

Supplement for Council

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On **Monday 24 March 2025** At **5.00 pm**

Minutes Supplement - Questions on Notice

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The agenda, reports and any additional supplements can be found together with this supplement on the committee meeting webpage.

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To: Council
Date: 24 March 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; Leader of the Council

SB1: From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Brown

Question

➤ Regarding the City's expected submission to government advocating for an Oxford-centric, sub-County-sized unitary authority, how do you intend to avoid fragmentation, extra cost and disruption concerning services presently operated at whole-County scale?

Written Response

A Greater Oxford Council will be well positioned to deliver whole system transformational integration of lower and upper tier public services. We have an excellent track record of successful collaborative work and our focus on preventative action - linking multiple community-based and partnership-based initiatives around tackling health inequalities and isolation, supporting the wellbeing and development of young people, and ensuring community safety – can ultimately deliver more significant savings to the public purse than those achievable simply through reorganisation of local authority structures and removal of duplicative roles.

In the provision of social care, the priority for a Greater Oxford council will be to design in prevention and early intervention as standard, to reduce pressure on the health and care system. Government itself has acknowledged the current social care system urgently needs reform, nevertheless a new Greater Oxford unitary would be closer to home for communities and neighbourhoods in central Oxfordshire and better

	<p>empowered to deliver integrated, citizen-focused services and reduce demand.</p> <p>Taking a whole systems approach, we would be a partner and activator for prevention focused on good housing, good environment and good community. We would provide leadership for economic inclusion that reduces inequality, focused on living wages, affordable housing, efficient transport, skills and learning. We would build on our record of activating community resilience through youth support, grass roots grants, active communities and cross-community inclusion. This approach of providing hyper-local support optimises people's access, experience and outcomes, and helps support the sustainability of services.</p> <p>Alongside the prevention focus, we are working with the District Councils Network to explore the best models for the delivery of adult and children's social care to avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services. This could involve shared services, or a Trust/Community Interest Company commissioning model, and certainly better integration into existing education, health and community services.</p> <p>We already have good partnership working with schools and health and there is so much more that we can do.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>Councillor Smowton asked, in relation to transport, whether the Leader of the Council agrees that the matter is well served by strong integration and partnership working across the region and unitirisation would be prevented from disrupting county transport projects, for example the current A40 improvements.</p>	<p>Verbal Response</p> <p>In response, Councillor Brown many noted that many changes to transport will come into place following the new era of devolution, however emphasised that the Mayoral Strategic Authority would provide strategic guidance alongside continued partnership working with other Councils.</p>

SB2: From Cllr Henwood to Cllr Brown

<p>Question</p> <p>Does the leader endorse the use of Compulsory</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>This city has a significant need for new, affordable homes, and for green,</p>
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Purchase Orders (CPOs) to acquire farmland otherwise needed to safeguard food security for use as housing developments or solar farms?	decarbonised energy. This must, of course, be balanced with the competing needs for agricultural land. However, the use of an expensive and time-consuming process such as Compulsory Purchase Orders should only ever be considered as a last resort to bring forward much needed projects.
Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.

SB3: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Brown

Question

Does the leader agree that Oxford residents who have lived here for a decade as refugees should have the right to secure citizenship in the UK?

Written Response

This council is not responsible for immigration policy. We are focused on supporting all residents and visitors to our city, whatever their immigration status and are proud of our new status as a City of Sanctuary.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Powell noted his shared price that Oxford City Council has been awarded a City of Sanctuary accreditation and focused on the criteria of the commitment to work with partners to identify national policy issues and to make collective responses to government to encourage change. In relation to this, Councillor Powell asked the Leader of the Council whether she agrees it is unfortunate that the government has introduced a policy through the changes to citizenship that prohibits people who have lived in the country for a decade from gaining citizenship on the basis of their mode of entry to the UK, thus disproportionality affecting refugees. Councillor Powell also asked whether the Leader of the Council would work with other councils to raise the issue with national government.

Verbal Response

Councillor Brown noted that the council cannot dictate immigration policy but assured that representations will be made on policy areas which the Council does not fully support.

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SB4: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Brown

Question

Does the leader consider Oxford's status as a City of Sanctuary to be compatible with national government policy prohibiting people from applying for citizenship in this country?

Written Response

Yes.

Supplementary Question

Council Powell asked, even though it is not within the Council's control, whether the Leader of the Council would she support specific comments on the government's decision to change the good character requirement for citizenship and the impact of this on residents who have resided here for over a decade.

Verbal Response

Councillor Brown declined to make an immediate commitment.

SB5: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Brown

Question

During the previous full council meeting, the portfolio holder confirmed an intention to work on a cross party basis around Oxford's response to proposed changes to local government. Can she confirm what form this cross party work will take?

Written Response

We are just at the start of a process to develop plans for a greater Oxford, but we will want to give all members a chance to shape the way that new authority will work. We are briefing Group Leaders on the process as we progress our interim proposal for a three unitary model, with the creation of a greater Oxford council. We will be setting up some workshops over the next few months to discuss the culture and governance of the new authority.

Supplementary Question

No supplementary question.

