Lucy Faithfull House.

Can the Portfolio Holder

Written Response

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic we have not been able to use Floyd's Row as it was intended, due to its use of communal sleeping spaces. Under the government's "Everyone In" initiative we made self-contained accommodation available for everyone who was in accommodation with communal sleeping arrangements, or who was rough sleeping. We originally made use of hotels, but in the summer consolidated this provision to 118 units in Oxford YHA and Canterbury House. The leases on these properties are currently due to expire at the end of March, and in mid-July respectively. Exiting this accommodation successfully will require a return to Floyd's Row, both as accommodation and an assessment centre. Our current intention is to use Floyd's Row as it was originally envisaged, although this is subject to a review of and recommissioning of county wide pathway services and also be determined by any required regulations to manage Covid-19.

We are working closely with colleagues in Public Health to ensure that any return to Floyds Row is undertaken

2. From Cllr Wolff to Cllr Rowley – Floyd’s Row centre

please clarify whether Floyd’s Row will re-open as a 56-bed shelter for those experiencing homeless or rough sleeping or whether some or all accommodation will be lost to provide an expanded assessment centre?

in accordance with their guidance in relation to Covid-19. The timing of this is currently unknown, and will be dependent on the progression of the vaccination programme. In the meantime Floyd’s Row is being used to assess people who are rough sleeping to ensure they get access to the right support and accommodation. This is undertaken by St Mungo’s in partnership with the Council’s Housing Options team.

Floyds Row was not developed as a replacement for Lucy Faithful House. The units lost by the decommissioning of Lucy Faithful House were replaced in the commissioning undertaken in the same year. Floyds Row addresses the need for rough sleepers to be accommodated whilst a longer term accommodation solution is found for them.

Supplementary Question

Can you confirm if the Housing First model is still Council policy, or has this been changed slightly?

Verbal answer

It is: we are still intending to acquire 50 additional Housing First units over the next 2 years and 3 months so significant expansion of Housing First model is still our policy. Other kinds of provision should continue alongside this, and planning is underway on how these would work and how Floyds Row fits into this.

Cabinet Member for City Centre, Covered Market and Culture

3. From Cllr Wolff to Cllr Clarkson – Town Hall heating

Question

Has the Town Hall been heated throughout this winter, and to what temperature?

If it has been maintained at normal rather than reduced temperature what is the justification for this?

Written Response

The building has been opened throughout the winter for the museum development works, maintenance work and some events.

Over this period the Town Hall has been heated when the building is open in accordance to the operations for that day and the rooms that are being used.

The heating system has a set point of 20 degrees and is on a timer, which has been adjusted accordance to our new operational hours to ensure the building is only heated when used. During the day individual rooms are turned off when not in use.

3. From Cllr Wolff to Cllr Clarkson – Town Hall heating

Supplementary Question

To what extent is the Town Hall being used and what is it used for? Could we use it to help with the pandemic response?

Verbal answer

Primarily maintenance work and the museum re-development. I understand the vaccination centres need very large open plan spaces, so it may not be suitable, but will enquire about whether it could accommodate other socially useful and Covid-safe activities.

4. From Cllr Simmons to Cllr Clarkson – demonstration at Bonn Square

Question

Did Council sanction the anti-COVID restrictions ‘Oxford 4 Freedom’ demo at Bonn Square on 20th December 2020 led by Piers Corbyn?

Written Response

The Council did not give permission for the demonstration to go ahead in Bonn Square on the 20th December 2020.

Supplementary Question

The Council has policies about the use of Bonn Square. Is there anything we can do to ensure the space is used safely and does not endanger protestors or public?

Verbal answer

There is little we can do apart from to expect the police attend to maintain order. We need to ensure freedom of speech even if we disagree. I understand police did attend and warned protestors to physically distance and wear masks and to make sure the people attending and others in the area were safe.

5. From Cllr Wolff to Cllr Clarkson – touring musicians’ visas

Question

It has transpired that during its negotiations with EU representatives the UK government rejected an EU offer of a visa-free period of 90 days for tours of musicians, bands, choirs and orchestras on the European mainland, despite warnings from musicians of such stature as Sir Simon Rattle. The absence of such an agreement will create serious obstacles. Oxford aspires to be a City of Culture; it has twinning arrangements with many cities in mainland Europe and (until the pandemic) a thriving and international musical scene. It has also frequently hosted European bands,

Written Response

Yes, I’d be happy to work with our cultural organisations in Oxford and with other towns and cities who will be impacted by this in a concerted effort to raise these issues with Ministers and lobby for action to avoid the significantly damaging impact.

We have already been in touch with cultural organisations in the city to ask for evidence of the likely impact and to coordinate lobbying effort.

5. From Cllr Wolff to Cllr Clarkson – touring musicians’ visas

choirs and orchestras, who are also likely to be affected by this failure.

Would the portfolio holder be willing to lobby the appropriate government ministers on behalf of Oxford's musicians and cultural organisations for the early negotiation of an agreement that may go some way to ameliorating the damage caused by Brexit?

Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services

6. From Cllr Garden to Cllr Chapman – increase in benefit applications

Question

What is the percentage increase in those applying for council benefits, including council tax, over the past 12 months in comparison with the previous year?

Please provide a breakdown by benefit and month.

