

To: Council
Date: 14 July 2025
Report of: Director of Law, Governance and Strategy
Title of Report: Questions on Notice from members of Council and responses from the Cabinet Members and Leader

Introduction

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.

Responses are included where available.

Questioners can ask one supplementary question of the Cllr answering the original question.

This report will be republished after the Council meeting to include supplementary questions and responses as part of the minutes pack.

Unfamiliar terms may be briefly explained in footnotes.

Questions and responses

Cabinet Member for Partnership Working and Inclusive Economic Growth; Leader of the Council

SB1: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Brown

Question

Oxford is home to a large number of trans, queer and non-binary people who will be understandably anxious after the judgment of the UK Supreme Court in For Women Scotland. Can the portfolio member please confirm that Oxford City Council remains fully committed to providing trans and non-binary people with public services and amenities that are appropriate to their chosen gender and which ensure that trans and non-binary people in our city are in all cases treated with dignity and respect?

Written Response

The Council remains fully committed to providing services to everyone, respecting trans and non-binary people in line with their chosen gender. We must treat all our citizens with dignity and respect. We will need to deliver services in line with the law and are awaiting the EHRC formal guidance on this matter to be agreed and published. However, we do not anticipate the change to the legal definition of sex under the Equality Act to change our commitment to inclusion for all groups.

SB2: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Brown

Question

I was pleased to see the announcement of proposals for a Greater Oxford Unitary authority. However, many residents may be concerned about the expansion of the city region into the Green Belt. Will the leader take this opportunity to put on record the commitment of City Council and the broader proposal to protecting green spaces and ensuring sustainability?

Written Response

Firstly, it is important to say that green spaces and Green Belt are not synonymous, some areas of Green Belt are very much not green and have already been developed, often in a poorly planned way.

Our commitment is clear; a Greater Oxford would deliver the homes this city and its citizens need, and we would do this as close to the city as possible, rather than dispersed across the whole county, which forces more

commuting and car-dependency. Inevitably, to do this we will need to carefully release areas of Green Belt.

It would be wrong to speculate where these areas might be at this point, but we would ensure that there is a robust evidence-base and rigorous public consultation before any release could go ahead. It will be a priority to ensure sites have excellent links into the city through sustainable transport modes.

Critically we will ensure that new developments provide high levels of accessible green space on site as well as making significant contributions to creating new (and improving existing) access to green spaces, such as country parks.

ET1: From Cllr Smowton to Turner

Question

In February Council accepted the Labour budget amendment that substantially integrated Lib Dem proposals as follows (considering year 1 only)--

1. Add a homelessness prevention officer
2. Add a planning enforcement officer
3. Introduce a fund supporting pavement and other walkability works
4. Development of a city centre play space
5. Development of smart parking charges (e.g., weight or emission dependent)

Could you please update Council as to how these have progressed to date?

Written Response

1) The Homelessness Prevention Officer has now been recruited. They are working in the Early Intervention section of the Homelessness Prevention team, working with clients to sustain accommodation and to help people to move ahead of eviction to avoid homelessness.

2) The additional planning enforcement officer is being recruited to, with the application window recently closed and interviews pending.

3) ODS are identifying locations where previous requests have been made for provision of works to aid accessibility for pedestrians with restricted mobility and wheelchair users which it has not been possible to address due to the lack of budget. Once this information is available the works will be prioritised for use of the budget available in 2025/6 and budget identified for the following year.

4) The concept of a city centre playground is being piloted through a series of pop-up children's events throughout summer 2025. City and County officers meet weekly to assess the success of these pop-ups and gather key insights. Following the conclusion of the events, a comprehensive review will be conducted to evaluate potential sites for permanent play spaces within the city.

5) A wider piece of advice has been commissioned initially on the car park portfolio to ensure the service offers value for money. A review of parking charges will form part of this but it is likely that work will commence on the parking charges specifically next calendar year.

ET2: From Cllr Miles to Turner**Question**

The Oxford mail reported that £10,932,486.09 is owed back to residents who have or continue to pay council tax to the city. How is this data broken down by year?

