

Members Questions & Responses for Council – 27 November 2024

Question	Raised By	Executive Member	Response
Question I – How many bookings have you received to hire the Chamber?	Councillor Michele Mead – Conservative, Councillor	Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council	The Council Chamber / Community Space has been used to host a number of meetings and events, such as the West Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Alliance that was attended by representatives from the ICB, OCC and local support organisations from across our district. The Council has now agreed a formal pricing mechanism or scale of charges for the renting out of both the Council Chamber / Committee Rooms along with a process to make bookings. The Communication Team have developed an appropriate marketing strategy, and the Communities Team are making their network aware of the new arrangements and costs (which does include a discount for local charities and communities). This has also been shared with Hexagon a commercial operator who are very interested in renting the Council Chamber / Community Space to host events and a meeting is being scheduled to progress this.
Supplementary question – How much are you towards the £150,000 target of income for the Chamber?	Councillor Michele Mead – Conservative, Councillor, Carterton South	Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council	We have bought forward the scale of charges, which have only just been launched. It is hardly likely we'll be reaching any target and will provide a written response. <u>Written response</u>

			The figure of £150,000 has been taken from a press release (Oxford Mail - 4th February 2024) in which the Leader stated that the “ ... works on the council chamber facility are a key part of a wider project to make better use of council buildings, which we expect will bring in up to £150,000 per year to the Council to help fund local services”. The figure was not a target for income from the Council Chamber alone and includes other properties which were part of the Agile Working Project such as Elmfield. Elmfield income is included in the 2025/26 budget and an estimate for the Council Chamber income will be included in 2026/27 budget as the scale of charges were only brought forward in December 2024.
Question 2 – As yet another shop closes in Marriotts walk please can we have an update on what the Executive are doing to fill these empty units?	Councillor Michele Mead – Conservative, Carterton South	Councillor Duncan Enright – Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Economic Development	A dedicated team, comprised of the Assets team, the Economic Development Team along with letting agents, managing agents and retail consultants meet regularly to ensure sustained momentum in filling empty units and driving initiatives that support the vitality of Marriotts Walk. Progress updates are shared with Senior Management and Executive Members. We are actively engaging with prospective tenants to attract businesses that align with the needs and aspirations of Marriotts. Recent efforts have led to short term lettings for the Calendar Club and we are in advanced discussions with an operator in respect of the former Frankie and Benny’s

			unit. We have leases in legal for Units 8 and 9, Unit 4, Unit 11B and Unit 15 securing current and new tenants. Encouragingly, footfall has seen a slight increase, with Marks & Spencer reporting significant profits—a positive indicator of overall high street performance. This improvement underscores the potential of Marriotts Walk as a retail and leisure destination and reaffirms our commitment to reinvigorating the space. Moreover, we are leveraging public realm improvements funded by S106 contributions to enhance the overall appeal and functionality of the area. This work is designed to make Marriotts Walk an even more attractive destination for businesses and shoppers alike. Our recent Vegan Fair brought increased footfall and added a vibrant atmosphere for our regular Saturday shoppers. Soon, the Christmas Market will arrive, offering a delightful selection of handcrafted gifts, local treats, and artisan goods. Looking ahead to Spring 2025, a new commercial market operator will bring more regular markets to the public realm, hosting seasonal, artisan, and food fairs. These events aim to foster community engagement, enhance the sense of place, and attract more visitors to support the businesses at Marriotts Walk.
Supplementary question – How are we monitoring the foot fall in Marriotts Walk?	Councillor Michele Mead – Conservative, Carterton South	Councillor Duncan Enright – Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Economic Development	I don't know the exact mechanics but the management team there count foot fall by automated systems and cameras across the estate. The same monitoring system across the town centre and we are working through the town partnership. We are monitoring activity across the whole of the town centre so we can measure improvements as we make them. Woolgate does a similar job and by sharing this data we can get a true

