

To: Council
Date: 18 March 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 Sandelson to Cllr Brown – Elise Benjamin

Question

On the next refresh of the excellent new portraits in the council chamber, would the Leader consider featuring former Cllr Elise Benjamin, who became Lord Mayor in 2011 as the first Jewish person to do so, the first Green party representative, and at that time the youngest person to hold the post?

Written Response

Author:

We will be hoping to add to the portraits as we go forward and I'm very happy to receive suggestions from all groups for inclusion. I will take away an action to formalise a process for putting forward and agreeing future additions.

Criteria will need to be agreed, but the first Jewish mayor that I'm aware of (and she may not be the actual first) is Cllr

	Susanna Pressel who preceded former Cllr Elise Benjamin by several years and many lord mayors will have been the youngest to hold the post at some point!
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SB2 From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Brown – Scrutiny of communities and ODS savings

Question	Written Response
Considering the ambitious savings sought from both communities and ODS budgets from FY 25/26, will you commit to engaging scrutiny early and often; for example, bringing a paper to scrutiny at the options phase, rather than only once final recommendations have been developed?	Scrutiny engagement has been very positive in the Council’s budget process. We will ensure that scrutiny of the two reviews is similarly strong.

SB3 From Cllr R Smith to Cllr Brown – Fair trade

Question	Written Response
As a Fairtrade City, will the leader consider appointing a Fairtrade Champion?	Author: There have been fairtrade champions in the past and there may be in the future. The role of champions are appointed by the leader around the priorities of the council and areas which need focus. Oxford is a well-established Fairtrade City and we are proud to be so.

SB4 From Cllr Aziz to Cllr Brown – Divisive rhetoric over democratic protests

Question	Written Response
Will the council leader write to the Prime Minister to register this council's dismay at the framing of Palestine supporters and marchers as "extremists" and "Islamists" along with other smears designed to stoke up tensions and fear in Oxford's diverse communities.	Author: I’m happy to do so. I share Cllr Aziz’s distaste and concern over the way in which the current government seem determined to divide communities rather than bring people together. This is the opposite approach to the one that I have always advocated.

SB5 From Cllr Aziz to Cllr Brown – Mayor of Ramallah video address**Question**

Can the leader provide an update on when the Mayor of Ramallah will be addressing council through a video message.

Written Response

We have contacted the Mayor of Ramallah's office several times to invite the Mayor of Ramallah to address council through a video message (on 7th and 8th December 2023, 2nd January, 24th January and 8th March 2024). Apart from a video with a Christmas message, we have not received any further replies. We are all sensitive to the awful situation that they are having to deal with and have sent a message of support. We don't want to put any additional burdens on them by continuing to ask about the video.

As Cllr Aziz is aware, we have subsequently issued an alternative invitation.

Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management; Deputy Leader of the Council**ET1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Fly tipping fines****Question**

How many individuals has the Council prosecuted for refusing to pay a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) issued for fly-tipping?

Written Response

There were no prosecutions in 2022 or 2023 due to unpaid fixed penalty notices for fly-tipping – as all fines were paid.

ET2 From Cllr R Smith to Cllr Turner – Community Infrastructure Levies**Question**

Will the cabinet member for Finance please provide a total of Community Infrastructure Levy monies from developers held by the city council, and what is the interest accumulated over the last financial year?

Written Response

The balance as at the end of 22/23 was £13,044,828, with a further income this year of £3,937,000 this year – a total of £16,981,828.

Interest is not applied to balances.

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

CM1 From Cllr Snowton to Cllr Munkonge – Cycling in parks

Question

Do you agree with me that, generally speaking, people expect park pathways to be pedestrian-only, and that consequently cycleways through parkland should be explicitly designated? Will you work to amend the draft parks byelaws to accord with this?

Written Response: The proposed new byelaws are currently out for public consultation.