Written response

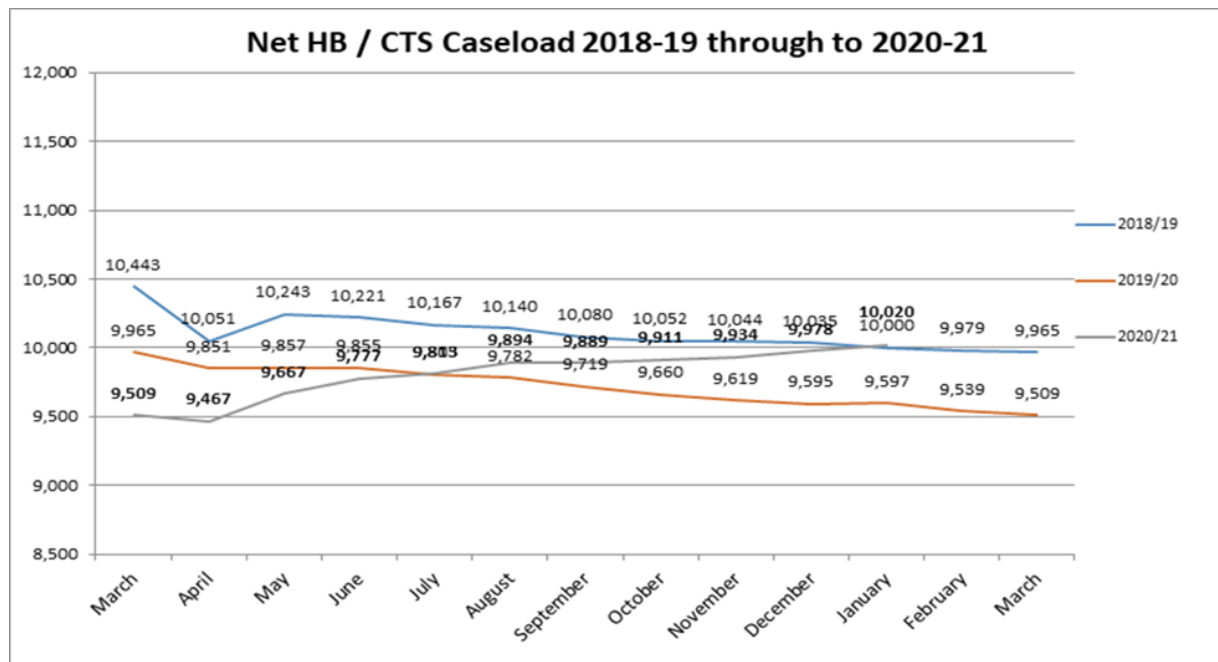
We have seen a 69% increase from same period

	1/4/19-10/1/20	1/4/20-10/1/21	% increase
New claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction	1,924	2,787	69%

Below is our Universal Credit caseload:

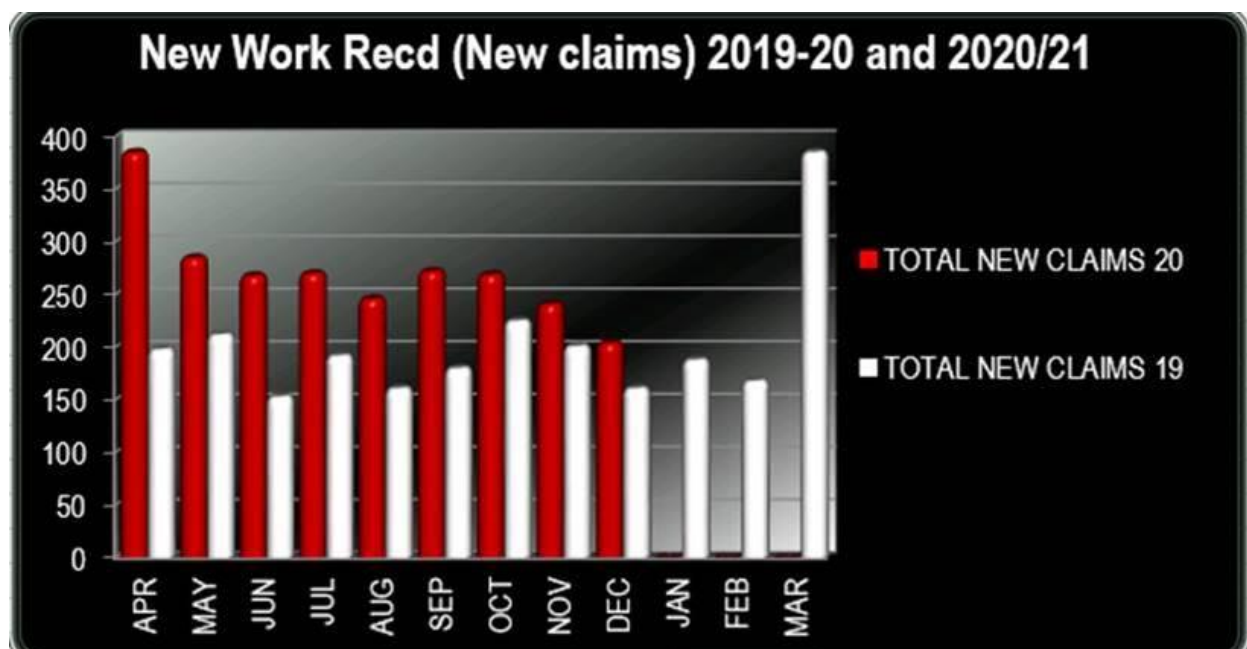
2020-21	10 Apr 2020	1 Dec 2020
Total Caseload	9,467	9,978
Working Age - HB and CTR	6,332	6,826
Working Age UC Customers	2,324	3,428
% of Working Age caseload on UC	36.70%	50.22%
% of total caseload on UC	24.55%	34.36%

See below table for the net caseload figures for the previous 2 years. We are almost back to 2018 levels. (HB =Housing Benefit. CTS = Council Tax Reduction/Support)
 Caseloads are shown from March 2018-March 2019, March 2019-March 2020 and March 2020-January 2020



The total number of changes in circumstances received at the end of December is 36,242.