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

ET1: From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Turner

Question

Regarding the recently discovered anomaly that lead to higher-than-intended council tax reduction paid to many claimants, could you please update Council as to what we know so far:

1. when did the anomaly first occur;
2. how much unintended extra relief is estimated to have been given;
3. what if any audit or cross-checking processes existed that might have revealed the anomaly sooner;

what changes are intended going forwards to catch issues sooner?

Written Response

1. The localisation of CTRS was introduced in 2013, changing from the council tax benefit scheme that existed at the time. Universal credit was introduced at the same time but the migration of working age claimants to Universal Credit (UC) was continually pushed back by the Government. In 2019/2020 the Council became a managed migration area for Universal Credit for new working age claimants although the take up of UC did not ramp up until 2020/21, coinciding with the Covid Pandemic. The resulting impact was that these people who may have been working and had not claimed Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) or were working on a limited income and in receipt of CTRS, moved to the banded UC scheme. Like most councils Oxford City Council adopted the standard Government scheme for CTRS linked to the old Council Tax Benefit Scheme, in 2013, and has only this year made changes to the scheme due to financial pressures. In the early stages of the CTRS scheme prior to 2020-21 claimants in Oxford on the scheme had little recourse to “earned income” and the ignoring of earned income for those on UC would have had limited impact – they would have been on full benefit, those were the claimants migrated across to UC. In fact, in the early years of the UC scheme there was no sharing of claimant earned income by DWP. Following the pandemic and the general return to work, disregard of earned income from

	<p>those on UC resulted in an increased discount for those UC claimants that were working and conversely a reduced amount of CTRS for those claimants that were not working, in line with a government ambition to incentivise work.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Had the Council chosen to adjust its CTRS scheme to include all earned income for claimants on UC then recent financial modelling, would suggest that savings from 2021-22 onwards would have been in the region of £4million - £6 million per annum gross, with the council's annual savings being in the region of £600k to £900k per annum. Of the 7,000 CTRS claimants approximately 34% would have been on nil CTRS under the Council's banded scheme. 3. The scheme is not audited in detail and the application of the CTRS scheme in respect of UC claimants in the manner described was not identified until September 2024, with staff noticing UC claimants with large amounts of income receiving disproportionate amounts of CTRS. <p>In April 2025 the Council agreed to make changes in the income bandings on which the CTRS discount is based to generate savings to the Council. The Council will continue to monitor the impact of any changes subsequently introduced and ensure that it is fully aware of any impact on claimants for any subsequent changes introduced.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>Councillor Smowton asked, in relation to the scenario referenced in the written response, whether there is a cross-district informal communication occurring regarding the CTR schemes, and whether the scenario is specific to Oxford.</p>	<p>Verbal Response</p> <p>Councillor Turner noted awareness of contact with other district councils regarding the scheme design, explaining that the Group Finance Director regular meetings with relevant counterparts. Councillor Turner also noted that he would be happy to raise this with other district councils and expressed eagerness to work cooperatively.</p>

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

Could the council compulsorily buy the building on the corner of Home Close and Godstow Road? The increasingly hazardous and decrepit state of the building over the last decade continues to negatively impact the local community.

Written Response

Where the Council has investigated properties with similar issues in the past, the use of Compulsory Purchase Order powers has not been an appropriate or financially prudent approach. Often these properties are tied up in probate or similarly complex legal disputes that renders the cost of bringing an individual home back into use disproportionate. Given these consistent difficulties in delivery the resource previously attributed to this activity was reallocated in a previous budget. I will see if we can make contact with the owner and find a way to encourage the property back into use.

Supplementary Question

Council Sandelson noted suggestions within the written response provided of existing probate and complex legal disputes which could prevent further research and compulsory purchase of buildings. Regarding the building in question, she provided further specific information and offered to facilitate an opportunity for introduction with the owner.

Verbal Response

Councillor Turner referred to the Council's empty home capacity and restrictions resulting from legislation regarding compulsory purchase orders and suggested that a discussion of a specific case should not be held at full Council. Councillor Turner committed to investigating the matter further whilst managing expectations.

Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford; Deputy Leader of the Council**AR1: From Cllr Henwood to Cllr Railton****Question**

An Oxford private cycle delivery business, Velocity Cycle Couriers, has been receiving a grant from Oxford

Written Response

All procurement carried out, as part of the DEFRA funded cargo bike trials,

<p>City Council which is subsidising their operation to the tune of 50% for each and every delivery since March 2024.</p> <p>https://www.oxford.gov.uk/news/article/1645/electric-cargo-bike-delivery-partnership-extended-until-end-of-february-2026</p> <p>By subsidising a single private courier company, is Oxford City Council creating an unfair competitive advantage over other courier businesses in the city?</p>	<p>has been conducted in line with the procurement rules as part of Oxford City Council's Constitution, A procurement exercise was conducted in February 2025 to appoint the private partner that was going to successfully deliver the extension of this contract.</p> <p>Both Velocity and Pedal and Post have received grant funding to support cargo bike trials. Both are local SMEs, aligning with the Councils procurement processes, which support both local providers and SMEs.</p> <p>The Council has not subsidised a single private courier and has been compliant with procurement rules under the Council's Constitution.</p>
Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.