Written Response

COUNCIL TAX	
Year	31/05/2025
2007	£11,618.72
2008	£14,302.27
2009	£25,985.24
2010	£30,970.99
2011	£43,450.07
2012	£72,409.11
2013	£81,589.95
2014	£112,334.07
2015	£142,956.94
2016	£148,320.58
2017	£213,939.78
2018	£293,845.59
2019	£381,444.19
2020	£521,908.69
2021	£980,335.85
2022	£1,461,891.96
2023	£2,162,932.43
2024	£4,232,249.66
£10,932,486.09	

ET3: From Cllr Miles to Turner**Question****Written Response**

<p>Is this council willing to waiver or reduce the fee for regular street closures for children's playing out sessions in the city?</p>	<p>Oxford City Council supports the Oxford Civic Society's Street for People Initiative that encourages local people to use their street to play in and interact with neighbours. The Council's road closure fee for street parties is £19, covering the administrative process and statutory consultation. This fee is currently applied to street closures for children's playing out sessions, which are often an element of community-led street parties. If a ward member feels this fee cannot be afforded, it might be a good use for ward member funds.</p>
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ET4: From Cllr Miles to Turner

Question

What has been the annual budget and team size for the environmental health team at the city council over the last 5 years broken down by year?

Written Response

Cost centre	Gross		Net		Gross		Net		Gross		Net		Gross		Net		Gross		Net		Budgeted	Budgeted
	Spend		Spend		Spend		Spend		Spend		Spend		Spend		Spend		Spend		Spend		Gross	Net
	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's
	2021-22		2022-23		2023-24		2024-25		2025-26													
Business Regulation	511	261	443	249	483	278	486	272	557	314												
Private sector safety	324	311	122	75	107	65	126	129	143	142												
HMO Enforcement	363	394	382	344	372	325	443	387	426	389												
HMO Licencing	219	-598	193	-571	191	-609	231	-473	195	-577												
TOTAL	1,417	368	1,140	97	1,153	59	1,286	315	1,321	268												

FTEs in Cost centre	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
ED16 Business Regualtions	10.7	9.5	9.7	10.1	10.1
ED17 Private Sector Safety	9.0	9.8	3.0	3.0	4.0
ED18 HMO Enforcement	8.4	8.6	8.5	8.5	7.8
ED22 HMO Licensing	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0
TOTAL	34.1	33.9	27.2	27.6	27.9

ET5: From Cllr R Smith to Turner

Question

We note that the City council plans to increase its CIL on labs and office space, and while this is not yet agreed, would request that some funds are earmarked for a city centre playground or playgrounds given that these jobs are likely to attract working families

Written Response

Should the increase in the CIL schedule be agreed at Council, then the new rate will apply to schemes determined after August 15th. The additional income from the levy increase will take a few years to be filter through to increased income. After that, it will be for full council to take decisions on spend, not me as portfolio holder, and of course there are likely to be many competing priorities, including this (excellent) suggestion.

ET6: From Cllr Fouweather to Turner**Question**

Can the Cabinet Member give a current financial statement on the amounts held by the Council resulting from S106 and CIL agreements with developers? Specifically, the amounts held and allocated to specific projects in this financial year, held and allocated for specific projects in future financial years and held but currently unallocated to any projects?

Written Response

This information is usually published as part of our annual Infrastructure Funding Statement which comes to Cabinet and Council around December each year. However, I have asked officers to give a high-level summary now in order to answer this question, with detail to follow in the IFS.

£13,975,756 of S106 contributions are currently held and are to be used towards the following:

Affordable Housing	£12,166,478
Community Facilities and Health	£403,000
Environmental/Economic	£267,611
Transport	£227,036
Open space/Leisure	£867,678
Other	£43,953

As S106 requests must be project specific there are no unallocated amounts.

The CIL balance at the end of 24/25 was £11,961,367 the allocations for which are:

Strategic Capital Programme Projects £8,381,983

Oxford North transport improvements £2,227,803

Neighbourhood CIL portion £1,138,024

This leaves £244,147 currently unallocated, although there are a number of capital projects currently under consideration.

AR1: From Cllr Miles to Cllr Railton**Question**

We congratulate the City council on the success of the pop up play space scheme. Could the member please clarify how this moves the scheme forward to a permanent solution and what the ETA might be?

Written Response

By the end of the summer 2025, the pop ups will have completed. A review will then take place, to consider locations of permanent play spaces in the city. Additionally, the City Centre Manager will encourage developers to also consider the public realm outside spaces that they have under development.

AR2: From Cllr Kerr to Cllr Railton**Question**

I congratulate the City council on the success of the pop up play space scheme and its collaboration with the county council to achieve this, but could the portfolio holder please detail the collaboration ongoing with the county to find a more permanent location for the playground?

Written Response

City and County meet once a week to review the success of the pop ups and identify key learnings. At the end of the pop ups a review will take place, to consider locations of permanent play spaces in the city. Additionally, the City Centre Manager will encourage developers to also consider the public realm outside spaces that they have under development.

AR3: From Cllr Kerr to Cllr Railton**Question**

□□ In the most recent budget, the city council allocated funds to develop the idea of a city centre playground. Could the cabinet member please detail the progress of that spend to date or the plan to spend it with a view to accelerating the project?