Across our work types we saw the largest increases in volumes during April and May 2020 (red shows claims in that month in 2020 and white claims in 2019)



7. From Cllr Garden to Cllr Chapman – non-payment of council tax

Question	Written Response															
<p>What actions have been taken by the council to support those that can't pay their council tax?</p> <p>Please provide a breakdown of actions taken and the numbers of those affected under each action.</p>	<p>Council Tax Hardship Relief has been awarded to 2,980 recipients of Council Tax Reduction, up to a maximum of £250 amounting to £612,772.30. A further 4 claims of £2,169.13 have been awarded under our discretionary policy.</p> <p>The formal recovery process for Council Tax ceased at the start of the pandemic mid-March, with softer reminders and “Nudge” techniques being introduced.</p> <p>2020/21 Soft Reminders</p> <p>COUNCIL TAX</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="438 772 1396 1030"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date Issued</th> <th>No issued</th> <th>Value</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>22/04/2020</td> <td>4,200</td> <td>£711,113</td> </tr> <tr> <td>14/05/2020</td> <td>1,400</td> <td>£230,016</td> </tr> <tr> <td>14/07/2020</td> <td><u>1,711</u></td> <td><u>£315,748</u></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Totals</td> <td>7,311</td> <td>£1,256,877</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The formal recovery process has re-commenced as the Courts started to re-open for less serious cases on the 12/08/2020, with the first summons issued on 10/09/2020 and first Liability Order hearing 09/10/2020.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We delayed first instalment payments until June/July for 3,593 customers • Payment Extensions and Holiday – If someone calls up and requests it, we continue to spread the payments until March. • We accept reasonable payment arrangements on arrears without obtaining a Liability Order. • We have issued 1,908 summonses resulting in the creation of 1,430 Liability Orders (L/O) since October (478 paid between Summons and the L/O hearing) • Attachments of Earnings or Benefits – To date we have done one attachment and this for the current year debt only. • We are now commencing Enforcement Agent action, but only to those who are out of area, refuse to engage or are persistently breaking arrangements. 	Date Issued	No issued	Value	22/04/2020	4,200	£711,113	14/05/2020	1,400	£230,016	14/07/2020	<u>1,711</u>	<u>£315,748</u>	Totals	7,311	£1,256,877
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8. From Cllr Wolff to Cllr Turner – Port Meadow boardwalk fencing

Question	Written Response
<p>(a) Can the portfolio holder explain the reasons for wishing to erect a new fence in Port Meadow closing off the boardwalk with lockable gates? Will access during flooding be restricted in any way?</p> <p>Under Section 38 of the Commons Act 2006 the erection of fences on common land require the "consent of the appropriate national authority" unless the City Council has been explicitly granted exemption under other legislation.</p> <p>(b) Does the City Council have permission to fence off the Bossoms Boatyard marina and boardwalk, as I believe is proposed?</p> <p>If so, under which legislation?</p> <p>Is planning permission required, and if so, has an application been submitted?</p>	<p>(a) We are acting following expert advice received which covered the Health & Safety aspects of the moorings at Port Meadow and in particular the risks of unauthorised people using the boardwalk. When public safety issues are raised, the Council is obliged to act accordingly in order to minimise these risks. Given the constraints of the location the fencing is a requirement to prevent harm or injury and to improve public Health & Safety for everyone in Port Meadow.</p> <p>The addition of the fence may also improve other issues that affect boaters such as vandalism and damage which has occurred in the past. A meeting is being sought with boaters next week and works are not intended to commence before that takes place.</p> <p>The fence will not impact the ability of authorised users (principally the moorers) to move around on the boardwalk and there will be no impact to the amount of space for those using the boardwalk.</p> <p>Gates will be included for authorised users to enter and exit the boardwalk and these will be located at the existing access points.</p> <p>Keys will be issued to Bossoms Boat Yard who manage this facility on behalf of OCC. Therefore keys will be distributed to authorised users only.</p> <p>The walkway was not designed as an alternative access route to the Meadow but for moorers to access and use their boats only.</p> <p>The installation of the fencing will not restrict access to the Meadow for anyone who wishes to visit, including people with disabilities. Access arrangements during flooding will be unchanged.</p> <p>(b) The Council does not require permission to erect the fence .It is to be attached solely to the Boardwalk and will not be attached to the Meadow or river bed. The Council owns the boardwalk. Therefore the fence is not being erected on common land and therefore this legislation does not apply.</p> <p>The work to install fencing on the boardwalk is being conducted in accordance with Common Land</p>