There is broadly balanced opinion around whether the general ban on cycling in parks should be lifted and it should not be assumed at this stage there is majority support in favour of this proposal. If there is, there would be very significant costs involved in creating designated cycle routes through the council’s many parks and it would be difficult to police without large numbers of staff.

However, there are also difficulties in policing the current ban.

There will be an opportunity to further consider this issue once the consultation is complete and the wider views of park users and other stakeholders have been established.

CM2 From Cllr R Smith to Cllr Munkonge – Quarry Pavilion 1

Question

1. Who was responsible for the decision to install a key code system for the Quarry Pavillion in the Margaret Road Rec and why were stakeholders, hirers of the building not consulted?
2. Is the member content that the key new system is environmentally friendly and was a safeguarding risk assessment undertaken on the new key code system for the Quarry Pavilion building?

Written Response

Quarry pavilion is an Oxford City Council asset, the Council delegate the management and maintenance to ODS.

The decision to implement the new locking system is part of the general operational management of the pavilion, along with a number of similar sites across the city. This was implemented to improve the effective management of safe access to these spaces and ensure that we have a robust system in place for

	<p>managing who is utilising these spaces and when.</p> <p>We are working to ensure that we maximise usage across all of our pavilions and the new system will allow our communities to clearly see what availability there is and avoid any conflict with other users, which might in itself be a safeguarding issue. As this is an operational matter on safer access and that there are no fundamental changes, public consultation was not sought on this occasion.</p> <p>However, our community users and sports clubs that are registered on our Pitchbooking system were sent an email correspondence to advise them of the changes, notifying hirers of the new method of securing the building.</p>
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<p>CM3 From Cllr R Smith to Cllr Munkonge – Quarry Pavilion 2</p>	
<p>Question</p> <p>Is the member content that the key new system is environmentally friendly and was a safeguarding risk assessment undertaken on the new key code system for the Quarry Pavilion building?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The new system is more environmentally friendly than the previous system. It saves on fuel/ emissions as the previous process meant hirers had to come to Cutteslowe park to collect keys in advance of their booking and then return the keys after use. In addition, it saves on travelling emissions and time of Streetscene staff at a weekend having to travel to pavilions to unlock the top lock prior to hirers use. The new system will also avoid the need for replacement keys.</p> <p>Safeguarding risk assessments are carried out across all of our sites as part of the ongoing management and operation of these spaces. The new system will provide a more robust management system to ensure that we know who is entering the pavilions and when, which may help to reduce the</p>

	<p>safeguarding risk in this area.</p> <p>Hirers of the pavilions need to undertake their own safeguarding risk assessments where children, young people and vulnerable adults are in their care as part of the conditions of their bookings and those of the relevant National Governing Bodies of Sport.</p>
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Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities

LU1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Upton – Westgate car parking charges	
<p>Question</p> <p>The Council meets with the Westgate annually to discuss car park usage and how the Westgate could better promote use of the Park & Rides. What was the result of the meeting that was due to take place on the topic at the end of January 2024?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>Author: Emma Gubbins</p> <p>The Council usually meets with the Westgate management team in Q4 annually to discuss the parking tariff, along with general asset management matters. This year the meeting is scheduled to take place in Q1 24/25 as the Westgate have already confirmed their intention to increase charging in April 24, in addition to the uplift in September 23. The Council will be seeking to understand whether a further increase is planned for September 24.</p>

LU2 From Cllr Snowton to Cllr Upton – E-scooters on off-road cycleways	
<p>Question</p> <p>In general, Voi e-scooters are permitted to be ridden wherever a pedal cycle may be ridden. However, the draft park byelaws would exclude them from marked cycleways in parks, introducing confusion for riders and suppressing use of a desirable mode of transport. Will you work to bring the byelaws back into line with the general principle that cycle and e-scooter access is harmonised?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>Author: The proposed new byelaws are currently out for public consultation. Provisional feedback suggests there is broadly divided opinion around the lifting of the general ban on cycling in parks, but strong support to ban E-scooters.</p> <p>The legalities around where they can be used is not straightforward and their use 'off road' is also a matter for the</p>

LU2 From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Upton – E-scooters on off-road cycleways	
	landowner. However, there will be an opportunity to further consider this issue once the consultation is complete and the wider views of park users and other stakeholders have been established.

