

To: Council
Date: 29 January 2024
Report of: Head of Law and Governance
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 Cllr 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 Inclusive Economy and Partnerships; Leader of the Council

| SB1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Brown – Christmas Tree | |
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| Question | Written Response |
| What was the total and breakdown of the cost for the city’s Christmas tree this year and what are the requirements in terms of location? Which locations were assessed to determine a suitable alternative location to Broad Street in addition to the Rose Hill location that was finally chosen? | <p>The Christmas Tree forms part of an overall tender which includes the Festive Lighting in the city and the Reindeer too. It is not possible to break it down as a separate cost.</p> <p>The Christmas Tree was sited this year at Rose Hill as it was the only other</p> |

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| | <p>suitable location it could be placed that was a Council asset with level ground and access to the required power supply and connection. The city council explored a number of other city centre locations with the county council but could not get agreement to proceed with any of them.</p> |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>If you are unable to provide the breakdown of the costs of the Christmas Tree, I wonder whether you would be able to circulate the cost of the overall festive lighting for the city? Specifically, you stated that some other city centre locations were explored but weren't possible to proceed with, which were those locations please?</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>One of the locations we looked at was Carfax. There were a number of other locations that were discussed with County Council officers and were looked at from the City Council's perspective to see whether they met various requirements which included access to power supply, not cause any problems with blockage to CCTV or highways sightlines, and all of the other incredibly complicated things that we have to consider when siting the Christmas tree.</i></p> <p><i>I think part of the problem was it became apparent late in the day that it was not going to be possible to site in Broad Street because of the new arrangements of the market. It is being looked at for next year. The whole contract in terms of lighting is actually up for tender to ensure we get an even better display of lights moving forward and that we have the kind of decorations that we want to see in the City Centre.</i></p> |

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| <p>SB2 From Cllr Gant to Cllr Brown – Overnight tourist levy</p> | |
| <p>Question</p> <p>Can the Leader update us on discussions with other councils about efforts to persuade central government to grant cities like Oxford powers to place a small overnight levy on hotel and other accommodation, as has been commonplace in European countries for many years, the revenue to be used for place-making and other improvements to the city, thus enhancing amenity for visitors and residents alike?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>Author: Ted Maxwell</p> <p>The Council continues to explore the options for a locally-managed tourist levy. The rationale is similar to what you have said, in that the monies raised would enable the Council and partners to deliver more of the City Centre Action Plan and its projects, all of which will improve the city centre, for residents and visitors alike.</p> <p>The European model, of a blanket “visitor levy” is not possible in Oxford without</p> |

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| | <p>primary legislation. The Scottish Government is pursuing a bill – the “Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill” – which would make this possible in Scotland, but we are not aware of any similar legislation being pursued by UK Government.</p> <p>Officers have engaged with several councils that are pursuing Accommodation Business Improvement Districts, which may be an appropriate route for Oxford to follow. The Council has also contributed to the “Oxfordshire Destination Management Plan” and its follow-up relating to strategic funding options. One of the report’s recommendations is to monitor the progress in Scotland and to lobby the UK Government for new legislation. We will support those efforts, mindful that 2024 is an election year and so potential changes will realistically only be from 2025 onwards.</p> |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>Thank you to the Leader for a very helpful full answer. It is good to see that the Councillor see many of the things that were recommendations in the Scrutiny Tourism review. Specifically, is this Council actually working with a group of other councils to lobby the government?</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>We haven’t set ourselves up as group in order to do that. We had plenty of conversations with other Council Leaders on this particular topic and we have looked quite closely at what some other councils have done. I think there is more that we need to explore because there are a couple of options which exists at the moment that we can follow up. I am not 100% yet that they would be absolutely right for Oxford. I think there is still more that we need to do in terms of lobbying, as well of current and future governments, so that we can make sure we have the kind of tourism tax that we want and that will enable us to invest in the kind of things that we need to be able to invest in for our city centre. I’m thinking in terms of things like signage, which we know needs improving – we have very little money to do that at the moment. But also, ideally, we’d be able to put more money into public toilets in terms of maintaining and potentially building new ones. Again, at the moment,</i></p> |

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| | <i>we do not have the funds to do that. If we were able to get in funds through this need, something that's done across the world in many cities, I think that will be a really good step forward.</i> |
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| SB3 From Cllr Jarvis to Cllr Brown – Closure of courses | |
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| Question Has the Council Leader written to Alistair Fitt - Vice Chancellor of Oxford Brookes University - as Oxford East MP Annalise Dodds has done, to convey concerns about the closure of courses such as music and maths, given the impact these closures have on the options for students in Oxford and across Oxfordshire? | Written Response Author: I have had a number of conversations with the Vice Chancellor raising concerns on behalf of the people of Oxford and seeking reassurances about the impact on students in Oxford and Oxfordshire. |

| SB4 From Cllr Jarvis to Cllr Brown – Redundancy at Oxford Brookes University | |
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| Question Oxford Brookes University has announced that redundancies are on the cards as part of its programme of cuts. What support can Oxford City Council provide to students and staff affected by job cuts at the university? | Written Response Author: As I understand it, current students should not be impacted by these changes as the idea is to continue students in existing programmes but not to recruit new students. We will continue talking to Oxford Brookes to ensure that staff and students are getting any support they need. |

| SB5 From Cllr Aziz to Cllr Brown – Empty shops in Covered Market | |
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| Question What is being done to ensure empty shops in the Covered Market are not left empty? | Written Response Prior to a longer term letting, empty units are either made available for a short-term letting or as an event/promotional space either for new businesses or to support existing tenants' short-term needs- examples last year include unit 46 as an art therapy art show, unit 54-55 for Christmas trees and 115-117 used for window displays. |