8. From Cllr Wolff to Cllr Turner – Port Meadow boardwalk fencing	
	<p>constraints, maintaining the site’s Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) status and ultimately ensuring that Port Meadow as a whole remains open for all to enjoy.</p> <p>Planning permission was not required as we are a local authority and have the rights as a statutory undertaker to do certain works on land within our ownership without the need for planning permission.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>The boardwalk is only 80cm wide and the fence may create dangers for the boaters themselves when the water levels are high. The boaters were not consulted on this, perhaps because the waterways officer post no longer exists.</p> <p>Can I ask that the fence is not erected until the boaters have been consulted and it is clear that their own safety will not be compromised?</p>	<p>Verbal answer</p> <p>It was not the intention to discontinue with waterways officer’s work and it was that work that led to this recommendation.</p> <p>Having got a clear health and safety recommendation, there is a possibility we could be held liable if something untoward happened as a result of us not acting.</p> <p>There is no intention to erect the fence until we have held a meeting and discussed this with the boaters.</p>

Cabinet Member for Green Transport and Zero Carbon Oxford; non-statutory Deputy Leader

9. From Cllr Gant to Cllr Hayes – Westgate car park charges	
<p>Question</p> <p>In a response to an earlier question, Cllr Hayes told me he would be holding a meeting with the Westgate centre management around now to discuss their obligation to “take account” of charges in city-owned car parks in their own pricing,</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The meeting took place towards the end of 2020 to talk about a range of issues and opportunities linking to the city centre and the wider green transport agenda.</p> <p>As part of this discussion I reiterated that the City Council’s main aim was to reduce congestion and encourage even more people to use active and sustainable travel options to visit the city centre. I was clear with the representatives from the Westgate Alliance in the meeting that we considered the parking charges at</p>

9. From Cllr Gant to Cllr Hayes – Westgate car park charges	
<p>something they have signally failed to do thus far.</p> <p>Has that meeting taken place, and can the councillor give us any update?</p>	<p>the Westgate car park to be comparably low and not in line with Gloucester Green and Worcester St car parks. Westgate Alliance agreed to review longer-stay parking charges and consider changing them to fall in line with Worcester St and Gloucester Green car parks.</p> <p>We also discussed opportunities for improvements and promotion of sustainable modes of transport. For example this included improved information around park and rides and we will be following up with the Westgate about opportunities for them to promote P&R within their literature and on-site advertising, working with the bus companies as we emerge from the current restrictions.</p> <p>Since the meeting there has been the latest national lockdown. Officers will be working with the county council, bus companies and city centre businesses to identify opportunities when the time comes to encourage people back to the city safely using sustainable modes.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>That is good news: do you have details about the timescale for the review; what 'longer stay' means in the context of overall charges; and why only these are being reviewed?</p>	<p>Verbal answer</p> <p>These are part of broader conversations with the Westgate Alliance and I can report back in due course, We are having some really productive conversations round wider issue: charge-setting process and concerns around congestion over the Christmas and post-lockdown periods. The Westgate Alliance want to be good partners to the city and its local authorities.</p>

10. From Cllr Wolff to Cllr Hayes – external consultation responses	
<p>Question</p> <p>Given the impact on the City, is the Portfolio Holder planning to officially respond on behalf of the Council, or has he already so, to the Government's consultation on the future of rural transport and/or the County's Oxfordshire Street Design Guide?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>Yes the Portfolio holders for green transport and planning have responded to the County's Oxfordshire Street Design Guide.</p> <p>The Government consultation on the future of rural transport is at a very early stage in terms of evidence gathering. Planning policy officers will ensure they have liaised with transport officers at the County Council to discuss this early stage consultation. No further action is to be taken at this stage.</p>

11. From Cllr Wolff to Cllr Hayes – ZEZ consultation

Question

Can the Portfolio Holder please update us on the ZEZ (Zero Emission Zone) consultation?

Written Response

The consultation was open to the public at the point in time that the member's question was received. It closed on the 17th January.

12. From Cllr Landell Mills to Cllr Hayes – ZEZ consultation 2

Question

When will results from Consultation be published?

Written Response

The ZEZ consultation closed on the 17th January. The City and County Council's officers will analyse the responses with a view to preparing a report for Cabinet in March.

13. From Cllr Landell Mills to Cllr Hayes – naming a ZEZ

Question

Although ZEZ is a catchy policy title, the area affected could more accurately be termed an ULEZ: Ultra Low Emission Zone.

Do you think calling it a ZEZ, when it isn't, is sensible?

Written Response

Oxford's scheme is recognised by key national decision-makers and experts as going further than any other scheme in the UK and functioning as a ZEZ.

London operates an ULEZ. As I am sure the councillor knows, London's ULEZ permits diesel and petrol vehicles to enter for free.

On this basis, why does the member believe that Oxford's ZEZ should be described as an ULEZ

14. From Cllr Landell Mills to Cllr Hayes – ZEZ Red Zone implementation

Question

Are the City Council still on track to implement the Red Zone in August 2021?