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AR2: From Cllr Henwood to Cllr Railton

<p>Question</p> <p>What is the source of the air quality grant funding used to support Velocity Cycle Couriers, and what additional administrative costs, if any, is the City Council incurring to manage this grant? Additionally, how much grant funding has been awarded to other cycle courier companies, such as Pedal & Post, and have any other private cycle delivery businesses received similar financial support?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) funded the air quality grant. The administrative costs associated with managing the grant are absorbed within existing resources.</p> <p>Pedal & Post are the other cargo bike delivery business to have received DEFRA grant funding. In 2022, Pedal and Post took part in Oxford City Council's first cargo bike trial scheme, supporting covered market traders in the testing and adoption of sustainable deliveries.</p> <p>Both funding awards were in line with the Council's Constitution & DEFRA grant funding requirements.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>Councillor Henwood noted the understanding that City Council management costs will be absorbed within existing resources but asked for the costs of managing the grant in terms of officer time.</p>	<p>Verbal Response</p> <p>Councillor Railton noted that the specific information may be hard to ascertain however referenced the work of the full-time air quality officer employed by Oxford City Council and the quality of reports they produce. It was also noted that work on air quality has been deemed a proportionate</p>

	use of officer time and referenced the grant funding which has been achieve for this.
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AR3: From Cllr Henwood to Cllr Railton

Question

Many Oxford businesses have suffered losses due to the city council-backed LTN scheme, County Council 'green' transport policies, and the ongoing Botley Road closure. Some face serious threats to their viability. How many of these struggling businesses have been offered a 50% subsidy from Oxford City Council to offset their lost customers in the Council's pursuit for clean air?

Written Response

Many independent businesses across Oxford have benefited from the collaboration with Velocity Cycle Couriers. These businesses are getting quick and affordable deliveries, even with the challenges of congestion and the bridge closure on Botley Road.

How would additional LGVs on the road help struggling businesses?

Supplementary Question

Councillor Henwood noted that the written response provided implies that an unfair advantage is rewarded to private companies instead of providing subsidies to struggling local businesses.

Verbal Response

Councillor Railton firmly disagreed and emphasised that the policy directly supports local businesses.

Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies

NC1: From Cllr Miles to Cllr Chapman

Question

What is the process for ODS reporting to the city council business regulation officers' issues where

Written Response

ODS should report issues to the Business Regulation Team (BRT) by emailing licensingmisc@oxford.gov.uk. If possible, attaching photographs

<p>pavement license holders are not cleaning the area outside their cafe of cigarette butts discarded by customers using the pavement cafe seating areas?</p>	<p>of the issue is helpful, as it could be a breach of one of the pavement licence conditions. If the issue is recurrent, this may lead to the Business Regulation Team serving an enforcement notice.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>Councillor Miles queried whether given the lack of regular reporting, an alternative practice could be established which required ODS employees to feedback to the Business Regulation team to support identification of hotspots. Councillor Miles suggested that this could avoid the passing of additional costs to Oxford City Council.</p>	<p>Verbal Response</p> <p>Councillor Chapman did not have the relevant information to hand but committed to providing a further answer.</p> <p>Written Response</p> <p>The Business Regulation Team (BRT) believes the current process—where ODS staff report issues via the licensingmisc@oxford.gov.uk email—remains appropriate. However, it recognises the value of strengthening communication between BRT and ODS to better support the identification of recurring issues related to pavement licenses.</p> <p>To that end, BRT is arranging a meeting with their counterpart at ODS to ensure field staff are fully trained on what should be reported and how. The team is also exploring a simple internal system, such as a shared spreadsheet, to help track complaints and identify potential hotspots. In addition, a quarterly check-in between BRT and ODS is being proposed to maintain regular communication and support coordinated responses. These steps aim to reinforce the existing reporting process while enhancing collaboration.</p>

<p>NC2: From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Chapman</p>	
<p>Question</p> <p>Will the portfolio holder make a commitment that the council will not fell any trees in Grandpont Nature Park during the 2025 nesting season?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>If the concern is the felling of trees in connection with the proposed footpath/cycle path bridge in Grandpont Nature Park, there are no proposals to fell trees in the 2025 bird nesting season (March – August).</p>

Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.
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NC3: From Cllr Stares to Cllr Chapman	
Question In regard to the Railway Lane Littlemore development- with planning for 90 homes with a required 100% electrically heated with heat pumps and with known grid capacity across the city an increasingly large problem how has it taken until now to realise that a substation will be required?	Written Response The question is based on an incorrect premise. The contractor/developer has confirmed that the need for a substation has been known since 2023 when the development was proposed.
Supplementary Question Councillor Stares requested clarification of why plans for the substation were not included in the original plans in 2021 but appear in the 2025 plan without public consultation.	Verbal Response Councillor Chapman committed to responding with further information. Written Response The initial planning application was submitted in April 2021. There have since been changes to the requirements on developers, for example, the introduction of a legal obligation to provide an electrical charging point for each parking space. In addition, we amended the scheme to reduce the future carbon footprint by removing gas heating. Discussions with SSEN about the electric supply capacity needed for the site continued through 2023/ 2024. Only at the point of applying to a service provider to connect to the existing substation, was the developer told that a new substation would be required on-site. The new substation is proposed to be sited on the edge of the development, to affect the least number residents and acoustic measures are included. There have been very few comments or objections raised in relation to the new planning application for this.