			picture of the health of Witney town. Good news our town is looking really healthy.
Question 3 – What are the latest developments in the Council's work towards becoming a Local Authority of Sanctuary and what are the Council's next steps on this?	Councillor Ruth Smith – Labour and Co-operative, Witney East	Councillor Rachel Crouch – Executive Member for Stronger Healthy Communities	Following the Council Motion, Officers have met with their peers in both Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council to learn from their experiences as they are ahead of us in regards applying to become a Council of Sanctuary. A regular meeting to continue learning from each other has also been set up. Officers have also met with Maggie Filipova-Rivers who is City of Sanctuary Local Authority Lead and Dr Hari Reed who is the Policy and Advocacy Coordinator at Asylum Welcome to discuss the actual application process and the steps involved. The Council has now formally joined the City of Sanctuary Local Authority network, which is an expected part of the process and have started to review case studies from organisation that have successfully been awarded Council of Sanctuary status to gain a better understanding of the application process. Nominations have now been received from all the Group Leaders and a Steering Group has been established, comprising of Cllrs Cosier, Doughty and Prosser that will be chaired by Cllr Crouch and supported by Officers. The first meeting of the Group is scheduled for 27 November. To help the Council complete the needs assessment/service gap analysis, that is part of the application process, we are linking in with an independent

			piece of research that is being currently being carried out across the county, that is being accredited by Oxford Brookes University.
Supplementary question – Just want to ask of an indication of time scale for the first parts of the process acknowledging it's a very ongoing commitment.	Councillor Ruth Smith – Labour and Co-operative, Witney East	Councillor Rachel Crouch – Executive Member for Stronger Healthy Communities	The motion was put in place in July and we are hoping to be completed by August 2025.
Question 4 – Please could you confirm when a mental health champion will be in position?	Councillor Alex Wilson – Conservative, Kingham Rollright and Enstone.	Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council	Heather McCulloch is the Council's Officer Mental Health Champion Councillor Rachel Crouch – Executive Member for Stronger Healthy Communities is the Council's Mental Health Champion
Supplementary question – Now that the mental health champion is in place, will there be a meeting between leaders to discuss the expectations of the mental health champion and confirm what that will be?	Councillor Alex Wilson – Conservative, Kingham Rollright and Enstone	Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council	Thank you for the congratulations on the speed of the mental health champion that was put in place. Two health champions have been agreed for staff; Heather McCulloch and Cllr Rachel Crouch who has taken on Stronger Healthier Communities. The rational behind not taking on anyone else is because we have a really good fit. They meet on a regular basis and the issue of mental health is on the agenda every time they meet. The important thing about champions is we make it work and only for that reason.

			After that response Cllr Rachel Crouch commented that she had been in communication with Witney Town Football Club about Tough to Talk – work on suicide.
Question 5 – How many homeless people is the Council aware of in West Oxfordshire and more specifically Witney?	Councillor Jane Doughty – Conservative, Witney West	Councillor Geoff Saul – Executive Member for Housing and Social Care	The Housing Team are currently working with around 100 households who have been placed in some form of Temporary Accommodation under a homelessness duty. The Team is also working with around another 100 households who are in some form of housing crisis to prevent homelessness from occurring. As at 18 November 2024 West Oxfordshire has one confirmed rough sleeper in the Witney area who has so far refused all offers of accommodation. The Housing Team continue to work closely with our Outreach provider in ensuring that welfare checks are carried out and accommodation options discussed. Housing have also received reports of a further two suspected rough sleepers in the Chipping Norton area today (18 November) but this has not yet been verified. Anyone worried about a rough sleeper should report this through the following website: https://thestreetlink.org.uk/ giving the location and description of the person or contact the Housing Team at: housing@westoxon.gov.uk
Question 6 – Following on from that when was the last time the Council’s Housing Policy in relation to homeless people reviewed and how frequently is this done?	Councillor Jane Doughty – Conservative, Witney West	Councillor Geoff Saul – Executive Member for Housing and Social Care.	Local Authorities have a duty to publish a new homelessness strategy every 5 years. West Oxfordshire DC has signed up to the Countywide Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-2026: https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s57561/CA_OCT1921R09%20-%20Annex%201%20-%20Oxfordshires%20and%20homelessness%20sleeping%20strategy%202021-2026.pdf This Strategy is reviewed quarterly and annually by all Local Authority and County Council partners. West Oxfordshire DC also has an independent