Written Response

The concept of a city centre playground is being piloted through a series of pop-up children's events throughout summer 2025. City and County officers meet weekly to assess the success of these pop-ups and gather key insights. Following the conclusion of the events, a comprehensive review will be conducted to evaluate potential sites for permanent play spaces within the city.

At this stage, the allocated funds remain unused. After the review, careful consideration will be given to the best way to utilise the funding - whether to build a new playground, commission consultants to identify the optimal locations, or invest in upgrading an existing area.

Cabinet Member for a Safer Oxford**LA1: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Arshad****Question**

I, like many other residents, was shocked at the high speed crash in Morrell Avenue in late May. This collision arises from a long history of dangerous speeding in the Avenue. Does the portfolio holder agree with me that Oxfordshire County Council and Thames Valley police need to urgently work together to ensure a speed camera is added to the avenue?

Written Response

Thank for you raising this issue. I too am shocked at the speeds some vehicles travel at in the city. I would also like to commend the work of the local resident's Speedwatch group in addressing speeding in this area. I will be contacting the police to ask for their assessment of speeding in the Morrell Avenue area and the suitability of a speed camera in the location.

Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies

NC1: From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Chapman

Question

Can the Cabinet Member explain how many temporary or agency staff are currently employed by the Council? Can he also provide the same information for consultants currently working for the Council on a contract basis either on a fixed term or extendable basis?

Written Response

Current records at 3 July show that the Council has 53 temporary agency staff and 2 consultants out of approximately 850 staff overall. Temporary Agency staff are used where we need to cover vacancies that are difficult to fill or to support with surges in demand. Currently, the largest proportion of roles being covered are specialists in Property, Law and Information Technology. These are fields where we have struggled to recruit for a long time. In addition, there are roles in Housing with short-term funding, niche roles such as in Ecology and temporary Project Manager roles.

NC2: From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Chapman

Question

Can the portfolio holder outline the council's policy on glyphosate use on residential streets and pavements and how many incidences of its use there have been in the last 12 months?

Written Response

The Council has a clear policy on the use of glyphosate-based weedkillers, which was agreed after a thorough review in the autumn of 2023.

The review, which looked at other Council practices, medical evidence, and the state of regulation for glyphosate products, found that deploying these weedkillers was by far the most efficient and cost effective of tackling the City's weeds on hard surfaces like roads, pavements, and tennis courts, and of combatting Japanese Knotweed and other pernicious shrubs.

ODS uses well trained and experienced contractors, and the application is by "targeted droplets" rather than mass spraying. The public are warned if glyphosate weedkillers are being used in an area. Treatments are not applied when conditions are windy.

	<p>The products continue to be licenced for use in the EU, the USA and here in the UK.</p> <p>Weed treatments are typically carried out three times per year. The first round will usually begin in March, the second treatment in June, and the final round being conducted towards the end of August. There may be a slight variance in treatment times depending on weather conditions.</p> <p>In the last 12 months we undertook treatments in April 24, August 24, and April 25. We have just finalised the second round of treatments in July and the final round will be undertaken by September 25.</p> <p>We have promised to look again at our use of these weedkillers if new evidence emerges to challenge the findings of our last review.</p>
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NC3: From Cllr Robinson to Cllr Chapman	
<p>Question</p> <p>Can the portfolio holder outline how road cleaners currently manage kerbside cleaning around parked cars on streets, given how parked cars can inhibit the cleaning process? Are there steps that can be taken to improve this?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>ODS have no legal powers to enforce parking restrictions so our sweepers work around parked vehicles as they can. This is apart from areas targeted for deep cleaning, where it was agreed that ODS would trial signs and advance notices on lamp posts to advise residents in good time of upcoming work.</p>

AH1: From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Hollingsworth

Question

The Museum of Oxford trustees have expressed concern that the latest City Council budget has left them facing unrealistic revenue and/or cost-cutting targets for this year. Will you work with them to (a) provide whatever support the council is able to help them improve their financial position, or (b) if necessary put the case for an in-year budget bid to ensure they are able to sustain their valuable cultural offer?

Written Response

The Museum of Oxford is a service run by Oxford City Council, not by a separate organisation. This has been the case since the late 1990s when the City Council took over running the museum from the Oxfordshire County Museums Service.

As with all Council run museums in the UK, financial pressures mean that the service needs to both be offering a service to local people and covering at least some of its costs from visitors and from donors. That responsibility falls on Oxford City Council, as the organisation that both hosts and runs the Museum.