LU3 From Cllr Jarvis to Cllr Upton – Interim local centres	
Question Is it possible to designate ‘interim local centres’ during the period of a local plan’s implementation for areas not designated as local or district centres in the plan. If so, has the city council ever done so previously?	Written Response No, this is not possible. There is no mechanism for designating local centres outside of the Local Plan process. Local Centres have been identified in several previous local plans. In drafting the Local Plan 2040, we considered whether any additional ones should be added. We were alert to the NPPF definition of a local centre being clear that it can’t just include a parade of shops that serve only the immediate area. Also important to this consideration was the policy approach that applies to local centres (and district centres and the city centre), which is that there should be an area of active frontage notable in the street and that should be protected as an area of activity. We also looked at maps of access to facilities and services and considered where this was lacking. These considerations led us to add Underhill Circus to the list of local centres, other sites were examined, but were considered to be stretching the definition too far.

LU4 From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Upton – Grandpont Nature Reserve	
Question Is the cabinet member concerned that in beginning to fell trees on Grandpont Nature Reserve, before having planning permission or a Forestry Commission	Written Response The Council was clear in all the press releases and correspondence with local people that the removal of trees did not

Licence in place, the council risks being accused of predetermining the outcome of the planning committee meeting regarding the planning application for the new bridge?	predetermine the outcome of the planning application for the bridge and, that if planning permission was not forthcoming that replacement tree planting would still be undertaken.
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LU5 From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Upton – Felling trees on Grandpont Nature Reserve 1	
Question When did the cabinet member become aware that the council was going to begin felling trees on Grandpont Nature Reserve in preparation for the building of the new bridge?	Written Response Key cabinet members were briefed on the issues and suggested approach by officers between 14 th February and 19 th February 2024.

LU6 From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Upton – Felling trees on Grandpont Nature Reserve 2	
Question Why did the council begin to fell trees on Grandpont Nature Reserve when they did not have planning permission for the new bridge or a Forestry Commission Licence?	Written Response The programme for the delivery of the proposed bridge is dictated by the requirement to spend grant funding by March 2025. To meet this deadline construction will need to start over the summer. To remove the risk of birds nesting which would delay the construction and jeopardise the entire project, it was decided to remove and pollard the trees before the bird nesting season began. The Council’s technical advisors did not consider the works required a license. The trees removed did not require planning permission or a felling license. When advised a license may be necessary for further felling, work stopped.

LU7 From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Upton – Felling trees on Grandpont Nature Reserve 3

<p>Question</p> <p>Can the cabinet member confirm that council will not fell any more trees on Grandpont Nature Reserve, in preparation for the new bridge, until it has been given a licence to do so by the Forestry Commission?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The Council will not fell any more trees until either there is a felling license, or the works are confirmed as exempt from needing a license.</p>
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<p>LU8 From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Upton – Felling trees on Grandpont Nature Reserve 4</p>	
<p>Question</p> <p>Is the cabinet member grateful to the residents who prevented the council felling over 5 cubic metres of trees on Grandpont Nature Reserve, which, without a licence or planning permission in place, would have been an illegal act?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>Officers and members rely on the advice of technical specialists. The appointed technical specialists did not advise the works required a license. When the Forestry Commission informally advised they believed further felling may require a license, no further work was undertaken. It has been confirmed that a felling license was not required for the trees that have been removed. The Council has therefore not undertaken illegal works. The council always seeks to be transparent about the work it undertakes, which is why we publicised that this work would be taking place, and listens to the input of others, which it has in this case.</p> <p>Author: Jenny Barker Susan: amend</p>