Written Response

Yes

15. From Cllr Landell Mills to Cllr Hayes – Air quality policy and ZEZ	
<p>Question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why has it taken so long to develop a policy to tackle Air Quality? <p>Initial consultation for the ZEZ started in 2016 (when there were hardly any electric cars) and it seems that the green zone will not be implemented by 2022 at the earliest.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you confident that a ZEZ or similar will be in place by then? 	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The City Council developed its first air quality policy in 2006. The production and publication of the Council's first Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) fifteen years ago was in line with recognition of the legal requirement on Oxford City Council to work towards the Air Quality Strategy (AQS) objectives under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 and relevant regulations made under that part and to meet the requirements of the Local Air Quality Management (LQAM) statutory process.</p> <p>A second AQAP was published in 2013 which set our clear policies to tackle air pollution. Since its introduction in 2013, we have seen an overall decline of 26% in NO₂, 31% in Particulate Matter (PM₁₀) and 36% in Particulate Matter (PM_{2.5}) in the places where air quality is being monitored.</p> <p>Our new AQAP outlines the actions we will take to improve air quality in Oxford from 2021 to 2025, but more importantly, move beyond a focus upon achievement of legal compliance. We are the first UK council to voluntarily set a target which seeks to exceed national targets.</p> <p>With respect to your second question, the answer is yes. Far from going slow, the implementation of what was previously known as the green zone is happening on an accelerated basis.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>Why not move straightaway to cover the main area: why have a pilot scheme?</p>	<p>Verbal answer</p> <p>We renamed the initial phase of the ZEZ as a pilot zone as we want to make sure that we learn all we can from this first phase to make implementation of the 2nd phase, covering the larger area, is as informed as possible. We think a phased approach and 'lessons learned' is the right way to proceed.</p>

16. From Cllr Landell Mills to Cllr Hayes – ZEZ traffic modelling	
<p>Question</p> <p>Longer term ZEZ or similar clean air policies will not, by themselves, address congestion on the city's roads, which needs to be dealt with to allow space for buses to run freely and provide more</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>Reducing congestion is not the purpose of the ZEZ. Reducing congestion is the purpose of Connecting Oxford. Cleaning up dirty air, thereby preventing resulting health harms, is the purpose of the ZEZ.</p>

16.From Cllr Landell Mills to Cllr Hayes – ZEZ traffic modelling

space for cyclist and pedestrians.
 What modelling has been done with existing traffic in the ZEZ red and green zones and surrounding areas and what are predicted numbers in these areas over the roll out and next few years?

Traffic monitoring data is available on the website for the ZEZ Pilot (formerly known as the red zone) Traffic and air quality modelling are currently being procured for the ZEZ (formerly known as the green zone) and Connecting Oxford.

17.From Cllr Landell Mills to Cllr Hayes – congestion and charges

Question

- How will ZEZ address congestion? Oxford is an affluent city in a wealthy part of the country and a lot of people will have electric cars fairly soon; how will the ZEZ address congestion in a few years' time when electric cars are the norm?
- By and large richer people have electric cars and poorer people have petrol and diesel; how does OCC address the charge that this proposal will be regressive and disadvantage less well-off people?
- Will the ZEZ allow petrol or diesel buses into the Green and Red zones and what is being done to electrify buses in the proposed ZEZ and city generally?
- How will ZEZ be integrated with Connect proposals? Would it be fair to charge motorists and then prevent them going through Active Barriers or would motorists who pay be able to pay to go through them?

Written Response

Reducing congestion is not the purpose of the ZEZ. Reducing congestion is the purpose of Connecting Oxford. Cleaning up dirty air, thereby preventing resulting health harms, is the purpose of the ZEZ.

Electric cars are much cheaper to run compared to diesel and petrol and we are seeing a well-developed second-hand electric vehicle market now. In Oxford EV car ownership is seen across a range of income levels and it is not right to say that poor people drive diesel/petrol. We are working with EV car clubs to make EVs available to a wide audience.

Registered Local Buses are subject to a Low Emission Zone which will result in a minimum 98% reduction in NOx from buses. As you might have seen, Oxford has recently been announced as in the running to become the UK's first all-electric bus city and we are working closely with bus operators and the County Council to achieve this. We have secured £2.6m to bring electric buses to Oxford and retrofit more than a hundred buses to Euro VI standard.

Connecting Oxford and ZEZ proposals are being developed to be fully integrated.

Supplementary Question

Appreciating the duties and obligations the council has, is reducing traffic congestion a key element in reducing and remedying dirty air.

Verbal answer

We want to set clear expectations and objectives for the two schemes.

Connecting Oxford's function is to reduce congestion. The ZEZ's function is to improve air quality. In cleaning up the air in

17. From Cllr Landell Mills to Cllr Hayes – congestion and charges	
	the city centre, one of the by-products may be a reduction in congestion, but that is not its primary purpose.