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| | <p>There are currently 4 empty units, 3 of which are under offer and legal completion is anticipated imminently. The only really vacant unit is being marketed and offers sought in line with the leasing strategy.</p> |
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| SB6 From Cllr Aziz to Cllr Brown – Council support for small business | |
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| Question | Written Response |
| <p>What is the Council doing to support small business? Six more business in the Covered Market are empty, including some of the longest established.</p> | <p>Author: Ted Maxwell</p> <p>There are only four businesses that are empty currently and three of them are under offer, only one being currently marketed.</p> <p>The council has limited resources to support businesses, but we are committed to supporting small businesses.</p> <p>The economic development team's work is guided by Oxford's Economic Strategy and Delivery Plan, which include a range of actions and projects to support small businesses. A recent highlight is the Meanwhile in Oxfordshire programme, a county-wide initiative delivered by Oxford City Council and Makespace Oxford. Its purpose has been to repurpose empty units for the benefit of start-ups and the independent business sector and so far 100 organisations have been housed and 200 jobs created or supported through the programme since its launch in 2021.</p> <p>From a City Centre Management perspective, the City Centre Action Plan is the guiding strategy, which acknowledges that it has been a challenging environment for small businesses and seeks to help with this: our monthly city centre newsletter provides a wide range of useful information relating to the city centre; our quarterly “Talk of the Town” meetings rotate around city centre venues and are proving to be an increasingly popular way for small businesses to network and seek help and advice; and our city centre</p> |

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| | <p>manager is available for one-to-one meetings to identify needs and sign-post further opportunities.</p> <p>On the Cowley Road, the Council has supported the creation of a new ongoing business-council series of meetings, so that independent businesses in that area have a regular chance to discuss issues and opportunities for improvement with the council and other agencies. It is hoped that this dialogue evolves into the businesses formalising their own association or grouping so that they have even more of a voice and ability to work well with the council and we are offering to help with this. We have also offered support to independent businesses on the Botley Road.</p> |
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| SB7 From Cllr Aziz to Cllr Brown – Diversity representation in Cabinet | |
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| <p>Question</p> <p>From October to November 2023, Oxford City Council has seen the resignation of two cabinet members, both are people of colour who are rooted in Oxford’s communities and has also seen most members of colour resign from the Labour Group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What work is being carried out by the rest of the Cabinet to ensure Oxford’s diverse communities voices and needs are being recognised and represented by the group? • Will the Leader confirm that she is committed to ensuing Oxford City Council has a Cabinet that represents the diversity of the residents of the city - as it did before Oxford Labour lost control of the council? | <p>Written Response</p> <p>As Cllr Aziz has often said, and I agree with her, it is important that valuing diversity and listening to diverse communities does not fall on the shoulders only of those who themselves come from those communities.</p> <p>We have in place policies in the city council to ensure that we do listen to diverse communities, from the representative nature of our citizen’s panel to the outreach work that our officers do across our communities.</p> <p>In addition, Labour councillors are regularly out on the doorstep listening to and talking with residents across the city.</p> <p>Our cabinet was and is representative of the ruling group’s diversity. I am sure it will continue to be so.</p> |

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| SB8 From Cllr Aziz to Cllr Brown – Leader’s call for action on rising Palestinian civilian casualties |
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| <p>Question</p> <p>Has the council leader written to the Mayor of Ramallah and other institutions in our twinned city to share her and Oxford residents alarm and horror at the sharp rise in killings and detentions of Palestinian civilians?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>Author:</p> <p>Yes. I wrote to the Mayor of Ramallah in December.</p> |
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| <p>SB9 From Cllr Aziz to Cllr Brown – Flying the Palestinian flag</p> | |
| <p>Question</p> <p>When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Oxford ended its twinning relationship with the Russian City of Perm, and also flew the flag of Ukraine from the Town Hall. Will the Palestinian flag be flown from the Town Hall once the flag mast is fixed?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>Author:</p> <p>We are flying the City of Oxford flag at half-mast again as we did previously. One of our flagpoles is still out of action and likely to be so for quite some time as work is needed to make the access way across the roof safe for staff to access it.</p> |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>Can we get an idea of how long its going to take to fix this flagpole and what is the actual hold up?</i></p> <p><i>When was it first discovered that the flagpole was out of action, because obviously this flagpole is used to fly flags for different occasions, I find it concerning that the fact this flag pole is out of action was not excused upon earlier or flagged earlier. I would like to get clarity on how long repairs will take place.</i></p> <p><i>There is concern among some residents that this Council is trying to ‘fudge’ flying the Palestinian flag. I think for accountability and transparency, we need a clear response for this question.</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>Firstly, I answered questions about this before Christmas. In fact, it has emerged since that the work is going to be done to the roof, not actually to the flagpole. It is going to take quite a long time because there is work that is going to be done to the roof in about a year’s time and this work will have to be done as part of that.</i></p> <p><i>The answer to your question is that we have taken one of the other flagpoles and are now using that to fly our flag at half-mast. One of the flagpoles is out of action and we’re using the other flagpole to fly the City of Oxford’s flag at half-mast instead to mark the whole situation in Gaza. That flagpole was previously flying the Ukrainian flag that has been taken down in order to do this. We will have to bury the flags until we’re able to repair the roof. As it is not safe to access the flagpole at the moment, I have no other option other than to use this flagpole.</i></p> |

Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management; Deputy Leader of the Council

ET1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Selling gifts to council

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| Question What document explicitly states that gifts to the city council (e.g. the Morrell Trophy or the personalised car number plate) cannot be sold with the proceeds invested into another asset class? | Written Response There is no one single document that sets this out. Rather each item/asset may have its own documentation and the Council would also have to adhere to general rules on best value. |
| Supplementary Question <i>Does the council have any documentation associated with the Morrell Trophy and personalised number plates explicitly stating conditions placed on these gifts?</i> | Verbal Response <i>The Councillor will probably not be surprised but will be reassured to hear that I don't keep them about myself personally. I don't know and I'm happy to find out.</i> Written Response <i>There is an asset register of all paintings and civic items within the Town Hall, this includes the trophy and number plate. We are actively seeking any other documentation that is relevant and will inform the member of our findings in due course.</i> |