	We acknowledge that the later submission of the application may cause some concern, but unfortunately matters were largely beyond our control and, without the substation, these affordable homes will simply not be able to come forward as required.
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Cabinet Member for Business, Culture and an Inclusive economy

AH1: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Hollingsworth

Question

The Ultimate Picture Palace first opened in 1911. As a community benefit owned cinema, it is a wonderful example of the kind of citizen led institutions that make East Oxford a vibrant and exciting area. It is also Oxford's oldest cinema. Recently, a number of concerned residents, staff and stakeholders met at the cinema to discuss concerns about possible threats to its future. Will the Portfolio holder agree to meet with those concerned and work constructively to ensure that the cinema remains able to continue to be in its place for future generations?

Written Response

I first provided informal advice to the UPP management team on this issue some months ago when they raised queries via a Council officer. At that point they wanted the queries to be treated as confidential while they weighed up their preferred options, which I respected. I am in direct touch with a senior manager and am very happy to continue to liaise with them to ensure the continued presence of the UPP in this listed building.

Supplementary Question

No supplementary question.

AH2: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Hollingsworth

Question

Recent months have seen the closure or proposed closure of numerous cinemas across Oxford City. Does the portfolio holder agree that cinemas are a vital

Written Response

There have been many closures of cinemas across the UK, as what customers are looking for has changed. But this seems to be a shift in the

community resource and will he undertake to do what is within his power to promote publicly accessible cinema facilities in Oxford City?	<p>kinds of venues and services they want, not the pleasure of going to a cinema to see a film. While some of the large companies have struggled to keep their businesses going, smaller and more independent cinemas have been successful.</p> <p>Cinemas started out as, and will remain, commercial enterprises who need to listen to their customers and respond to meet their changing needs in order to be successful. As the Cabinet member I am very happy to help Oxford's cinema owners and operators to do this.</p>
Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.

Cabinet Member for a Healthy Oxford

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CM1: From Cllr Malik to Cllr Munkonge

<p>Question</p> <p>Oxford City Council has given half a million pounds to aspire academy, Glanville Toad for the gym. Before COVID local community had access.</p> <p>COVID restrictions are long over and I have raised this before, but never got the answer.</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member confirm when the community will have the access to use the gym?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>A gym was developed at Spires Academy in 2014 which met the needs of both the school and the community. There were legal agreements put in place at that time to secure this use. The gym closed due to COVID and unfortunately post COVID the school has struggled with the viability of operating a community facility.</p> <p>We have reached out to the head teacher again to understand whether the school is now able to open the facility up to the community again, or whether the Council may wish to consider its options under the legal agreements and will advise if we have a response at the Council meeting.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>Councillor Malik notice his repeated attempts to seek</p>	<p>Verbal Response</p> <p>Councillor Munkonge apologised for the delay in responding to the matter</p>

an answer on this matter and provided some context on the matter. Councillor Malik asked whether the Cabinet member could look into taking legal action against the school in regards the taxpayer money they have received.

but confirmed that the Council has been in communication with the Head Teacher and awaits a response. It was clarified that depending on the response provided, legal action may be explored.

CM2: From Cllr Rawle to Cllr Munkonge

Question

Could the portfolio holder provide an update on what proportion and how many public toilets and community centres now have free period products and sanitary waste bins in all toilets, including men's and gender neutral toilets, following the motion on period poverty passed at full council in July 2022?

Written Response

The Council has worked with various partners on the Period Poverty campaign and period products and sanitary waste bins are available at all of our community centres. Currently there aren't any period products supplied at the public toilets, there are however sanitary bins provided in all public toilets.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Rawle welcomed the consideration of the Cabinet member regarding the provision of free period products in public toilets however asked for clarification regarding the provision of sanitary bins in all public toilets, including male disabled toilets, and non-gender specific toilets.

Verbal Response

Councillor Munkonge confirmed that sanitary bins are provided in all public toilets and community centres and committed to exploring the cost involved in additional the request.

CM3: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Munkonge

Question

Given the recent withdrawal of the retrospective application for planning permission, can the portfolio holder confirm when the adverts will be removed from the Plain?

Written Response

I can report that these adverts have been removed.

Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.
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CM4: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Munkonge	
Question Given the more than 200 concerned responses from local residents and organisations, will the administration outline what lessons have been learned from the attempts to seek permission for the citing of adverts at the Plain roundabout?	Written Response I am informed that these advertisements have previously secured planning consent. The County Council's Highways team have changed their approach since previous applications, so one important lesson this that for any future applications, earlier engagement with Highways colleagues will be planned in. I am happy to take other feedback from the councillor on this issue.
Supplementary Question Councillor Powell noted that use of earlier engagement had been highlighted as a lesson learned, and therefore asked what form this would take in the future to avoid unnecessary stress amongst residents.	Verbal Response Councillor Munkonge emphasised the serious approach the council takes to health and safety and confirmed that going forward, engagement will take place at the earliest possible stage with other consultees.

