

**To:** Council

**Date:** 31 January 2022

**Report of:** Head of Law and Governance

**Title of Report:** Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision – as submitted by the speakers and with written responses from Cabinet Members where available

## Introduction

1. Addresses made by members of the public to the Council, and questions put to the Cabinet members or Leader, registered by the deadline in the Constitution, are below. Any written responses available are also below.
2. The text reproduces that sent in the speakers and represents the views of the speakers. This is not to be taken as statements by or on behalf of the Council
3. This report will be republished after the Council meeting as part of the minutes pack. This will list the full text of speeches delivered as submitted, summaries of speeches delivered which differ significantly from those submitted, and any further responses.

Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda

1. Address by Colin Aldridge – Drug Consumption Rooms
2. Address by Chaka Artwell, Secretary of Oxford African Caribbean Conversation (OACC) – Public Safety Women
3. Question from Chaka Artwell – Concentrated Wealth

## Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda

### 1. Address by Colin Aldridge – Drug Consumption Rooms

I came here about 2 years ago talking of Drug Consumption Rooms. This time I am here to ask the councillors to try to gain permission for a DCR trial in Oxford.

Since the Defence of the Realm Act was introduced around the time of the First World War, we have had illegal drugs on our streets. This has now led to 4,561 deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales in 2020, up 3.8% from the previous year and the highest number since records began in 1993.

<https://news.sky.com/story/drug-related-deaths-hit-record-high-in-england-and-wales-after-rising-for-eighth-year-in-a-row-12374678>

Criminalising drug use is not working. There are many in our society who now realise this course of action needs to change to become a health challenge. Forcing people into rehab through the criminal justice system does not work for the majority as they are not willing participants. We can only improve the situation by having people wanting to change their actions.

On Wednesday 17 January 2018 there was a debate in parliament about Drug Consumption Rooms in which approximately 17 cross-party politicians spoke. A large majority were in favour but as yet nothing has happened.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-01-17/debates/1681A3C1-E6A4-4E10-8E38-8B4B240D5B67/DrugConsumptionRooms>

DCRs are used in many different countries around the world. In terms of the historical development of this intervention, the first supervised DCR was opened in Berne, Switzerland, in June 1986. Further facilities of this type were established in subsequent years in Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Norway, Luxembourg, Denmark, Greece, and France. A total of 78 official drug consumption facilities currently operates in these countries, following the opening of the first two drug consumption facilities in the framework of a 6-year trial in France in 2016. There are also 12 facilities in Switzerland with much success.

This is a big step to take, therefore we need to have a trial to discover for ourselves the benefits and pitfalls.

[https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/2734/POD\\_Drug%20consumption%20rooms.pdf](https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/2734/POD_Drug%20consumption%20rooms.pdf)

Drug Consumption Rooms can introduce users to a healthier life and reduce the dangers of needles in our parks and streets. They also allow users to take their chosen poison in a controlled and safer environment.

Supplying drugs to users is illegal, which means our government is the only body able to debate and give permission for a trial. A precedent has been set with the trial of e-scooters in Oxford, which has just been extended.

In a recent email from the MP Layla Moran says “I understand that the Drug Deaths Taskforce, set up by the Scottish Government, supports the introduction of safer consumption facilities in Scotland. The Drugs Death Taskforce has recommended that the UK Government consider a legislative framework to support their introduction”.

I am here to ask all councillors to come together to write a cross-party letter to the government asking permission for a trial in Oxford City.

We have waited long enough – it’s time for action.

I am starting a petition asking parliament to debate this. I will send each of you a link which I hope you would be able to sign and share in whichever way you feel appropriate. Thank you for listening.

### **Written Response from Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthy Oxford**

Drug deaths are preventable and if 4,561 people were being killed by any other illness, it would be considered as a public health issue and the Government would act accordingly.

Taking a public health approach to drug consumption aligns with the public health approach that is being taken to tackle a range of societal issues including serious violence because it’s an approach that works. It is also an approach being advocated

by the current government which makes their continued opposition to drug consumption rooms inconsistent and contradictory.

The experience of Bristol City Council, whose request to start a pilot project involving a drug consumption room was rejected by the government in September last year indicates that more work needs to be done in changing the views of the Home Office before agreeing to submit a request for permission to hold a trial. Evidence such as that from The Society for the Study of Addiction shows that the benefits of drug consumption rooms outweigh the disbenefits.