ET2 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Existing and future flooding costs to council

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| Question What was the financial cost of this month's flooding to the city council and what was the money spent on? How is the council managing this increasing financial risk of loss and damage in the face of increasing severity of extreme weather events and flooding due to climate change? | Written Response The costs are still being accumulated but latest estimate is that the total cost will be around £70- £80k spent. Duties included: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monitoring flood sites in the run up to the event, including monitoring river levels and physical site inspections.• Manufacture and placement of flood warning signs across the city.• Manufacture and placement of signage to close the towpath in |
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| | <p>various locations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullstake Close - Erecting the flood barrier, sandbag wall and pumps. 24 hour a day monitoring once set up. • Vicarage Road - Setting up pumps and sandbag wall. 24 hour a day monitoring once set up. • Ferry Hinksey Road - Setting up pumps and sandbag wall. 24 hour a day monitoring once set up. • Delivery of sand and empty bags from depot to Redbridge. • Assisting EA with works on Abingdon Road area. • Extra sweepers deployed to clean areas after flooding. • Call out to Oatlands Rec and Botley Park. • Call out to council houses in Fox Crescent area. • Deployment of temporary toilets to Abingdon Road for tenants. • Assistance with the deployment of pumps <p>We hope and expects costs to be picked up by Government and if that does not happen in a timely fashion we will obviously make appropriate representations. If these were not forthcoming we would need to revert to reserves and balances to fund such costs.</p> <p>Oxford City Council will continue to support the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme (OFAS) as a partner in order to reduce flood risk to the city of Oxford, its resident's businesses and the Council. I would also point to the extensive coverage of this major concern in our new Local Plan.</p> |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>The £70-80k spent on this recent flooding is significant given that we're likely to have more instances of flooding</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>We have an insurance contract we go out to tender. I'm not aware that it covers this sort of thing, and of course you can</i></p> |

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| <p><i>in the future. That is going to be a significant cost to the Council if we're bearing that every time there's a flood. Has the City Council done any research into Climate Risk insurance to insure itself against these costs given that the UK has significant expertise in this area? Thank you.</i></p> | <p><i>see why it might not, but very happy next time our insurance tender is up to have a look at this or take on board anymore. I'm hopeful that we may get compensated by the government for this one, and it would be frankly pretty outrageous if we didn't. Clearly isn't fair if individual councils, because of their propensity to flood, are exposed in this way. It's also incumbent on us to support measures like the Oxford Flood Alleviation scheme which will reduce the risk. That's something which we can control, that we support those schemes.</i></p> |
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| ET3 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Business rates delinquency rate | |
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| <p>Question</p> <p>What is the delinquency rate on business rates owed to Oxford City Council versus collected over the last 12 months?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>As at 31/12/2023</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2022/23 collectable debt is £90,072,862.21, we have collected 96.82% so the delinquency rate is 3.18% • 2023/24 collectable debt is £89,361,210.49, we have collected 81.11% so the delinquency rate at this stage in the year is 18.89% |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>The delinquency rate on business rates is significantly higher this year – about 15% higher. What's changed? Has the Council become weaker in collecting the debt? What is the reason for this significantly higher delinquency rate?</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>It is early in the year so we haven't collected the final amount. Wait until the end of the year and I think you'll probably find it's going to be pretty similar.</i></p> |

| ET4 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Empty council owned commercial property | |
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| <p>Question</p> <p>How many of the council's commercial property portfolio is currently empty?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>Currently there are 18 properties that are vacant in the Council's investment portfolio, excluding the Covered Market.</p> <p>9 properties – under offer/in legals</p> |

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| | <p>4 properties – currently being marketed (none in city centre)</p> <p>5 properties – requiring conversion works, or due to residential use will be taken to the market in a different way to the wider portfolio.</p> |
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| <p>ET5 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Council owned commercial property portfolio EPC rating</p> | |
| <p>Question</p> <p>What is the breakdown of the EPC ratings within the council’s commercial property portfolio? (i.e. how many of the properties of the total number have each EPC rating?)</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>Please see response provided in the table shown in Appendix 1</p> |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>If you exclude these commercial properties which are exempt that you have a 71% of the Council’s commercial building stock rated EPC D and E, which is three quarters of all commercial stock in the city. Is that acceptable?</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>That goes back to previous budgets and I don’t recall a lot of spending changes proposed by other groups saying we’d rather you didn’t spend money on this thing because we’d like additional investment in commercial properties. In fact, if anything, I seem to remember the commercial portfolio was rather looked down on in the previous budget rounds. Maybe it’ll be different this year.</i></p> <p><i>It’s a statement of fact, it is where we are. We have to invest in our commercial portfolios guided by our asset management plans. In doing that, we will do what we can. But, I suppose, I don’t make an apology for not making investment in our commercial property the primary focus of all of our investment. We’ve got lots of other things that we’re doing in the climate space and lots of other calls on our scarce funds. We’ll do what we can, of course, it will also guide our choices in the future when it comes to investment decision and property purchasing decisions.</i></p> <p><i>It reflects the situation that we’re in.</i></p> |

| ET6 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Summertown public toilets | |
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| Question What are the opening hours for the public toilets in a) South Parade and b) Diamond Place, and what is the respective cost of operating these public conveniences? | Written Response The opening times for both toilet blocks are 08:00 till 17:00 Due to the multi-faceted way that the streetscene crews work, it's really difficult to get an exact cost for cleaning 2 individual toilets. However, the best estimate for the 2 blocks would be £32k per annum, this includes labour, vehicle and consumables. |