<p>LU9 From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Upton – Grandpont Meadow/Oxpens bridge 1</p>	
<p>Question</p> <p>What is the full cost of the proposed new bridge from Grandpont Meadow to Oxpens, and how is it being funded?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The full cost of providing the proposed Oxpens River Bridge will not be known until the design work is complete later this year. The bridge will need to be delivered within the grant funding that has been achieved.</p> <p>Funding of £8.6m from the Oxfordshire Growth Deal is being held for the proposed bridge. Funding of £1.7m has been identified through the Housing</p>

	Infrastructure Grant from Homes England for path works connected to the proposed bridge.
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LU10 From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Upton – Grandpont Meadow/Oxpens bridge 2	
Question	Written Response
Can the cabinet member give details of what arrangements are in place with the County Council, should the Oxpens Bridge project look at risk not being completed in time and is he satisfied that the County Council has the resources to meet these commitments?	City and County Council officers are working closely on the planning, design and delivery of the proposed bridge. The current programme shows the bridge being delivered by March 2025 and this is being carefully monitored. The bridge will be adopted by the County Council once complete. The County Council has retained £200k Growth Deal funding for their work on the proposed bridge.

LU11 From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Upton – Grandpont Meadow/Oxpens bridge 3	
Question	Written Response
Given that the council has declared a climate emergency and that it is widely agreed that it is generally much greener to refurbish/improve existing infrastructure rather than to build new, did the council seriously consider improving the existing bridge across the Thames, particularly the landing on North bank, before committing to the proposed new bridge from Grandpont Meadow to Oxpens?	<p>The bridge is a dedicated cycling and walking bridge, which is fully aligned with the Council’s support for increased active travel in response to the climate emergency. The bridge is also required by our adopted Local Plan 2036 to connect future development on Osney Mead with the Oxpens site and the city centre. It is a County Council scheme that is being delivered by the City Council with Oxfordshire Growth Deal Funding.</p> <p>A study was undertaken on behalf of the County Council by Skanska to explore the potential to undertake improvements to the Gas Works rail bridge to enable it to be designated as a cycle route. The study identified that considerable work would be necessary to the bridge, access on the northside, the bridge over Castlemill Stream and the meadows to accommodate cycling. It would also be a longer route than the proposed bridge alignment and not as accessible during times of flooding. This study was completed prior to the proposed new</p>

	bridge being taken forward and contributed to the decision for a new bridge.
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LU12 From Cllr Pegg to Cllr Upton – Meadow Lane planning application	
Question	Written Response
<p>Can the Cabinet member confirm the arrangements in place to ensure a strategic approach is taken by officers in considering and bringing forward for decision the planning application(s) concerning Meadow Lane, particularly with regards to the riverside land between Fairacres Road and Donnington Bridge?</p>	<p>The Oxford Local Plan sets the vision and strategy for all development within Oxford City. Where sites are allocated in the Local Plan, the relevant site-specific policies provide a strategic overview regarding their delivery and set clear expectations as to what development will be supported. Land at Meadow Lane is currently allocated for residential development within the Local Plan 2036 (SP42) and within the emerging Local Plan 2040 (SPS13). It is the only allocated site in the Meadow Lane area and is located to the south of Fairacres Road and Donnington Bridge. The allocation at Meadow Lane sets out the need for specific consideration about open space, nature and flood risk, heritage and movement and access (amongst other factors).</p> <p>Sites which come forward outside of the site allocations are considered on their own merits and are expected to comply with the broad range of policies that comprise the Local Plan. Where relevant, and possible, officers will encourage comprehensive developments that consider neighbouring sites and landowners. For all developments, consultation with statutory and non-statutory consultees is undertaken to inform the decision-making process. Likewise, engagement with internal and external stakeholders will also be carried out by officers throughout the pre-application and application process.</p>

NC1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Chapman – Fines for littering**Question**

What is the total income of fines given out for littering in Oxford over the last 12 months?

Written Response

Between 1 March 2023 and 14 March 2024, there were fixed penalty notice fines of £675 issued for littering.