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Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities

LS1: From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Smith	
Question How many Selective Licences for private rentals have been issued by the Council since the scheme was	Written Response Since the Selective Licensing scheme came into effect on 1 September

expanded to cover such all rentals in Oxford?	2022, the Council has issued 11,193 final licences.
Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.

LS2: From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Smith

Question

Is the Council team administering the Selective Licence Scheme fully staffed?

Written Response

The Residential Regulation Team, which administers the Selective Licensing Scheme alongside the HMO scheme and all private sector housing enforcement, currently has three Environmental Health Officer vacancies. The council plans to begin recruitment for these roles in April.

Supplementary Question

No supplementary question.

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LS3: From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Smith

Question

How many unlicensed properties have been identified since the start of the Selective Licensing scheme and have all the landlords been issued with financial penalties and/or fines?

Written Response

Since the start of the Selective Licensing scheme, the council has received 246 enquiries about unlicensed Selective License properties. After removing duplicates, 241 investigations have been carried out. Of these:

- 106 landlords have now applied for a Selective Licence
- 24 properties were determined unlikely to require a licence
- 18 properties are exempt
- 18 cases were closed as resolved or where advice was sufficient
- The remaining cases are under investigation

Currently, two cases are progressing through legal proceedings for failing to apply for a Selective Licence, and one case is at the representation stage for an intention to issue a financial penalty. Additionally, 1,132

	licence applications have been charged the higher fee for failing to apply within 12 weeks.
Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.

LS5: From Cllr Djafari-Marbini to Cllr Smith

Question

How many council homes are currently available in the Blackbird Leys area for the residents of Windale House and Northbrook House to be able to stay local to their networks if they so choose? How many residents of Northbrook House and Windale House will be forced to take up Housing Association homes instead of their council homes?

Written Response

As well as new builds and acquisitions, the Council relets around 300 void properties a year and a sizeable proportion will be on Blackbird Leys which will enable residents to stay local to their networks should they choose. At any given point in time, around 40 one-bedroom properties are being worked on ahead of re-letting in the city and again, a sizeable proportion will be in Blackbird Leys. We hope and expect that residents will be accommodated in Council properties, although Housing Association homes will also be available for them to bid on, if that is their preference.

Supplementary Question

No supplementary question.

LS6: From Cllr Djafari-Marbini to Cllr Smith

Question

How long is currently remaining on the Council's grant provision to SOFEA and contracts around larders and emergency food provision?

Written Response

The Council supported SOFEA through various grant provisions including COMF and Household support funds during the COVID and immediate post COVID landscape. There are currently no Council grants in relation to SOFEA. During COVID we worked with SOFEA to help set up the community larders within the City. The Community Larder model is one that is now self-sustaining where larder members pay a very small subscription which helps ensure that the larders and SOFEA are sustainable in the longer term.

Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.
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LS7: From Cllr Djafari-Marbini to Cllr Smith	
Question How many members of staff are currently working in the Housing Services team and Communities teams compared to 12 th March 2024?	Written Response On the 12th March 2024 145 people worked in Housing Services, in March 2025 159 do. The staffing head count increased in particular because of additional staffing made available from government grant to support the Council to respond to increased homelessness and Temporary Accommodation use. In Communities there were 115 staff in 2024 compared to 78 staff at the same point in 2025. This is explained by: two teams moving to Corporate Property; and in the variation of external funding available to pay for fixed term contract roles.
Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.

LS8: From Cllr Djafari-Marbini to Cllr Smith	
Question What are the projected timelines of future development of housing on the Windale House and Northbrook House sites?	Written Response Officers will make recommendations for the future redevelopment of these schemes in due course. This will consider the capacity within the HRA business plan for such investment, in the MTFP, alongside consideration of other delivery options to bring forward affordable housing on these sites in the long term.
Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.

LS9: From Cllr Yeatman to Cllr Smith	
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<p>Question</p> <p>Given the recent statement from Mutual Aid that it received double the average amount of requests for food support in the first two months of this year, what more is this Council doing to support the most vulnerable in 2025?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>We have been working closely with the Community Food Network and Good Food Oxfordshire to help ensure that there is a system response to issues that might impact the community food system. Which will include completing relevant actions within the Oxfordshire Food Strategy and City Food action plan.</p> <p>The City Council has been working in partnership with community organisations and partners to establish additional food support locations across the City. This includes the Hinksey Park Food Larder and the new Oxford City Community Fridge.</p> <p>In addition to this we will continue to promote City Council grant funding opportunities Grants – Oxford City Council as well as Household Support funding, to help provide food support across the city, supporting larders, community fridges and food initiatives that provide free or low cost access to food.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>Councillor Yeatman requested that the Cabinet member consider the presence of an advice centre to support residents of Littlemore and Cowley at Temple Square.</p>	<p>Verbal Response</p> <p>Councillor Smith clarified that Oxford City Council does not run advice centres directly but does fund them. If a gap has been identified, Councillor Smith confirmed willingness to facilitate discussions about provisions.</p>

LS10: From Cllr Djafari-Marbini to Cllr Smith	
<p>Question</p> <p>Why were the proposed development of Northbrook House and Windale house not included in the regeneration plans currently underway in Blackbird Leys? Will it be Ox Place who will be developing the sites or a Housing Association?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>Windale and Northbrook Houses were not accepted into the initial phase 1 of BBL regeneration, but we continue to consider sites for further regeneration in order to invest in the community and increase housing supply. No decisions have been made on the future of the sites yet and what organisation will lead a potential redevelopment. Consultation with</p>

	current tenants on the decant of the blocks has now closed, and work is beginning on how best to proceed towards developing the site for affordable housing, with a recommendation expected to be agreed by cabinet later this year.
Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.