| ET7 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Fee from South Park use for fireworks | |
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| Question What was the fee was paid to the City Council for the use of South Park for the firework display that caused damage to the park in 2023? | Written Response £3,150 |
| Supplementary Question <i>The fee received were £3,150 for the use of the South Park for this firework event taking place. Do you have an estimated cost of the number of people out spent on addressing the damage caused by the firework event and wouldn't officer time be better spent on other activity?</i> <i>We received £3,150 for allowing this firework event to take place but because of the damage caused there was a significant amount of time that I believe has had to be spent by officers on addressing complaints and remediation. Was it worth it for South Park and what is the estimated cost of the people time as that's a resource spend?</i> | Verbal Response <i>I'm afraid the South Park firework lead is Cllr Chewe Munkonge.</i> Verbal Response from Cllr Munkonge <i>We have provided a response there. At this time, I cannot comment but we are looking into it.</i> |

| ET8 From Cllr Pegg to Cllr Turner – Meadow Lane car park | |
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| Question When will there be a public update on the future of the Meadow Lane car park, | Written Response Following a review of all matters raised by the stakeholders, we are working with |

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| including a timeline for a decision-making process? | our consultants Jessop and Cook to submit a planning application on behalf of the Council. The timeline is still to be agreed and an update will be provided to stakeholders in early February. |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>It's really great to see that there will be a public update in early February.</i></p> <p><i>Going forward, it would be excellent to know. Could the Council commit to keeping community groups, residents, resident associations, sports clubs, and the various people who have been involved in the consultation so far be kept up to date with what is happening with the process? The lack of that so far has been causing some of the frustration from local people.</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>It's a really fair challenge. The difficulty with this is an important regulatory authority has got a different view. I think sometimes officers would want to try and get where they can first without that being in the public gaze. Sometimes officers need to be clear what the options are and need to scope out to be sure it is a sensible thing to do.</i></p> <p><i>I do take onboard the feedback and I think we should bear it in mind, while it may not be possible to give a running commentary on something like this, we do need to keep people informed.</i></p> <p><i>I'm very happy to pick up questions in between and respond courteously.</i></p> |

Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks; Deputy Leader of the Council

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| CM1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Munkonge – Cycle parking city owned parks | |
| <p>Question</p> <p>Does the city council follow the national guidance LTN 1/20 for installing cycle infrastructure when installing cycle stands in parks?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>We are reviewing local transport note 120 and how we apply it within our parks and open spaces.</p> |

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| CM2 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Munkonge – Use of park contract requirements | |
| <p>Question</p> <p>What restrictions are placed on organisations using South Park (or other city-owned or operated parks) on use of vehicles and heavy machinery on grass surfaces?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>There are currently no restrictions on the use of vehicles and heavy machinery on grass surfaces although this is under review.</p> |

| CM3 From Cllr Snowton to Cllr Munkonge – South Park remediation | |
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| <p>Question</p> <p>Can you confirm whether the council will need to spend any of its own money on restoration of South Park following the damage resulting from the Guy Fawkes Night event? What is the cost of the estimated officer time spent on managing remediation efforts after this damage compared to if no damage would have been caused?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>The event organisers are paying for all the rectification costs for South Park following the firework event. At this point, it is unclear what officer time will be needed to manage the remediation efforts as the timescale involved is weather dependent.</p> |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>What is your current intended approach for same event next year?</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>We are in discussion. We haven't concluded yet.</i></p> |

| CM4 From Cllr Morris to Cllr Munkonge – Allotment sites asbestos contamination | |
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| <p>Question</p> <p>Can the portfolio holder explain what steps the city council is taking to address the threat of asbestos contamination on allotment sites and remove all historic hazardous asbestos material from allotments sites, including in sheds and fencing?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>The council is aware of the presence of asbestos in a number of the sheds and other structures on some allotments and has undertaken appropriate management surveys. Asbestos would only present a significant risk if disturbed and any posing a risk has been removed. Removal and disposal of the material would bring a significant budget pressure</p> |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>What is the situation regarding the report I made some weeks ago with regard to broken asbestos in farm allotments? I did not receive a response and wonder whether that was significant concern to take any action on it.</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>If it is a specific concern, I will follow that up.</i></p> |

| CM5 From Cllr Morris to Cllr Munkonge – Grass cuttings collection | |
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| <p>Question</p> <p>Can the portfolio holder reassure residents that grass will be cut and collected towards the end of August and not left in situ to rot down and encourage</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>The cutting of the verges is undertaken by ODS on behalf of County Highways. County is unable to fund the additional costs of removal of the grass and green</p> |

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| <p>rank vegetation to grow and block up street drains?</p> | <p>waste disposal which would be significant given the scale of the operation.</p> <p>However, Oxford City Council does fund the collection of grass cuttings on across the 8 verges that formed part of its original 'no mow' pilot where this has been found to have increased biodiversity. These verges are on the following roads:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marston Road • Sunderland Avenue • Headley Way (Oxford Road Bypass) / Eastern bypass • The Round way • Bayswater Road • Grenoble Road • Abingdon Road • Abberbury roundabout |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>If the County grass cuts are unable to fund the additional cost of removal of grass, can the Council confirm will they still follow the same policy just cutting the grass at the end of the season and just leaving it to rot in big piles or revert back to more regularly?</i></p> <p><i>I don't know whether which policy would be better with regard to benefit to our plants.</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>Grass cutting measures is covered under a colleague's portfolio and so I'll refer this on to Councillor Nigel Chapman.</i></p> <p>Verbal Response from Cllr Chapman</p> <p><i>Basically, there are two verge cutting regimes going on here. There's one dependent on biodiversity. Then you have the rest of the verges that will be cut twice a year.</i></p> <p><i>The County Council used to fund far more cuts of verges in the past. But last year, for biodiversity reason and others, they reduced the cuts significantly so we're having to balance things out very carefully here. What I do hope is that by cutting most of the verges twice a year, assuming the budget is read, we will stop the very heavy growth earlier in the season and create less of a problem as seen in Marston Road where there were a lot of blockages on drains and gullies.</i></p> <p><i>I'm hopeful that will be able to help the situation.</i></p> |

CM6 From Cllr Latif to Cllr Munkonge – New leisure provider 1**Question**

Can it be explained to Council why a new provider for leisure services is being announced with just 2 months to go, given the previous provider had a 15-year contract?

