

To: Council

Date: 30 January 2023

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

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. Mr Ihor Terekhov, Mayor of Kharkiv – Oxford-Kharkiv Relations
2. Question from Jennifer Stanton – Council Banking

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

1. Mr Ihor Terekhov, Mayor of Kharkiv – Oxford-Kharkiv Relations

Dear Mr Lord Mayor, dear members of the Council, dear guests!

I am pleased to welcome you on behalf of the citizens of Kharkiv! Thank you for the opportunity to address you at this time when Ukrainian-British relations are at an all-time high.

We honour the people of Great Britain for their solidarity and support of Ukraine in our fight against the Russian aggressor. I believe that the United Kingdom and the City of Oxford, in particular, understand our circumstances because, more than 70 years ago, Britain, like Ukraine today, suffered from the enemy attack.

Kharkiv was one of the first cities to receive the enemy's treacherous blow. But the City has survived and overcome almost all of the difficulties. Even in the most difficult times, Kharkiv's municipal enterprises, services sector, and local authorities continued to

work. For the extraordinary bravery, courage, and heroism of its residents, Kharkiv has been awarded the honorary title of 'Hero City.'

Kharkiv and Oxford have a lot in common, for they are the centres of education and science, culture and art of their regions. Our cities have long university traditions. In my opinion, the very fact that Kharkiv has chosen the European path of development is one of the reasons for the extreme cruelty of our enemy. Despite the huge losses and damage, we are confident about the future. In building bilateral relations at the level of territorial communities, such as Oxford and Kharkiv, we see an opportunity to involve the best practices of world experts in the restoration of Kharkiv.

Dear ladies and gentlemen! Let me once again express my gratitude for your support! I look forward to meeting you in a peaceful, rebuilt Kharkiv!

Thank you for your attention!

Written Response from Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management

Thank you for your address, Mr Terekhov, and first of all may I express my solidarity with the people of Kharkiv and all of Ukraine, as victims of Vladimir Putin's disgraceful war of aggression. I have been as humbled and impressed by Ukraine's resistance as I have been saddened by the appalling nature of Russia's attacks on Ukrainian territory and Ukrainian civilians. I am glad that many people in Oxford are supporting Ukraine – in the early stages of conflict supplies were gathered, notably by Oxford's Polish community, and transferred to Ukraine, and of course we have been in contact with our twin city, Wroclaw, which has close links to Lviv. I am especially heartened that so many people in our city have opened their homes to people from Ukraine, while others are giving of their time to assist those who are here. In Oxford, we are proud of our designation as a city of sanctuary, and see a duty to assist those in need wherever they come from.

Oxford values its international links and we are of course open to expanding these. The exact designation of a link is much less important, in my view, than what actually happens in contact between cities, and in particular between people of different cities. We are therefore very open to assisting efforts to bring people from Kharkiv and people from Oxford together, mindful that what is possible now will be different from what is possible in the happier times we hope lie ahead. Our officers will be willing to meet with you to discuss this further, and our website also contains useful information (<https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20139/oxford-international-links/1401/our-twin-city-process>).

I was fortunate to visit Ukraine in 2011 (although sadly not Kharkiv), and remember the richness of the culture I saw, and the warmth of the reception I received. This has compounded my horror and sadness at this war, and I sincerely appreciate your suggestion of a meeting in peaceful, rebuilt Kharkiv. That day really cannot come soon enough.

2. Question from Jennifer Stanton – Council Banking

Oxford City Council declared a Climate Emergency in January 2019 – one of the first councils to do so – but four years later continues to bank with Barclays, the largest funder of fossil fuels in Europe.

Last November, Extinction Rebellion presented a letter to the City Council asking that they move their account away from Barclays Bank.

Council leader Susan Brown responded that Barclays had the best social and ethical record among banks which tendered for the account.

However, the Good Shopping Guide rates Barclays as the least ethical of all UK banks with the lowest score of 35 out of 100. Meanwhile, Barclays continues to invest billions in fossil fuels.

It is therefore unconscionable for the City Council to continue to bank with Barclays.

Will the City Council commit to moving its account, within the next year, to a bank that is not contributing to the Climate Emergency through investment in fossil fuel extraction and use, **by putting the account out to tender with the requirement of no direct investment in fossil fuels as part of the tender?**

Will the City Council also **inform Barclays Bank that the reason for retendering their account is Barclays' extensive funding of fossil fuels?**

Written Response from Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management

Historically Oxford City Council held its current account with the Co-operative bank but when the bank decided to withdraw from the local authority market, the Council was forced to procure a replacement banker. Of the bidding tenderers, Barclays scored joint highest in relation to social and ethical policies – the other two bidders were also major high-street banks. This is about our current account, not our investments. We would obviously have welcomed a wider choice of bank but there are limited banks willing to operate in the local authority market and the Council cannot function without a current account.

The Council engages with Barclays on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) matters; it is a subject at each of the account manager meetings. We also ask for ESG information from all of our other counterparties and challenge them on this area as well. Oxford City Council takes climate change and the efforts to combat it very seriously and will continue to undertake our own measures towards change and work with suppliers and customers towards a sustainable future.

The approach that Barclays take to try to influence their customers to move away from harmful environmental activities and making the targets gradually tighter is an approach taken by others as well. Other banks who work within the local authority market take a similar approach and have targets relating to 2050 alongside Barclays.

The Council has a commitment, in line with local authority codes of practice, to consider the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) ratings of its counterparties when considering its treasury management policies. ESG is a rounded measure of the sustainability of a company and its practices. Of the banks that are active within the local authority market, according to a leading ESG rating agency Sustainalytics, Barclays Bank plc has the best ESG rating.

I very much sympathise with the thrust of the question and we would welcome a wider choice of banks next time, and of course environmental, social and ethical policies will be part of that procurement.