<https://www.addiction-ssa.org/in-the-news-call-for-drug-consumption-rooms-in-the-uk/>

We have some excellent charities working in this sector in Oxford. If there was a clear indication that the government's view had changed, then the Council would be willing to consider working with the relevant agencies to develop a proposal for Oxford.

## **2. Address by Chaka Artwell, Secretary of Oxford African Caribbean Conversation (OACC) – Public Safety Women**

Oxford City Council's motion entitled "Becoming a Trans Inclusive Council" which was supported overwhelmingly by the Elected Councillors, must be rescinded; withdrawn and abandoned by Oxford City's Elected Councillors on the grounds that "Becoming a Trans Inclusive Council" foreseeably in my view places female pupils and women in real danger of intimidation from biological boys and men whilst in these traditional single-sex female spaces.

In the United States, a Loudoun County Judge found a boy guilty of sexually assaulting a 15-year-old girl, reported the Daily Mail on Tuesday, October 26th 2021<sup>1</sup>. The transgendered appearing boy, who was wearing a skirt, invaded the girls' bathroom at Stone Bridge High School in the United States after the Education Board had also authorised boys to invade and disrespect traditional female single-sex places.

This frightful sexual assault could in my opinion easily occur in Oxford following the Elected City Council's December 2021 vote for Oxford to become a "Trans Inclusive Council."

In 2020, the Elected Oxfordshire County Councillors ignored I believe the general safety of female pupils and voted to authorise biological boys to access Oxfordshire Secondary School's traditional single-sex female toilets.

Oxfordshire County Council's vote to allow boys to access female pupils' toilets was successfully challenged by an unnamed thirteen-year-old pupil; who stated that puberty was difficult enough without having boys authorised by the unwise Elected Councillors invading their traditional single-sex female pupils' toilets.

In 2020, with enormous support from Oxfordshire's rank and file, this wise THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD girl crowd-funded to challenge the Elected Councillors decision at the High Court in a Judicial Review.

The Oxfordshire schoolgirl who brought the Judicial challenge won her just battle against Oxfordshire County Council's "Transgender Toolkit." – but she said Oxfordshire's Elected County Councillors "have not apologised or admitted (the transgendered Toolkit) was wrong."

It is shocking and unacceptable to me; especially of the "double-dipping" County Councillors, that no Elected Councillor spoke at Oxford's City Council meeting in support of protecting traditional single-sex public spaces used by girls and women.

In my view Oxford's Feminist Union believes that Oxford City Council assisted the passage of the "Trans inclusive Council" motion to frustrate and prevent the public from democratically challenging this potentially harmful and unwise motion<sup>2</sup>. It is noticeable that public speakers at Full Council were direct Labour Supporters or Labour activists.

In my opinion there is ample and empirical evidence of the real and present dangers that biological males pose whilst in traditional female single-sex spaces. The Prison Service reports that biological-males in female prisons have raped numerous female prisoners and female Prison guards.

Oxford, with the historical abuse of young girls by men, ought to make the safeguarding of girls and women a priority. There was no call by City Councillors to protect girls and women from the clear and present threat the "Trans inclusion Council" policy presents to female pupils and women in my opinion.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10132015/Loudoun-County-judge-finds-boy-skirt-GUILTY-sexually-assaulting-female-student.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://oxfordfeministunion.co.uk/2021/12/>

Women have every right to continue to expect Women's Refuge, Sports facilities, female changing rooms, female prisons and Rape Crisis Centres to be female only.

For these women in public office to support this "Trans Inclusive" policy is in my view ipso facto proof of the fallacy that having women or minorities does not lead to superior policies or wise adjudication.

That thirty-eight Elected City Councillors voted for the "Trans inclusive" policy causes in my view many Oxford voters' great shame and disappointment and concern for the public safety of their sisters; wives and mothers who could be forced to use traditional female public spaces with biological men and boys. Oxford City Council has nothing to be proud about.

Chaka Artwell Secretary

OACC. OX3 8BW.

### **Verbal Response from Councillor Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities**

Democratic spaces and processes should not be used as a cover for making outlandish, unfounded and deeply problematic statements about anyone, let alone vulnerable minorities such as Trans women, men and people.

Transphobia or any form of bigotry cannot and must not ever be passed off as freedom of speech, yet this is exactly what is happening here tonight and this is what is happening across the country due to a Government stoking its cultural wars on the back of the most vulnerable in our society. There is truly nothing more shameful than denying people's humanity and Human Rights. There is nothing more shameful than trying to weaponise rape, sexual abuse and violence against women and girls to further dehumanise Trans women, men and people.