Written Response

There is a procurement process that needed to be followed in relation to any appointment of a leisure provider. Work started on this around 2 years ago, contracts should be reprocurd as close as possible to the end of the previous contract to ensure the bids reflect current market trends and requirements of the Council.

This has been a significant piece of cross council work for the authority. The process has been very competitive. There has been significant member engagement which has included regular member briefings, cross party steering groups, leaders and cabinet meetings.

CM7 From Cllr Latif to Cllr Munkonge – New leisure provider 2**Question**

What risk to leisure services across the city exist given the new provider has just two months' notice before a changeover of provider?

Written Response

Serco has confirmed that they are able to mobilise within this period and have a mobilisation plan in place.

In addition, the Council has its own overarching transition plan and risk assessment in place. This includes contingency options to support the operator if required.

Whilst we expect the transition to go smoothly, insight from local authorities across the country flags that there is always the risk of some minor disruption.

CM8 From Cllr Latif to Cllr Munkonge – New leisure provider 3**Question**

During the covid pandemic many primary school children missed swimming lessons. What immediate measures have been agreed with the new leisure

Written Response

Being able to swim is a key life skill and we recognise the impact of the pandemic, this is referenced within our Thriving Communities Strategy as a

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| <p>provider to ensure these potentially lifesaving lessons are provided for children who missed out?</p> | <p>priority and something that we will continue to monitor.</p> <p>School swimming bookings will transfer over to the new operator and they understand the priority of these. In addition the operator does have a focus with its business plan on providing more after school swimming lessons.</p> |
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Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities

| <p>LU1 From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Upton – Templars Square redevelopment</p> | |
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| <p>Question</p> | <p>Written Response</p> |
| <p>What steps has the council taken to encourage the redevelopment of Templar’s Square since the new owners of the site took ownership in 2022 and have been consulting on its future?</p> | <p>The potential redevelopment of Templar’s Square shopping centre is an important opportunity. However, it is one that will need careful thought given the important role the centre plays as a local retail and community asset, alongside its relationship with surrounding residential communities.</p> <p>In early 2023, officers established both an internal officer working group and an external working group with the new leaseholders Redevco to explore opportunities. This work has also informed the proposed site allocations policy in the draft Local Plan.</p> <p>Redevco requested a pause in our discussion last year while it undertook further work internally, but late last year signalled it will be ready to reengage again in early 2024.</p> <p>The Council is in the process of commissioning external consultants to provide advice on any future redevelopment options for the centre. Once this is in place a clearer programme will be established with</p> |

| LU1 From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Upton – Templars Square redevelopment | |
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| | <p>Redevco.</p> <p>A briefing for local ward councillors with Redevco and the City Council is being set up, expected to be in March.</p> |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>In view of your response, do you believe there is significant risk that housing targets on that site don't end up being delivered? Or, do you think at this stage it's a matter of delay but still confident that they will be delivered?</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>I wish I had a crystal ball that I could answer that question accurately. I think we have to remain optimistic that they will be delivered. Obviously, because they are in the next iteration of our local plan, I can't give you more of an answer than that. But we will certainly be pressing our discussion with the developers, pressing for those to be built as soon as possible.</i></p> |

| LU2 From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Upton – Gardens being lost | |
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| <p>Question</p> <p>As part of the planning application process for property redevelopment (e.g. extensions and major alterations) can the Cabinet Member ensure that applicants are informed that any reduction of the amount of garden space in favour of hard surfaces must be defined and included?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>The Oxford Local Plan 2016-2036 includes policies that set out what is expected from development in terms of sustainable urban drainage (SUDS) techniques.</p> <p>The Council has a National and Local Validation List that sets out what is expected from planning applications, and this specifies that all applications must include details of the SUDS proposals for the scheme. The latter includes how they intend to ensure that rainwater soak away is maintained.</p> |

| LU3 From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Upton – SUDS | |
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| <p>Question</p> <p>Given the recent extensive flooding in Oxford, can the Cabinet Member work with colleagues to drive an improvement in runoff amelioration relating to property redevelopment (e.g. extensions and</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>There are already measures in place to achieve this.</p> <p>The Oxford Local Plan 2016-2036 already has a policy that requires new</p> |

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| <p>major alterations), for example by tightening future requirements that new or replacement hard surfaces must be to the SuDS standard?</p> | <p>development to manage surface water through SUDS systems and techniques to limit run-off and reduce the existing rate of run off from development. This is considered as part of our determination of planning applications.</p> <p>Householders can replace hard surfaces with permeable paving under permitted development rights. Householders wanting to replace hard surfaces exceeding a certain area with non-permeable paving would need to apply for planning permission.</p> |
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| <p>LU4 From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Upton – Contractor site access damage</p> | |
| <p>Question</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member discuss with the County Council how it might, as highways authority, put in place measures through its consideration of planning applications to ensure that where any work is carried out under City Council planning permission, that applicants are made liable for the repair of damage caused to pavements and/or adjacent roads?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>Where there will be permanent alternations or improvement works to the highway as part of a planning consent the applicant would be required to enter into a section 278 legal agreement with the County and as such the County would be able to approve and oversee any works and/ or damage.</p> <p>Where this is not the case and there is damage, e.g. erosion of verges or pavements etc. then the County would be the authority most likely to be able to enforce this.</p> <p>In most cases planning applications include conditions seeking construction traffic management plans, which include requirements for condition surveys of roads pre and post construction. The County Council highways team deal with such matters.</p> |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>I don't see anything in the written response to say that any discussion with County Councillors is proposed or indeed happened?</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>This is something that is absolutely infuriating as the case of where contractors have really damaged pavement and the road next to a building site. We've been battling the County to try and repair it. But I think you know our</i></p> |