Cabinet Member for Planning

LU1: From Cllr Henwood to Cllr Upton

Question

The February 5th report presented to cabinet stated CIL receipts generated developments 1.5km from the proposed Blackbird Leys station and Littlemore station will be directed to the introduction of the Cowley Branch Line. Is this best practice?

Written Response

The decision taken by Cabinet and Council in February 2025 commits an overall allocation of £2.5m Community Infrastructure Levy to the delivery stage of the Cowley Branch Line, if other local parties contribute a total of £17.5m and central Government meets all remaining costs to deliver the scheme and reintroduce the train services. To be clear, this money will only be spent if the line is definitely opened for passenger services.

The reference to expected receipts within 1.5km from the two proposed stations was part of the case within the report for giving decision-makers confidence that more than enough CIL receipts would be generated to fund this decision. This takes into account that a passenger service on the Cowley Branch Line will facilitate denser employment uses, with less land required for car parking, and hence higher CIL receipts than would otherwise be expected.

Yes, it is best practice that local authorities and other local promoters commit their own funds towards infrastructure schemes that are seeking

	Government funding. (The National Infrastructure Commission recommends a range of 15-25% of the total costs are brought forward by local partners.) Given the need to have certainty of the funds within the next few years, CIL is the most appropriate source of funds for the Council to use for this purpose which will be of huge benefit to local residents.
Supplementary Question Councillor Henwood queried whether diverting funds to Cowley Branch Line project would put Littlemore and Blackbird Leys at risk in regards the infrastructure they may need in the future and asked why a risk assessment has not been made when the poorest communities are being disadvantaged.	Verbal Response Councillor Upton disagreed and clarified that that the Cowley Branch Line would increase availability of funds for these communities by the significant increases in CIL receipts that will be generated.

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LU2: From Cllr Henwood to Cllr Upton	
Question How much will a train ticket cost from Blackbird Leys to Oxford City?	Written Response We are working with Network Rail, Oxfordshire County Council and others to reopen the Cowley Branch Line to passengers. The fares will be decided when a train operator is appointed, but our emerging work has assumed that the fares would be broadly similar to bus fares in Oxford, currently £2 a journey or £4 return. They are also likely to be similar to the train fares between Oxford Station and Oxford Parkway - the distances are similar, and the Cowley Branch Line will be an extension of the same line. An off-peak return from Oxford Station to Oxford Parkway is £4.10.
Supplementary Question Councillor Henwood sought clarity over the assertion that tickets could be cheaper, despite a provider not having been identified as yet.	Verbal Response Councillor Upton confirmed that the provider has not yet been identified but that informed assumptions have been made based on existing provider prices and journeys.

LU3: From Cllr Henwood to Cllr Upton

Question

The February 5th report to cabinet states this will create a modal change from car journeys to train journeys. How will this be achieved in Littlemore and Blackbird Leys?

Written Response

Part of the value of the reopening of the Cowley Branch Line for passenger services is that it will dramatically improve the public transport accessibility for residents in Littlemore and Blackbird Leys. With the city centre an 8-10 minute journey away (and with an onwards service to London and connections to many destinations), many residents will find the train a cheaper, easier and much quicker option for their journeys.

Supplementary Question

No supplementary question.

LU4: From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Upton

Question

Do you agree that there is an imperative to increase building heights and densities within the present built-up area, so as to minimise outward sprawl and maximise people able to live close to key employment centres? Going forwards to Local Plan 2042, will you fully explore the options for achieving this, such as designating areas where upward growth is expected, or specifying attributes of a site that make it particularly suitable to upward growth?

Written Response

In Oxford, we have a pressing need for additional homes but not many options for accommodating them. We also have a clear and agreed level of unmet housing need which currently relies on neighbouring areas to deliver the balance. In this context, the City Council will do everything we can to identify further opportunities for accommodating our own needs within the city boundaries.

The City Council will continue to take the approach of framing Local Plan policies that set the minimum capacity numbers we require on sites without setting maximums. This is important as we understand that more detailed planning work on a site may identify that additional homes could be reasonably accommodated, and in those circumstances such proposals would be supported. I would agree that future residents are more likely to have a sustainable lifestyle if they live close to workplaces, and all the other services and facilities that Oxford has to offer are within easy walking, cycling or bus routes.

	<p>Although the Local Plan does contain some policy considerations for high building proposals in parts of the city, because of the historical and heritage value of Oxford's skyline, this is by no means a blanket approach, and the City Council continues to work in a pragmatic way to increase density to make the best use of our scarce land resources and provide much needed housing while not undermining the qualities of the city. Density levels in Oxford and in our local plan far exceed those of our surrounding areas. There are many additional factors which affect the number of homes delivered on a site; density is a function of these many, and sometimes interlinked, choices by developers. These factors include for example: the proportion of houses to flats, the number of bedrooms provided, the amount of private and public open space, the internal space standards and level of parking provision etc.</p> <p>The work on the Local Plan 2042 will reassess these factors to ensure that we continue to maximise the capacity of the city whilst ensuring that it remains a pleasant place to live for future residents.</p>
Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.