18. From Cllr Landell Mills to Cllr Hayes – administration and costs	
<p>Question</p> <p>Questions about administration of the ZEZ and associated costs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will be the capital cost to set up the red zone and green zone? • Will the ZEZ be policed using APNR cameras? • Will these be the same cameras as used for the Bus Gates? • How much will these cameras cost and how many would be required? • What is their life expectancy? • Annual maintenance costs? • Would the City or County manage the servers? <p>Will the City Council collect monies for ZEZ or County Council?</p> <p>What will the monies raised be used for and what are anticipated numbers?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>We no longer refer to the Green and Red Zones, instead we refer to the ZEZ Pilot and ZEZ.</p> <p>Capital costs to set up the ZEZ Pilot are c. £200,000. We have a grant from Defra (£150,000). Capital costs of the ZEZ are currently being developed in line with the established work schedule.</p> <p>ANPR camera technology will be used to enforce the ZEZ Pilot.</p> <p>As the transport authority, The County Council holds the powers related to the ZEZ and they will be responsible for managing the charging scheme and the collection of money. Income raised by the ZEZ Pilot will be used to cover the costs of implementing and running it. Any funds left over must be spent on schemes or initiatives which directly or indirectly facilitate the achievement of the County Council's local transport policies. This is a requirement of the legislation that enables the scheme.</p> <p>Projected income, if any, for the ZEZ pilot is currently being modelled.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>Are you concerned that the costs of the cameras may be too expensive for the whole area, and how have costs been managed?</p>	<p>Verbal answer</p> <p>The County Council is responsible for the cameras and enforcement. We are concerned about costs and the need for adequate monitoring, and there will be further work to clarify both before the full ZEZ is implemented.</p>

No questions

19. From Cllr Wade to Cllr Hollingsworth – Seacourt P&R flooding

Question

The Extension to the Seacourt Car park was inundated by 25 December and parts were still under water on 9 January. Pumps are used to keep the extension dry but seem to be failing. This may be because the porous surface of the extension has become clogged with silt. The last two Christmases have seen flooding in Seacourt.

Can the Cabinet Member confirm the cost of pumping and cleaning the extension car park after each flooding event?

Written Response

As has been made clear in the project proposals, the planning application and in numerous answers to questions on this subject, the extension to the Seacourt Park and Ride is designed to flood when the Bulstake and Seacourt streams burst their banks. The pumps which are permanently installed as part of the scheme are designed to pump any water from the water storage system constructed under the car park to the streams when the streams are not flooded, either at times of heavy rain or as flood water levels recede. Water will remain until the levels in the streams fall below the level of the car park, at which point the pumps will begin to operate. They are not designed to keep the car park extension from flooding during a flood event, as that would run counter to the Environment Agency's requirement that the car park extension acts as a floodwater storage area until water levels have fallen.

The porous surface of the car park allows water to drain from the surface of the car park to the underground storage system. Clearly the laws of physics dictate that when the streams have burst their banks and the car park and its underground storage system is flooded, as it was designed to, water will not drain through the porous surface until the water levels have fallen below the level of the car park. When the water levels have fallen, the water will then drain through the porous surface and can be pumped away, using the pumping system as it was designed to operate.

During the recent flooding, both the pumps and the porous surface functioned as they were designed to function.

The surfaces of all car parks are swept and cleaned on a regular basis to ensure both that they continue to operate as specified and to ensure that they are not slippery, and the costs of that are included in the standard maintenance budget for the car parks function.

19.From Cllr Wade to Cllr Hollingsworth – Seacourt P&R flooding	
Supplementary Question In the maintenance budget's cost of clearing up after flooding, how much is included for the main part of the car park and how much for the extension?	Verbal answer I will ask Cllr Hayes to supply that as the project will transfer to his remit now that it is complete. The site is working as designed; to act as a flood storage area, ie flood and then pump water out from the storage once the surrounding water level has subsided generally.

20.From Cllr Simmons to Cllr Hollingsworth – purchase of Iffley Meadows	
Question Is the Portfolio Holder able to, and will he, disclose publicly the price paid for the purchase of Iffley Meadows?	Written Response The price is currently confidential, but will in due course be made publicly available via reports to the shareholder in the usual way.

21.From Cllr Simmons to Cllr Hollingsworth – Iffley Meadows planning application	
Question I have seen video evidence that heavy vehicles are already accessing Iffley Meadows despite, as far as I am aware, there being no detailed planning application approved or environmental assessment (regarding in particular the protected badger sett on site). Can the Portfolio Holder confirm this?	Written Response Contractors were employed by OCHL (Oxford City Housing Ltd) to remove Japanese Knotweed, a fallen tree and rubbish and overgrowth from the former allotment on the site, work that does not require planning permission. It is a breach of the law to allow the spread of this plant onto land belonging to others, so prompt preventative work is good practice. OCHL instructed their contractor to stop work once soil was discovered to have been piled by the contractor very close to the badger sett which was known to exist on the site. OCHL have employed the services of an ecologist to advise if there are any implications on the badger sett.
Supplementary Question When I went to the site, it looks like hedges have been removed, there are tyre tracks near the sett, and there are other species on the site. Will a full account of the ecology of	Verbal answer As the shareholder's representative, I will ask that the company provides a clear account of what it has done and intends to do, But can't commit on behalf of the company.

21. From Cllr Simmons to Cllr Hollingsworth – Iffley Meadows planning application

the site be carried out before any further work is done?

22. From Cllr Simmons to Cllr Hollingsworth – selective licensing consultation

Question	Written Response
Can the Portfolio Holder provide an update on the selective licensing consultation?	The consultation for Selective Licensing was extended in order to take account of the short national lockdown in November, and ran for a period of 16 weeks in total, 6 weeks longer than the statutory requirement. As proposed in the report to Cabinet in September 2020, the consultation was run on behalf of the Council by an external organisation, and they have confirmed that they received a good level of response from across all groups of stakeholders. Their analysis of those responses will be addressed in the report on whether or not to proceed with the Selective Licensing scheme, due to be heard at the March Cabinet meeting.