The Museum of Oxford Development Trust is a charitable organisation whose aim as set out on the Charity Commission record is to "raise funds for the development and continued support of the Museum of Oxford"; in other words, not to run the Museum itself. It has raised money from various funding bodies, and makes contributions in line with its charitable objectives to the Museum of Oxford.

The Charity Commission data for the Museum of Oxford Development Trust's most recent financial report for the year ending 31 July 2024 has a total income of £106,546 and total expenditure of £21,010.

AH2: From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Hollingsworth**Question**

In addition to the Local Plan's ordinary Call for Sites process which primarily targets medium-to-large sites, does or will the council proactively engage with SME developers that could bring forward small (less than 10 unit) sites in order to encourage such sites' contribution to our housing need?

Written Response

The Call for Sites process looks for all development opportunities; as the Call for Sites documentation says, "there is no minimum (or maximum) size of site" being called for.

The Housing Land Availability Assessment and then the Local Plan processes assess and then allocate specific larger housing sites of 10 or more homes. They also encourage housing to come forward on smaller sites and the Local Plan has a suite of policies to encourage this. Officers take care to promote the Local Plan and the Call for Sites extensively and have a range of virtual and in person drop-in sessions open to all landowners and developers.

AH3: From Cllr Gant to Cllr Hollingsworth**Question**

Could Cllr Hollingsworth update council on progress of the feasibility study into a possible Business Improvement District for Oxford? BIDs are a well-established tool for managing and improving urban centres in partnership with local stakeholders, and have been successfully in operation in many historic towns for many years, including elsewhere in Oxfordshire. The idea was first considered by this council as far back as 2008, and the current administration agreed to start work on a feasibility study almost a year ago, on 23 July 2024. What progress has been made, and when can we expect a decision and potential action to flow from that process?

Written Response

The question conflates two slightly separate things. A Business Improvement District (BID) is something which covers all businesses in a designated area. The project that began in 2024 which was to support work by the accommodation businesses and providers on a possible Accommodation Business Improvement District (ABID), which covers all businesses of a specific type in a designated area. Similar names, but different things. What they do have in common is that the decision to create one or not does NOT sit with the City Council, but the businesses and organisations that would be impacted by it.

Since last summer Oxford City Council has been working closely with accommodation providers such as hotels and colleges to assess the

	<p>impact of tourism and explore potential funding through an Accommodation Business Improvement District.</p> <p>An initial feasibility study, along with an independent report by The Mosaic Partnership, was completed in December 2024. The findings indicated a tentative interest in establishing an ABID, though several significant concerns were raised by visitor accommodation providers. Since then, efforts have focused on addressing these concerns, with a strong emphasis on building trust and fostering relationships with accommodation providers.</p> <p>Given the extensive challenges that the hospitality sector has been facing in 2025, without this groundwork there would be a risk of any ballot being held rejecting the idea of an ABID. This scenario is not unique and many other towns and cities have faced similar challenges and have extended the process to allow for thorough stakeholder engagement.</p> <p>The Council is now advancing to the next phase of the project with support from a consultant. Separate Task Groups for hotels and colleges will be established to evaluate the impact of tourism and identify potential projects. These groups will also explore funding options and determine whether an ABID ballot is likely to be successful.</p> <p>Funding for officer time and the consultant has been allocated through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF).</p> <p>It is important to understand that the Council will have no direct influence over whether any options are pursued; the final decisions, including how any funds raised are allocated, rest entirely with the levy payers.</p>
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<p>Question</p> <p>Last December the Jericho Wharf Trust made a request to the Council for Compulsory Purchase action on a site that has now been derelict for 20 years. The Hong Kong landowner's latest proposals are to sell the land for development of up to 230 student flats, without delivering any of the established planning policies for the site which specify a new community centre and repair boatyard facilities as well as housing and affordable housing. What is the Council's latest position on Jericho Wharf?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The City Council's planning policy for this site is set out in the Local Plan 2036, and has not changed. Any application received has to be determined on its merits by the City Council as the Local Planning Authority through the planning process, as set out in legislation.</p>
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AH5: From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Hollingsworth	
<p>Question</p> <p>Surveys have consistently identified around 400 local boats which should be taken out of the water every 4 years for inspection and essential maintenance of their hulls.</p> <p>This is essential maintenance to keep boats safe and in a good state of repair. However, there is currently nowhere to do this in Oxford. Will the Council support local boaters by using their compulsory purchase powers to buy Jericho Wharf where space could be provided for essential boat repair facilities?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The Council has been working with the Jericho Wharf Trust for many years to bring forward the Jericho Wharf site, and I share their frustration that the site has not yet been developed for the long overdue community facilities needed.</p> <p>While the City Council will remain open to using CPO powers to ensure development of the site it is important to understand that the process is inherently risky and very expensive. Initiating a CPO that fails to succeed will use up substantial amounts of public money as abortive costs to the Council, taking funds away from other much needed schemes and making no difference to this site.</p> <p>If the landowner comes forward with another planning application now and secures permission, then the clear legal advice received by the Council is that a CPO would be highly unlikely to succeed.</p> <p>Therefore, the Council's position is that we need to understand very clearly the current position of the landowner. To this end the City Council is</p>

facilitating a meeting between the landowner and the Jericho Wharf Trust later this summer.