LU5: From Cllr Miles to Cllr Upton	
<p>Question</p> <p>As the city council is responsible for pavements, what actions does it take when a pavement is identified as not having a dropped curb for wheelchair users to safely dismount a pavement and cross the road at a junction in a residential area?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The City Council, through ODS, undertakes maintenance of roads (other than main roads) under S42 of the Highways Act but this does not extend to making alterations to the roads. Any proposed changes would currently need to be agreed by and funded by the County Council as Highway Authority.</p>
Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.

LU6: From Cllr Djafari-Marbini to Cllr Upton**Question**

Has the cabinet member been in discussions with Firoka about the eventual uses of the current Ozone Leisure Park? If they have what have been the outcomes of these discussions?

Written Response

The Council as Local Planning Authority are in pre-application discussions with the landowner about the redevelopment of the Ozone Leisure Park. These pre-application discussions with planning officers are encouraged by National Planning Practice Guidance to help applicants understand what Local Plan policies and other material matters they will need to take into consideration when submitting an application, including what facilities should be re-provided within any new scheme to comply with the Local Plan.

Last year, along with approximately 10-15 other councillors, I attended a presentation from Firoka and their development partner, while they were still considering the concept of the site and were seeking councillors' views on what they would like to see there. Unfortunately, you did not attend that meeting, but other local councillors did and gave their views. That was the only contact I have had with the developer.

Since then, some initial proposals have emerged which the applicant is currently undertaking public consultation on, and I understand that the local Cllrs Smith and Arshad have made representations.

As Cabinet Member for Planning, I have not had discussions with Firoka Group or the applicant regarding these proposals, and as a member of Planning committee I retain an open mind on any future application that may come forward.

Supplementary Question

No supplementary question.

LU7: From Cllr Djafari-Marbini to Cllr Upton

<p>Question</p> <p>Have there been assessments made for the suitability of Northbrook House and Windale House sites to be included in the next local plan? What were the conclusions of the officers if assessments were made?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>I am not sure what your question is asking. Since these sites already have housing on, they are by default covered by policies in the next Local Plan concerning housing land. They do not need to be specifically listed in the plan in order for them to be redeveloped for more housing.</p> <p>As part of the Local Plan process Planning Policy Officers are reaching out to landowners both internally within the City Council and externally to identify as many potential <u>new</u> development sites as possible. Officers will assess those sites to identify new ones for inclusion in the consultation stages for the new Local Plan, as outlined in the Local Development Scheme.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p>	<p>No supplementary question.</p>

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LU8: From Cllr Djafari-Marbini to Cllr Upton

<p>Question</p> <p>Why weren't Northbrook House and Windale House sites included in the draft 2040 Local plan considering the plans to 'redevelop the sites for new council homes'?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>A specific policy was not considered necessary for a site with no additional units and that is remaining in housing use. Any planning applications for this site can be determined according to general policies of the plan. Site-specific allocations in the local plan were only made for larger sites that would deliver 10 or more additional units, or if something specific needed to be said about change of use. The expectation was that these particular sites would be redeveloped during the plan period but that very few, if any, additional units would be provided by that redevelopment, albeit that the typology of the redeveloped units may change.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p>	<p>No supplementary question.</p>

LU9: From Cllr Henwood to Cllr Upton**Question**

In reference to Council's proposals for a new Local Plan 2042. Councillors were offered an "opportunity" to review the Local Plan, and a "Workshop for opposition Cllrs to put forward suggestions / ideas towards the Local Plan 'refresh'. When will these workshops take place? And will interested members of the public be given the same opportunity to participate in similar workshops?

Written Response

I did indeed offer at a recent Scrutiny meeting to invite Members to attend workshops to discuss the Local Plan work and provide suggestions into the project. Officers are currently seeking a date which would offer the best opportunity for a wide attendance and the invite will go out shortly. The intention of the first session will be to set out the programme, timings and scope of the work, and to explore with councillors which topics in particular they would like further sessions to focus on. We hope that this additional opportunity for engagement will be helpful to all Members.

As set out in the Local Development Scheme (the timetable and programme for the development of the Local Plan) which was agreed by Cabinet in January there are a number of stages for the public to engage with the project. In brief these include a consultation on Preferred Options (for policies) in June and July and then a consultation on the full draft Local Plan in November and December 2025. In addition, an informal launch for the new Local Plan will be held in March to ensure there is a wide awareness of the work ahead and the opportunities to engage with that.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Henwood requested that assurance be provided that proper due diligence will be given through full and open consultation in relation to housing on sensitive sites.

Verbal Response

Councillor Upton confirmed all sites have already been fully through this process once two years ago, and that a second round is now ongoing. It was emphasised that a lot of due diligence has been completed and more is underway.