			Prevention of Homelessness Strategy, and this has been reviewed during 2024. However, the delivery of the aims of the strategy is closely linked to the announcement of the Homelessness Prevention Grant Funding for 2025 – 2027. This announcement is due in December 2024 therefore the new Preventing Homelessness Strategy draft is scheduled to be available in January/February 2025.
Supplementary question – Can the homeless strategy be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee?	Councillor Jane Doughty – Conservative, Witney West	Councillor Geoff Saul – Executive Member for Housing and Social Care.	It is not for me to set the Overview and Scrutiny agenda however various homeless/housing issues are coming to Overview and Scrutiny in January, and there will be opportunities to raise your issue there.
Question 7 – Given that West Oxfordshire District Council is recording a deficit in regard to Green Waste, will the Executive Member consider reducing the Green Waste Fee from the current £50 ahead of the 25/26 budget?	Councillor Thomas Ashby - Conservative, Witney West	Councillor Lidia Arciszewska – Executive Member for Environment.	The garden waste service is very popular with residents, this year 32,457 licenses have been sold. This year the service has resulted in revenue of £1,622,850, compared to £1,483,425 last year. The current licence fee of £50 is the 2nd lowest in Oxfordshire, providing good value for money at just £2.17 per collection. The garden waste license fee is based on cost of delivering the service, from the initial purchase of the license to the emptying of bin. The same methodology will be used to set the fee in 2025/26.
Supplementary question – What are you going to do to increase the licenses we sell?	Councillor Thomas Ashby - Conservative,	Councillor Lidia Arciszewska – Executive	This is a popular service with residents and the revenue has to cover our costs. The fact that we have fewer licenses reflects many difference reasons one being the cost of living crisis. We don't have any deficit.

	Witney West	Member for Environment.	
Question 8 -There have been a number of complaints regarding trees. There have been many claims of subsidence over the past few years within my ward, therefore there is a real need for the Tree Management Policy to be reviewed urgently. Not only are there cases of subsidence, but many elderly residents are unable to afford Tree Surgeons to maintain Council owned shrubs, bushes and trees that are affecting their homes. Please can the Executive Member start the review on the Tree Management Policy in January 2025, as this is a Policy which is now out of date.	Councillor Thomas Ashby - Conservative, Witney West	Councillor Lidia Arciszewska – Executive Member for Environment.	As indicated at the last Council meeting in September, a review of the Tree Management Policy adopted in 2019 will be conducted early in 2025. The intention is to increase the scope and responsibilities of the (currently vacant) Tree Officer post within Planning Services to include practical works to Council trees as well as Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and Tree Conservation Area (TCA) applications. It is anticipated that, once appointed, the Tree Officer will also be able to review or input into a review of the Tree Management Policy.

Supplementary question – The tree management policy effects lots of members and wards can a working group be set up to look at this policy?	Councillor Thomas Ashby - Conservative, Witney West	Councillor Lidia Arciszewska – Executive Member for Environment.	This policy was set up by the previous administration late in 2019 we will review as early as next year.
Question 9 - How many fly-tipping incidents have been reported? How many that have been reported have had action taken against them? Please can the Executive Member review the Policy to ensure that all housing estates are covered by this policy?	Councillor Thomas Ashby - Conservative, Witney West	Councillor Lidia Arciszewska – Executive Member for Environment.	A total of 753 incidents of fly-tipping have been reported this year, 54 of these are duplicate cases. As a result, 130 site visits have been conducted by officers, of those visits 65 further investigations have been opened with 22 resulting in FPNs already being issued and a further 5 which will be issued shortly. In addition, 22 investigations are still ongoing. I believe this demonstrates a robust approach to environmental crime in West Oxfordshire and I would like to put on record my thanks to the officers who undertake this work and the Ubico crews who clear up the waste. Currently several covert cameras are deployed in fly-tipping hotspots in the district with a further 8 locations identified for future operations. Signage is placed in these locations warning that CCTV is being used, this has almost halted the number of incidents. The current policy covers environmental crime on land in public ownership. Incidents that occur on privately owned land are the responsibility of the landowner/tenant and there are no plans to review this.
Supplementary question – Thousands of Council tax papers are not receiving the service of fly tipping as they	Councillor Thomas Ashby - Conservative, Witney West	Councillor Lidia Arciszewska – Executive	The responsibility for fly tipping on private housing developments belongs to the owners and there are management companies responsible for doing

live on new estates. Can this policy cover all new housing estates to include all tax payers in WODC?		Member for Environment.	that. We can't improve on that. We are responsible for removing fly tipping from Council and public land.
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