After this meeting the Council will continue to review its position and act accordingly.

AH6: From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Hollingsworth

Question

Will the Council use its powers to compulsory purchase Jericho Wharf and if so, how long would the process take?

Written Response

The process for a CPO would likely take a number of years. It is notoriously hard to predict timeframes and will be dependent on a wide range of external factors. Timing will not be in the control of the City Council as the applicant.

Cabinet Member for a Healthy, Fairer Oxford and Small Business Champion

CM1: From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Munkonge

Question

Headington area schools complain of needing to transport children back and forth to leisure centres across the city when Barton Leisure Centre would be a manageable walk. In order to save time, money and transport emissions, will you do your utmost to ensure slots are made available for all schools to use their nearest centre?

Written Response

Children being able to swim 25 metres before they leave primary school is a key priority for Oxford City Council. The importance of this priority is also supported by More Leisure the Council's leisure operator.

More Leisure have confirmed that there are several schools within the Headington area that are using Barton Leisure Centre and don't seem to have a record of any unsuccessful approach. If there are schools from the local area who are interested please do get in touch with Christopher.hawkes@serco.com or alternatively speak to James Baughan or Hagan Lewisman who are the relevant Council officers.

In tandem with this More Leisure will pro-actively reach out to local schools in each leisure centre local area.

CM2: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Munkonge

Question

Will the portfolio holder undertake to work with the leisure provider to ensure that the trans and non-binary residents of and visitors to our city continue to be treated with dignity in the provision of leisure services within Oxford City, following the judgment of the UK Supreme Court in For Women Scotland and the associated EHRC draft Code of Practice, which has understandably generated significant anxieties?

Written Response

Yes we are committed to working with the leisure provider to ensure that all visitors to our leisure centres are treated with dignity and respect. The leisure industries UK Active organisation is due to provide some guidance in this area shortly.

Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities

LS1: From Cllr Robinson to Cllr Smith

Question

What reassurances can the portfolio holder give to residents that social housing enquiries are working effectively, given the death in Plowman Towers in April which was not discovered for over a month, even after neighbours had repeatedly reported the smell? Can the portfolio holder reassure residents that the housing tenancy portals and communications are working as intended?

Written Response

The Council's Contact Centre received four calls from two residents in late March complaining that there was a smell near the bin chute area. Blocked bin chutes are not an uncommon occurrence. An order was raised to clear the bin chutes and one of the residents confirmed that the smell had dissipated. A visit to a neighbouring property the following week presented no smell in the area. I am satisfied that the enquiries made were properly recorded and followed up with actions by officers. It is not believed that the smell present in late March were connected with the death of the tenant. Some three weeks later, on 22nd April, an ODS Operative was concerned about another smell and promptly called Thames Valley Police who forced entry.

Chair of the Planning Committee – Oxford City Planning Committee

MC1: From Cllr Rawle to Cllr Clarkson

Question

Could you provide clarity on why proposals for Meadow Lane Car Park have not yet been brought to Planning Committee, particularly when the call-in was requested in March 2024 and could you outline when proposals for Meadow Lane Car Park will be brought to Planning Committee?

Written Response

Officers have been working with the applicant to resolve outstanding objections from the Local Highways Authority in relation to the application. It would appear that this is close to being resolved, and as such officers are looking to take this to committee in either August or September.

Chair of the Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee

KM1: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Miles

Question

During the meeting of the Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee on 21 May 2025, the committee elected not to pass a Special Saturation Policy. Instead pausing the special saturation policy pending more evidence. As a councillor representing Cowley Road, this is a matter of real concern. Can the chair please outline what actions are open to councillors to have an interim policy in place while further work is carried out?

Written Response

There is currently no legal provision for implementing an 'interim' Special Saturation Policy under the Licensing Act 2003, just as there was no provision to 'pause' the policy whilst more discussions could occur. At the meeting on 21 May 2025, the Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee resolved not to adopt the proposed policy. Instead, the committee requested that officers bring forward a revised recommendation in September 2025, which may include the original proposal.