NC2 From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Chapman – Housing Management System Update**Question**

Will you please update Council concerning the ongoing remediation of the issues affecting the Housing Management System that led to its late and problematic introduction?

Written Response

The Council's Housing & Asset Management system and its associated mobile working solution will have been live for three years this coming May. The remediation has taken place successfully and it is fully operational across the many Council and ODS services, including Incomes, Tenancy Management, ASBIT & CRT, Tenancy Sustainment, Temporary Accommodation, Housing Needs, the Contact Centre, Property Services for planned maintenance and in ODS, Building Services (repairs), H&S compliance, Voids, StreetScene, Pest Control and Parks. The members briefing of 9th February highlighted the many technological benefits that are operational within ODS.

NC3 From Cllr Pegg to Cllr Chapman – Cricket Road trees**Question**

Can the cabinet member provide an update on the replacement of trees on Cricket Road, following the death of trees planted there last year?

Written Response

All of the replacement trees have been planted on Cricket Road. The ODS tree team has advised that the reason for the failure of some of the trees, was that with the limited lead time for the planting in Winter 22/23 for the Queen's Green Canopy, the usual supplier was not available, which impacted on quality. The new trees will be closely maintained over a three-year period.

Cabinet Member for Safer Communities

ML1 From Cllr Aziz to Cllr Lygo – Islamophobic hate crime and antisemitism	
<p>Question</p> <p>Following Tell Mama's report on Islamophobic hate crime showing a 235% rise in reported Islamophobic hate-crime since October 8th 2023, with the vast majority of cases impacting Muslim women, what work is being done by the cabinet member and stakeholders to ensure Oxford's diverse Muslim communities know that they are supported and are encouraged to report Islamophobic hate crime, including misogynist hate.</p> <p>What work is being done to support members of the Jewish community over a big national rise in antisemitic hate-crime?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The Council and Oxford Local Police Area work closely with the Oxford Council of Faiths to celebrate the strong friendships between our communities in Oxford. The police Independent Advisory Group, Community and Diversity Officer and our Locality Managers work with community representatives of all faiths to encourage reporting of hate crime.</p>

ML2 From Cllr Aziz to Cllr Lygo – Make knife crime a public health issue	
<p>Question</p> <p>What work is being done by the cabinet member for safer communities and stakeholders across the city to tackle knife crime in the city? Oxford has seen another spate of stabbings over the past few weeks. Will the cabinet member support Cllr Jabu Nala Hartley's call to re-frame knife crime through a public health lens to better support young people - especially with their mental health?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The Oxford Community Safety Partnership brings together the police, councils, and other local partners to tackle serious violence and knife crime. The Oxfordshire Violence and Vulnerability Strategy illustrates this partnership approach and can be found on the Oxfordshire County Council website. The strategy uses a public health approach, working with youth organisations across the city including our Youth Ambition Team, to support young people and provide them with positive activities.</p>

Cabinet Member for Culture and Events

JH1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Hunt – Museum entry fee for non-residents

Question

What is the Cabinet's position on charging non-residents a small entrance fee for entry to the museum at the town hall?

Written Response

The museum is currently operating a 'Pay What You Can' model, encouraging users do donate what they can afford, including a recommended donation.

The museum management team are currently reviewing options around charging non-residents and the impact this will have on footfall, income and fundraising outcomes. These options will be available for consideration in Q1 of 24/25.

JH2 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Hunt – Revocation of pavement terraces permissions

Question

Would it possible to revoke pavement licences for cafe's where pavement parking by customers next to the cafe is a problem, and difficult to enforce? If so, what evidence would be needed to take this course of action?

Written Response

Parking enforcement matters on the highway including pavements are enforced by Parking Enforcement, Oxfordshire County Council Highways Department using the Traffic Management Act 2004 . When there is a substantiated complaint in relation to a public safety issue concerning a pavement licence and the suitability of the space, due process outlined in the Business and Planning Act 2020 and levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023 would be applied.