LU10: From Cllr Miles to Cllr Upton**Question**

How many planning enforcement officers does the

Written Response

The council currently has two planning enforcement officers and a principal

council have and what is each officer's average current caseload to address any breaches in planning conditions?	lead officer, with a typical caseload of around 100 cases per officer. The council is also in the process of recruiting a third planning enforcement officer to focus on short-term lets. This caseload is considered manageable, and with the new officer, we expect it to remain at a similar level.
Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.

Chair of the Planning – Oxford City Planning Committee

MC1: From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Clarkson

Question

Thames Water's failure to invest in the Oxford Sewage Treatment Works, and its subsequent lack of capacity led to the Environment Agency (EA) objecting to Oxweds plans to develop the land at Oxpens.

The City Council granted outline planning permission for the Oxwed scheme with a condition that the homes cannot be occupied until OSTW has the capacity to cope.

Does the portfolio holder agree that a similar condition may also be necessary for future hotels, student accommodation and large employment sites, until capacity at OSTW is increased?

Written Response

The member will be aware from their Member Training on Planning, that conditions need to meet a number of tests in order to be imposed on any planning permission. These are looked at on a case-by-case basis, and therefore a decision will be taken at that time. Any application that comes before committee will include an assessment that sets out what conditions are necessary for the application in front of Committee.

It is worth noting that, following extensive work from City Council officers, as well as government, that the Environment Agency have removed recent objections and that the first phase of capacity improvement works at the Oxford Sewage Treatment Works are underway.

Supplementary Question

Councillor Muddiman welcomed the good news and asked whether more detail can be provided on how

Verbal Response

The Lord Mayor recommended that the Chair of the Committee could not answer the second part of the question; the Leader of the Council agreed.

much the increase will be, and what confidence the Chair of the Panning Committee has that Thames Water will still exist and be able to deliver.	Councillor Clarkson explained that contracts are currently being drawn up and noted her understanding that DEFRA and the Environment Agency believe there to be sufficient capacity. Councillor Upton, as the relevant Cabinet Member, explained that senior officers have had extensive conversations with relevant parties to get the issue sorted and confirmed that they are in a position where contracts have been tendered and awarded for work by 2027.
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MC2: From Cllr Djafari-Marbini to Cllr Clarkson

Question Has there been a full and proper assessment of the affects of development of the Northbrook House and Windale House sites and how will so many new residents be catered for with existing provisions for GP & dentist surgeries, schools, community centre etc in order to prevent worsening inequalities? This is especially considering their location within the top 10% of LSOAs in England based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation.	Written Response A planning application has yet to be received for these properties. Should one come forward officers will thoroughly assess all relevant matters and make an appropriate recommendation at that time.
Supplementary Question	No supplementary question.

MC3: From Cllr Djafari-Marbini to Cllr Clarkson

Question What were the reasons for the city planners being in favour of the change of use of the Bingo Hall at Ozone Leisure Park to office/labs at the pre planning stage in contradiction of local plan 2036 to preserve leisure and community uses (policy V6)?	Written Response The redevelopment of the Bingo Hall was a planning application that was approved by the Oxford City Planning Committee at their meeting on the 19 th March 2024. The officers committee report is available to read on the Council's website
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<https://mycouncil.oxford.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=36778>

The Councillor is able to view the planning judgement behind the recommendation to approve the application. That includes an assessment against the relevant policies of the development plan including Policy V7 (rather than the quoted V6) which deals with community uses. In reaching the decision to recommend approval, the officers report acknowledges that the Bingo Hall had been vacant for an extended period of time, and that permission had previously been granted for a change of use of the building from Bingo Hall to a range of uses that fell within the Class E uses. This enabled a potential change to an extensive range of alternative uses for the building in order to encourage it being brought back into a viable use. When considering the complete redevelopment of the building, regard was given to that planning history as well as the potential loss of the Bingo Hall, concluding that the loss was acceptable.

32 **Supplementary Question**

No supplementary question.

Chair of the General Purposes Licensing Committee

EM1: From Cllr Yeatman to Cllr Mundy

Question

Given the confirmed launch of Uber (date unconfirmed at time of Licensing meeting), the extension of Botley Road closure and the changing night time economy in Oxford, will the Council consider any further concessions to the increasing challenges faced by

Written Response

The Licensing Authority will always consider proposals to support the licenced trade, both Hackney Carriage and Private Hire. Any proposal needs to be specific and be considered individually, in line with and balanced against current legislation, statutory and non-statutory guidance, and

Hackney Carriage licensees?	council policy. The General Purposes Licensing Committee agreed to extending the ULEV HCV Licence Early Adopter Discount, saving over £100 from new and renewed licences (ULEV standard) in the first quarter of 2026.
Supplementary Question <p>Councillor Yeatman asked the Chair of the Committee whether a representative from the taxi trade could be invited to report back on their experience of the launch of Uber in Oxford, and if the issue of additional taxi ranks could be expedited.</p>	Verbal Response <p>Councillor Mundy clarified that the issue of additional taxi ranks has been discussed previously but explained that the matter lies with Oxfordshire County Council, noting that pressure can be continually applied within reason. Councillor Mundy also supported the need for more taxi ranks. Finally, Councillor Mundy welcome the invitation of a representative, such as a member of COLTA, to attend and discuss the introduction of Uber.</p>

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