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| | <i>legal powers are what they are. We can ask County to improve their enforcement of remediation work after building has occurred. There's not a lot more we can do. I will undertake to do that.</i> |
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| LU5 From Cllr Latif to Cllr Upton – ODS overtime costs 1 | |
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| Question The Budget Review Group were recently advised that the overtime costs to ODS had risen from £140,000 per annum to £168,000 per annum over the last year. Has this added cost to ODS, and subsequently the Council, been factored into the modelling around LTNs and the cost-benefit analysis? | Written Response This is the estimated additional cost incurred by ODS as a result of the LTN's which the Council has agreed to pay. I am not aware of whether these costs have been factored into the cost- benefit analysis of the LTN's which would be a matter for the County Council |

| LU6 From Cllr Latif to Cllr Upton – ODS overtimes costs 2 | |
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| Question Has the figure of £168,000 been shared with residents across Oxford to allow them to consider the full impact of LTNs on the City, and potential impact on Council services? | Written Response Author: Nigel Kennedy The figure has been calculated by ODS as an estimate of the additional cost of them carrying out their services for the Council. It is referred to in the Council's published budget papers which are currently out to public consultation. |

Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services

| NC1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Chapman – Data systems | |
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| Question What data system does the council use to aggregate and track all incoming complaints from residents to the council and direct them for resolution by the appropriate team (e.g. related to litter, fly tipping, noise nuisance, business | Written Response The Council currently uses Aareon QL to manage all Housing related complaints and will expand this to the rest of the council from 1 st April 2024. Complaints are captured by using a form which is |

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| regulation, environmental health etc.) | directed to the appropriate service for investigation. Prompts are made by the system when the actual response times are outside of those expected. The system provides management information including the analysis of trends to identify future improvements |
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| NC2 From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Chapman – Housing Management System | |
| <p>Question</p> <p>Given the revelations regarding deficiencies in the Post Office Horizon System and the supplier Fujitsu, can the Cabinet Member assure the Council that the system has been properly and independently audited in its use for financial transactions? Can he also confirm that the supplier has robust procedures in place to ensure that the Council is informed promptly of any and all software faults which could adversely affect its use of the system?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>There are controls in place to ensure the accuracy of data entered into the system by staff and this is supported by regular reconciliation of data being fed in via interfaces from other systems. With all systems, errors do from time to time occur, but these issues are raised in a timely manner and the project team work on these to fix, thereby ensuring that the accuracy of the output is maintained. When problems occur, which are more in respect of systems design, these are reported to the supplier by any one of its customers and are subsequently fixed in future systems updates and patches. System controls are from time to time subject to internal audit scrutiny with any recommendations on changes being reported back to management and Audit and Governance Committee for action. Whilst errors can never be entirely eradicated, the mitigations and controls that are in place should be sufficient to ensure that these are kept to a minimum.</p> |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>Given the well-known scandal surrounding the Post Office's Horizons system, I'm a little bit disappointed to see that the Council is relying on internal audit. Could I ask that the Cabinet Member considered having an external audit given the large amount of financial transactions that this system processes?</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>I think that's making a supposition that the internal audit will not do a good job and there's no reason to think that.</i></p> <p><i>I think that this is proportionate response. Of course, in regard to complicated housing management systems, you never rule out the issues of using external. Based on the answer here and the system controls in place, I don't see the case for it at the moment.</i></p> |

NC3 From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Chapman – ODS work on floods

Question

Does the portfolio holder agree that ODS did an excellent job in minimising the impact of the recent floods for both residents and businesses?

Written Response

Yes, I do. The ODS Flood teams did an amazing job during Storm Henk working around the clock to protect businesses and properties. As a result of working over the weekend and through the night, only four domestic properties in Oxford suffered flood damage. Whilst I feel for any person affected by flooding, given the risks, this is a very good result.

There was excellent co-operation with the Council and the Environment Agency. There are always lessons to learn to be even better next time and a review of how we responded is being undertaken.

But I am very proud of the response – a practical example of ODS “Doing Good” in action and of public service at its best.

NC4 From Cllr Pegg to Cllr Chapman – Driving to household waste recycling centre

Question

Following the removal of bring banks, how can residents recycle textile waste if they are not able to drive or cycle to a household waste recycling centre?

Written Response

ODS is in discussions with charities that operate seasonal/temporary bring banks for textile collection – and it is expected these arrangements will continue.