23. From Cllr Wade to Cllr Hollingsworth – CO2 emissions from private rented sector

Question	Written Response
What steps has the Council taken to use its influence through licensing and other measures to reduce household Green House Gas emissions from Privately Rented and HMO licensed properties in the city?	<p>The Council has pro-actively identified poorly performing privately rented properties using the EPC data for Oxford and targeted them for inspections under the Housing Health and Safety Rating Scheme, securing improvements by issuing notices where required. The Council was one of only 6 authorities to be awarded funding from BEIS to pilot enforcement activity using the recently introduced Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards Regulations which resulted in over 1,000 visits to properties.</p> <p>The Council also requires an EPC as part of the HMO licensing process and imposes licence conditions on the worst performing properties to prevent excess cold and raise energy efficiency standards.</p> <p>The council has also consulted on introducing a Selective Licensing scheme which, if adopted by the Council and approved by the government, would significantly improve property standards in the private rented sector.</p>
Supplementary Question How the pilot works in terms of it being	Written answer supplied after the meeting The funding from BEIS was a one off grant of £150k which was used to pilot work on the new regulations, develop methods to identify properties in the PRS and also to get

23. From Cllr Wade to Cllr Hollingsworth – CO2 emissions from private rented sector

self-financing and can the Council levy 'fines' (civil penalties) as per the HMO scheme?

delegated powers from the County Council to issue fixed penalty notices where landlords have not obtained an EPC and to enforce minimum energy efficiency standards in commercial premises. The grant was not intended to enable the Council to become self-financing in this work.

There are powers to issue penalties under the regulations which involves a similar mechanism to financial penalties under the Housing Act 2004, although the maximum amount is significantly less. The maximum penalties amounts apply per property and per breach of the Regulations and the maximum fine per property is £5,000 in total. They are:

- up to £2,000 and/or publication penalty for renting out a non-compliant property for less than 3 months
- up to £4,000 and/or publication penalty for renting out a non-compliant property for 3 months or more
- up to £1,000 and/or publication for providing false or misleading information on the PRS Exemptions Register
- up to £2,000 and/or publication for failure to comply with a compliance notice

Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthy Oxford

24. From Cllr Wade to Cllr Upton – vaccinations for rough sleepers

Question

Currently there are about 25 homeless people living and sleeping on our streets, in addition to those we have found places for in hostel accommodation.

Would the Cabinet member agree that pressure should be put on the Government through MHCLG to arrange priority vaccination for all those who are homeless in our city?

Written Response

This is an issue which the city council has raised through the Health Protection Board and through meetings of the Oxfordshire Leaders group. Public Health colleagues and local vaccination leads recognised that rough sleepers are a vulnerable group and that they and those who work with them should be vaccinated as soon as possible. However, the Chief Medical Officer's restated guidance is that only those over 70, and people who are registered as Clinically Extremely Vulnerable should qualify as the next priority groups. This is extremely disappointing but we will now be working with health partners to identify those within this group who could be considered as clinically extremely vulnerable to enable them to be prioritised and will continue to press for them to receive the vaccine as quickly as possible.

25. From Cllr Simmons to Cllr Upton – returning students' safety

Question

Can the Portfolio Holder update Council on any recent discussions with the universities on plans for students to return to Oxford in a COVID-safe way?

Written Response

We are in regular contact with both universities who have been exemplary in implementing testing and COVID secure arrangements to minimise the risk of transmission, and to protect the health of students, staff and the wider community.

Both universities are delivering courses on line for most students until at least mid-February in line with the national lockdown.

The majority of students at Oxford Brookes and the University of Oxford have been asked not to return to Oxford before then, with the exception of those studying specific courses relating to medicine, health, education and social work or those who need to return in order to be able to participate in study or for their safety. Students who return are asked to take free and fast tests for COVID-19. Where in-person teaching does take place, both universities have COVID-secure arrangements to ensure it can continue safely.

The Universities are also implementing asymptomatic testing for staff.

Prior to the Lockdown both universities had developed plans for the phased return and testing of students and will update and review these plans according to any further guidance as and when lockdown restrictions change.

26. From Cllr Wolff to Cllr Upton – Covid restrictions for cyclists

Question

As the Prime Minister has found from his recent experience, his own government's edicts restricting the taking of exercise to within one's 'local area' are less than helpful for cyclists. A sports cyclist may well consider a ride of 60 - 70 miles appropriate exercise. During such a ride their feet may never touch the ground and they are very unlikely to come closer than two metres to anyone.

Has the portfolio holder had any conversations with Thames Valley Police that might enable her to give some guidance to Oxford's many cyclists, and if so, what does she believe that advice to be?

Written Response

It is the responsibility of Thames Valley Police to provide guidance on the interpretation of legislation that they enforce.

27. From Cllr Simmons to Cllr Upton – Covid restrictions enforcement

Question

Following the rise of the recent new variant COVID and the consequent need for the greater enforcement of lockdown rules, can the Portfolio Holder please update Council on recent changes to enforcement regimes?

Written Response

The regulations are enforced by both the Council and Thames Valley Police with the Police being primarily responsible for enforcing the rules for individuals such as gatherings and wearing face coverings and the Council for enforcing business restrictions. Both the Police and the Council have already carried out extensive engagement education and explanation of the regulations and have hardened their position on enforcement in the lockdown period. The COVID Secure Team are continuing to visit business premises both in the daytime and in the evenings to ensure compliance with a view to taking enforcement action if a breach of the regulations is evidenced.