Transphobia is a form of misogyny and should be called out for being so. I am very proud of Oxford City Council for passing a motion to become a Trans Inclusive Council and I, along with my colleagues, will be doing everything in my power to work with all Elected Members to ensure this motion is put into action. Indeed, Cllr Louise Upton and I are due to meet Cllr Lucy Pegg and hopefully Cllr Chris Jarvis who wrote and proposed the motion in the next week or so – thank you Councillors.

I am very proud that Oxford City Council flies the Transgender flag over the Town Hall annually on the Trans Day of Remembrance, which is on 20 November – as we know this is a day when we honour, mourn and remember the names of our Trans siblings who lost their lives in acts of Transgender violence. I am very proud of the fact that this Council has approved the creation of a Violence Against Women Taskforce, focused on tackling misogyny across our City. This is, of course, an inclusive and intersectional space which will, of course, include our Trans sisters. I am very proud of the fact that Oxford City Council has elected more Councillors of LGBTQIA+ backgrounds from all parties. I would also like to acknowledge the harm of this so-called speech that has been made this evening and the pain that it must have caused a lot of people in this Chamber and those listening. Thank you.

### 3. Question from Chaka Artwell – Concentrated Wealth

Elected Oxford City Councillors, Oxfam has released a report that has been reported by the BBC, that states the lockdown of small and independent businesses has assisted the “**world's 10 richest men (to) have more than doubled their collective fortunes since March 2020,**” Oxfam reveals.

For this reason, Councillors, the concentration of the wealth of Planet Earth into the hands and control of a dozen men poses the **greatest threat** to the continuation of human; plant and animal life on Planet Earth.

It comes as a shock that Oxford City Councillors do not even try to address the threat to life on Planet Earth from having over 80% of the wealth of Planet Earth under the control of the few.

Africa contributes least to “climate change,” but the Congo’s environment and children are exploited horribly to mine the coltan without which **electric car battery** production is not possible.

Do the Councillors understand its is easy for the wealthy to be Green; whilst it is almost impossible for the poorly paid? Do Councillors agree this level of concentrated wealth is the **greatest** threat to life on Planet Earth?

Oxford City & County Council Watch.

#### **Written Response from Councillor Tom Hayes, Cabinet Member for Green Transport and Zero Carbon Oxford**

The greatest threats to the continuation of human, plant and animal life on earth are climate change, habitat destruction, disease and war. If anyone was in any doubt about their severity then I would expect the global experience of the past couple of years will have changed that – with a global pandemic that has killed millions, record wildfires in the US, Greece and Siberia, a twelve-year record in Amazon deforestation and vicious conflict in Yemen, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Armenia.

Addressing inequality, as well as tackling climate change, boosting biodiversity, sustaining and protecting people through the pandemic, and helping to keep our citizens safe – are at the very heart of this Council’s work. I’m proud that Oxford is home to Oxfam, whose data you report. While working at Oxfam I led UK campaigning to tackle global inequality, including publishing the annual data reports which you mention. We agree on the need to end the rampant inequality we see in the world.

We in Oxford may be able to do little to deliver a redistribution of wealth from the world’s mega-rich, but of course all of us are able to make a difference when it comes to climate change and biodiversity. Just as every individual was able to make a difference when it came to controlling the spread of COVID. This is about behaviour change. Reuse is cheaper than replacement, vegetables are cheaper than meat, taking the bus is cheaper than running a car, insulating the loft is cheaper than paying your gas bill – indeed for many of our tenants, it is free. But as everyone knows as those New Year’s Resolutions begin to fade, behaviour change itself isn’t easy.

Oxford’s 2019 Citizens’ Assembly on Climate Change, which involved a representative group of residents of Oxford of all ages, means and different communities, was in clear agreement that the Council should work engage and empower *all* Oxford residents to make those changes that help achieve carbon reduction while *not* disadvantaging low-income households in the city. And that is what we are doing – with a list of some 60 actions set out in our Zero Carbon Action Plan. One of these relates to helping people

insulate and retrofit their homes. We are currently spending £1.6 million to upgrade 365 council homes in the city, and have secured a further £1.9 million to support low income home owners install insulation in their own homes. These actions will both cut household bills and reduce carbon impacts. This Council will continue to use our own processes, our partnerships and our work with Oxford's communities to ensure that as we cut carbon emissions in Oxford we take opportunities to enhance residents' standard of living, especially those who are most vulnerable and have low-incomes, through our climate action.

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