More generally, residents wanting to dispose of good quality and usable textiles are advised to consider the following options:

Charity shops (most charity shops are happy to take a range of textiles and household items, as long as they’re clean and in good condition)

- Online second hand vendors, i.e. Shpock, Vinted, Depop, ebay
- Oxford [Freegle](#) – the local online secondhand marketplace

For other textiles:

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of retailers take back items within store (e.g. H&M and Dunelm) • Charity shops such as the British Heart Foundation, Helen and Douglas, Age UK and OXFAM accept rags (unusable textiles) except bedding and curtains. But please double check by calling your local store before visiting them. <p>As a very last resort, textiles can be disposed of in your green refuse bins.</p> |
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| NC5 From Cllr Rehman to Cllr Chapman – ODS maintenance efficiencies | |
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| <p>Question</p> <p>When ODS are called out to a property for maintenance. What percentage do they have to return to within 4 weeks to carry out further works? Once called out do operatives carry out an inspection of the property? If not, would it be more efficient to do so, and any works required booked into routine works.</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 1st Jan 23 – 31st Dec 23 there were 29,523 responsive repair & heating breakdown orders raised. • Of these 23,840 were raised at first point of contact by OCC Contact Centre • On attendance the ODS operative will identify if any further works are required and will also ask the tenant if there are any further repairs they want to report. If further works are required, we raise the order through our mobile working IT solution and agree an appointment with the tenant before leaving the property - last year ODS raised 5,683 additional work orders. • Properties are not routinely inspected as part of the repairs appointment, but additional works are identified and appointed as detailed above. • However, as part of the ODS Damp and Mould strategy, our operatives have been trained to identify if there are any mould and damp issues in the property. This is also part of the script in our mobile working IT solution. If damp and mould is identified an electronic survey report is produced and sent directly to OCC. |

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| | <p>Last year we completed damp surveys to 855 properties where mould or damp had been identified. These are then reviewed by OCC who decide what action is required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orders raised by the OCC Contact Centre within 1 month of a previous order was 2,410 orders = 8.16%. These orders primarily relate to heating, plumbing and electrical repairs, which were not known at the point of the previous repair order visit. |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>Thanks for the responses. In your opinion, is ODS efficient?</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>Yes, I think they are efficient and when you look at the response from tenants in our Council houses and flat to the speed and quality of repairs, it's a very high figure. You've got to put that alongside the answer I gave before. It doesn't mean that everything is perfect but given the sheer scale and volume of repairs being done compared with the number of cases that are raised where people feel dissatisfied, it's a very tiny number in thousands of cases. It's not perfect but it's a very, very good result.</i></p> |

Cabinet Member for Culture and Events

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| <p>JH1 From Cllr Rehman to Cllr Hunt – South Park damage</p> | |
| <p>Question</p> <p>The damage to South Park caused by the firework display in November. When will the park be repaired and what is the estimated cost?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>The park will be repaired when the ground is firm enough. Given the scale of the damage, attempting to undertake the work while the ground is still waterlogged will make the situation worse and cause further compaction of the soil. The cost for rectification is currently being assessed together with the event organiser.</p> |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>As we got £3,150 for the event, just by looking at the amount of damage that</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>It's a very interesting question and a very important one that we've been discussing</i></p> |

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| <p><i>was caused is going to be above that figure. In essence, it's going to cost us more to have the events than we actually receive and given the amount of fireworks that were used and the amount of cars that were driving in, do you think its worth having this event with all the other stuff that we are trying to do with pollution, and the costs to residents?</i></p> | <p><i>in depth since the 4th of November. What I can tell you is that the officers have just actually put together their report, repairs are now being discussed and costed. Not only do we have a friend in South Park group, we have a Save Park group which has also come together and mobilised to ask these questions. We have to really now look at what we can do to repair the park and, going forward, what sort of fireworks we're going to enable to take place.</i></p> |
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| <p>JH2 From Cllr Rehman to Cllr Hunt – Cowley Road Carnival</p> | |
| <p>Question</p> <p>Can we have an update on the Cowley Road Carnival. After last year's late cancellation, it was promised the City would engage earlier and work more closely with organisers to ensure we have a carnival this year.</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>Council officers have been in regular contact with Cowley Road Carnival throughout the last year. The Carnival Committee have submitted a funding application to the Arts Council and expect to know the outcome in April 2024. Officers have supported the committee with grants advice and encouraged them to apply to the council's Oxford Community Impact Fund as well as other external funders. The council is also encouraging the Carnival Committee to contact local businesses</p> |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>Seems like where we are with the Carnival is the same as last year. Is there anything more we can do to get this to go ahead given everything else going on?</i></p> <p><i>To get joined up together would be really important instead of just diverting the organisers. Do you agree with me?</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>There's a new chair of the Cowley Carnival who have put in the application to the Arts Council is a huge plus which wasn't the case last year. If anyone knows of any organisations that like to support the Cowley Carnival that would be terrific because we're very keen for it to take place and a huge landmark event every summer.</i></p> |

Cabinet Member for Housing

LS1 From Cllr Goddard to Cllr Smith – Rented housing inspection

Question

What is the role of Metastreet in the City Council's rented housing inspection programme?

Written Response

Metastreet is the software system used to process applications and to record property inspections undertaken as part of the selective licensing scheme.

LS2 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Smith – Rats in rented accommodation

Question

What is the average time taken for complaint resolution when rubbish dumped in the gardens of HMO or rented properties are the source of local rat infestation?

Written Response

In the last 3 years there have been 149 complaints concerning rubbish from privately rented HMOs. On average service requests are open for 3 months for such types of complaint.

LS3 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Smith – Green Square Accord - maintenance issue

Question

How many complaints has the council received regarding Green Square Accord properties over the last 12 months, and on which broad categories of topics (e.g. mould/leaking roof)?