A total of 66 Fixed Penalty Notices had been issued by the Police to individuals by the 19th of January for breach of lockdown regulations in private and rented houses.

28. From Cllr Simmons to Cllr Upton – Vaccination volunteers

Question

I have had several members of the public contact me asking how they can help at vaccine centres. Official NHS advice is to contact GoodSAM/Royal Voluntary Service. On this website your identity is confirmed along with any other necessary checks (e.g. DBS) relevant to the role for which you are volunteering. Your details are then passed on to the local vaccine providers who make contact via the Responder app. Prior to the opening of the vaccine centres I was directing volunteers to Oxford Together (though they are currently not advertising for vaccine centre helpers). In fact, I registered myself with both GoodSAM/RVS and Oxford Together.

From what I can ascertain, local centres are NOT using the official GoodSAM/RVS route to recruit volunteers but more informal networks which may not be subject to the relevant checks.

Can the Portfolio Holder please clarify the mechanism by which local people can volunteer their time to support the vaccine roll-out?

Written Response

There are a number of ways in which people can volunteer to support the vaccine roll out. The volunteer vaccinators programme is being administered by the St John's Ambulance who are training volunteers.

Local Primary Care Networks have moved quickly to mobilise the roll out of vaccinations from GP surgeries and other local centres and have drawn on established volunteer networks known to GP practices and via Oxford Together.

The people of Oxford have responded magnificently to the calls for help at vaccine centres. Most have been overwhelmed with volunteers.

Via www.oxfordhub.org I've done an afternoon in Hi-Viz, parking cars at the Leys Health Centre after responding to an email from Oxford Together. We would continue to encourage people to register interest in volunteering via this route.

28. From Cllr Simmons to Cllr Upton – Vaccination volunteers

Supplementary Question

Is there a specific approval process for volunteering through oxfordhub.org

Verbal answer

Registering was straightforward although this was just for car park duties. The process through St John's Ambulance seemed more extensive. There may be sufficient volunteers at the moment to cover all needs.

The Circular Wave app also allows registration as a volunteer and signing up for shifts, but shifts do get booked up quickly.

Cabinet Member for Supporting Local Communities

29. From Cllr Simmons to Cllr Tidball – supporting remote learning

Question

Is there anything more the City Council can do to support COVID-safe access to the internet for children being forced to learn remotely – for example by providing access to technology or free internet via existing Council facilities?

Written Response

At the current time with national lockdown restrictions our ability to provide access via community facilities is very limited.

However, the Council is aware of a temporary scheme led by major mobile phone network providers in the country which is providing either access to more data or broadband – it is subject to criteria.

This is being embedded into the Council helpline and into the work of the locality hubs too. So, the Council can support residents concerning any unmet need.

Additionally, a mixture of 30 laptops and tablets have been provided through working with local community organisations in the Community Impact Zone.

Moreover, as we move through the phases of lockdown and changes, we will need to consider how we use Council owned assets to increase digital inclusion, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas of the city – this work is now being developed, as part of the ongoing equalities review.

30. From Cllr Wade to Cllr Tidball – supporting remote learning 2

30. From Cllr Wade to Cllr Tidball – supporting remote learning 2

<p>Question</p> <p>The Department for Education has confirmed that it will be inviting schools by 15 January to put forward their requirements for laptops. They have removed this task from the County Council. We are concerned that the actual supply of laptops will be weeks down the line for our children in this city.</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member advise what the City Council is doing to provide equipment urgently to those pupils who are being disadvantaged by a lack of basic equipment?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The Council has allocated an officer to work with the County Council and Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF) to identify laptop provision gaps for disadvantaged children.</p> <p>The County Council and OCF have an agreed SLA to undertake and co-ordinate this work.</p> <p>OCF is co-ordinating this work and has enlisted the support of many different community groups and organisations that are currently working with schools.</p> <p>Given the urgency of the task, the City Council will be working with OCF via the County to utilise established pathways into schools to address any unmet need/demand. The City Council has identified a sizeable stock of decommissioned laptops to donate via OCF into schools.</p> <p>At the time of writing, the City Council is discussing with the County and OCF the best way to supply the stock.</p> <p>The City Council will also work with other city stakeholders, such as the university, to identify additional hardware to supply schools' established pathways via OCF.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>There are several parallel processes running between the Department for Education's short-response time applications, the County Council, and schools. Are we working with all three to ensure no-one is left behind?</p>	<p>Verbal answer</p> <p>I will ask officers to follow up. The County Council is working with schools to make sure gaps are covered and we are meeting and working with both. We want to understand where the gaps in digital access are, given the number of children registered for free school meals and those eligible but not registered.</p>

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

31. From Cllr Simmons to Cllr Brown – refunding student rents

Question

Will the Leader be making representations to the universities, colleges and private landlords to encourage them, if they have not done so already, to refund rents for students unable to return to Oxford due to COVID restrictions?

Written Response

I have been discussing these issues with the two universities since before Christmas. The University of Oxford and its colleges have made arrangements to reimburse students for accommodation costs where they are unable to take up accommodation because of current restrictions. The situation at Brookes is a bit more complex as there are different providers. The government has a role here too. Some universities and accommodation providers are in a better position than others to be able to offer a rebate.

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