Written Response

Regulatory Services have received 6 complaints regarding GreenSquareAccord properties in the last 12 month and they have been about:

- Damp and Mould (2 properties)
- Pests (2 Properties)
- Disrepair
- Overcrowding

LS4 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Smith – Green Square Accord - communications quality

Question

How many times has Green Square Accord met with Council officers and/or councillors to resolve maintenance

Written Response

Officers from regulatory Services have met GreenSquareAccord 6 times in relation to 3 properties concerning

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| issues of their properties within the city over the last 12 months? | maintenance issues, in relation to the 3 other properties where complaints were received, the issues were resolved without the need to meet GreenSquareAccord. |
| Supplementary Question <i>Is the Council satisfied with the level of communication and responsiveness by GreenSquareAccord to residents when they have a complaint?</i> | Verbal Response Yes. |

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| LS5 From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Smith – Brownfield development grant application | |
| Question The DLUHC has announced further funding (£80 million) for converting Council owned brownfield land so that it can be used for housing. Is the City Council bidding for a share of this funding for any projects and if so where? | Written Response Author: Dave Scholes The Council successfully bid in the previous round for BLR funding for 5 small sites, and these are being progressed into delivery – with a report to Cabinet on 24 th January 2024. The Council has a project to consider approx 200 small garage and back-land sites that might be suitable for housing, but often have many constraints and delivery challenges. It is proposed to review the resourcing required to bring forward further sites, after this initial ‘pilot’ phase moves into delivery, and to only apply for further funding after further decisions on this. |

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| LS6 From Cllr Rawle to Cllr Smith – Landlord registry | |
| Question Can the portfolio holder explain why the rogue landlord registry is not made public? | Written Response Housing and Planning Act 2016 does not permit the Rogue Landlord Database to be in the public domain. In 2022, the government announced, following a consultation into widening the access to the database that they would “introduce a Property Portal to make sure tenants, landlord and local councils to have the |

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| | information they need”, there are no details as to when this will be introduced. |
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| LS7 From Cllr Rawle to Cllr Smith – Discrepancy in selective licence registration | |
| Question At present, fewer than 7,000 properties are registered with either a selective licence or an HMO licence. According to the City Council’s estimates prior to the selective licence scheme being introduced, there were 30,000 privately let properties in Oxford. Can the portfolio holder explain the discrepancy between these two figures and why many landlords appear not to be registered? | Written Response The estimated 30,000 privately rented properties includes properties which are exempt from licensing under the Housing Act, due to ownership/ management eg college owned student accommodation, we estimated 12,000 exemptions. Currently we have received 11,451 selective licence applications covering 12,796 properties/units. (due to block licences covering a number of flats) Within the HMO stock we have 3630 HMOs currently either licensed or in the process of being licensed. The remaining equates to 5% of the estimated number that are not licensed, however work to find unlicensed properties continues. Please note, the Housing Act 2004 and associated regulations require licences to be placed on the register only once the licence has been granted. |

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| LS8 From Cllr Rawle to Cllr Smith – Unregistered landlords | |
| Question Can the portfolio holder explain what steps are being taken to catch unregistered landlords and what the City Council would advise residents whose landlords are unregistered to do? | Written Response Work to identify unlicensed properties is on-going. We have received 285 reports of unlicensed properties in the last 12 months. All such reports are investigated and where appropriate formal action will be taken for properties operating without a licence. Proactive work is recommencing in the near future following training of officers in this area. Residents can report concerns about |

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| | <p>unlicensed properties via the website. Occupiers of unlicensed properties can also apply for a rent repayment order to reclaim rent paid from the landlord, whilst the property was unlicensed, details of this are on the website.</p> |
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| LS9 From Cllr Rawle to Cllr Smith – Section 21 notices | |
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| <p>Question</p> <p>Can unlicensed landlords issue section 21 notices to tenants?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>A section 21 notice to evict a tenant cannot be served where a valid licence application has not been made or a property licence has not been issued.</p> |

| LS10 From Cllr Djafari-Marbini to Cllr Smith – Kestrel Crescent garages | |
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| <p>Question</p> <p>It is very positive that innovative community led housing developments will be led at the Balfour Road and Pegasus Road site via the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust especially considering the very high cost of and need for housing. Officers inform us that there is also a review under way of all such small sites. There is a similar site at Kestrel Crescent. This is a derelict and mostly unoccupied or abandoned garages (around 15-20). Quite a few are boarded up and have graffiti on etc and residents have been enquiring the possibility of the use of this space for much needed car parking spaces. What are the plans for this site?</p> | <p>Written Response</p> <p>Author: Dave Scholes</p> <p>As referenced with regard to the question above (LS5), a small sites project is underway to assess approx 200 sites, many of which are very under-used. This project proposes to test the viability of each site for housing, but where that is deemed unviable, then alternative uses will be explored to try and bring these spaces into more worthwhile use again. That could include EV charging, and other possible uses, all of which can be explored on a site by site basis.</p> |
| <p>Supplementary Question</p> <p><i>Timeline would be helpful please.</i></p> | <p>Verbal Response</p> <p><i>No precise timeline. Survey work to approximately 200 small sites is taking place. We want that to be ready so that we're ready to learn from the work on small sites that we are progressing and able to take advantage of any future investment or funding opportunities. I don't have any timeline I can give the</i></p> |

councillor right now.

LS11 From Cllr Rehman to Cllr Smith – Community centres

Question

Given the investment made in community centres and Blackbird Leys and East Oxford currently not available to residents. Why are resources available not being utilised and operated to fully to fill some of the voids the closures have caused. Asian Cultural centre operating on limited hours with no elections for over 5 years. Littlemore Community Centre not producing accounts for 5 plus years. As Landlords what are we doing to ensure that centres are operating to the terms of very favourable lease agreements and ensuring residents are receiving value for money and social benefits?

Written Response

Staff resources from the temporarily closed community centre's at East Oxford and Blackbird Leys have been reallocated to cover vacancies at Rose Hill Community Centre and to also support the work to redevelop those sites.

Discussions with the Asian Cultural centre have been taking place over the past couple of months to support the association in increasing its usage. More recently this month the senior officer team have included the facility within the East Oxford locality walk around.

We meet with all of the Community Centre Associations on a monthly basis, to understand any issues, how the centres are performing and to look at opportunities to work better together. We will look to work with Community Associations where issues arise and have written to Littlemore Community Association regarding their accounts.