

Members Questions & Responses for Council – 31 January 2024

Question	Raised By	Executive Member / Lead Officer	Response										
<p>Question 1 – Can the Executive Member for the Environment, let us know how many Garden Waste Licences were sold in the following years: 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 & 2023?</p>	<p>Councillor Thomas Ashby – Conservative, Witney West.</p>	<p>Councillor Lidia Arciszewska – Executive Member for the Environment / Simon Anthony – Business Manager, Environmental Services.</p>	<p>The table below shows garden waste subscription numbers for 2019-2022 to 2023-2024 inclusive. As can be seen from the table garden waste subscription demand has remained largely stable following incremental prices increases over the years. Subscriptions grew to their peak in 2020-2021 during lockdown as customers had greater disposable income and time to maintain their green spaces. Subscriptions have slightly declined in recent years due to the cost-of-living pressure among other factors although remain above 2019-20 levels.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1317 874 1868 1104"> <thead> <tr> <th>Period (Financial year)</th> <th>Total Number</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2019-2020</td> <td>32859</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020-2021</td> <td>34662</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021-2022</td> <td>33984</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2022-2023</td> <td>33426</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Period (Financial year)	Total Number	2019-2020	32859	2020-2021	34662	2021-2022	33984	2022-2023	33426
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<p>Question 2 – In the light of the possible changes to Publica, and employment of staff directly by WODC recently circulated, can the cost implications in relation to Pension contributions be</p>	<p>Councillor Harry St. John – Independent, North Leigh.</p>	<p>Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council / Madhu Richards – Director of Finance.</p>	<p>This issue was covered in the Publica Review Report, presented to the Executive on 15 November 2023. This report identified the risk of potentially significant one-off staffing costs, including possible redundancy and pension costs. The precise value of this cannot yet be established</p>										

<p>highlighted at an early stage if such employees (new or existing) will become members of the LGA/OCC pension scheme? This is so that Members can compare the current position with the new scenario. There is a mention of £1m pa extra contributions made in a recent report – How much might it cost WODC?</p>			<p>at present, but an assumption of £75,000 for ongoing pension costs was included in the budget reported to Executive in January.</p> <p>In line with the decisions of Executive, a business case for a new operating mode and an associated transition plan will be prepared in partnership with the other Publica Council's and with Publica. This work will help the Council understand the potential costs and inform future decisions.</p>
<p>Question 3 – I notice the Executive approved the process of Trade Union recognition of WODC staff – Has any Union previously been recognised by WODC?</p> <p>Are there any cost implications for WODC and how many Members, if any, of the Executive are themselves Union members, particularly members of GMB or Unison, which are likely to be the main Unions involved?</p>	<p>Councillor Harry St. John – Independent, North Leigh.</p>	<p>Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council / Zoe Campbell – Assistant Director, Organisational Effectiveness.</p>	<p>WODC historically has not recognised a Trade Union. Publica currently recognises both Unison and GMB and discussions are taking place with the Executive and HR regarding the process to recognise a trade union. To be recognised a Trade Union must confirm that it has at least 10% Union membership within the proposed bargaining unit that will be created by recognition. There are no cost implications to the Council. Membership of a trade union is a confidential matter between the union and the employee. As for Members of the Executive, any membership would be detailed on their Register of Interests as appropriate.</p>
<p>Question 4 – Last year, at the March Council, you replied to a member of the public's question regarding the Blenheim Solar Power Station, and I quote: -</p> <p>"We wish to make a fully informed judgement as to whether the harms of the proposal outweigh the benefits.</p>	<p>Councillor Harry St. John – Independent, North Leigh.</p>	<p>Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council / Phil Shaw - Business Manager – Development Management.</p>	<p>The statement I made last March, is one that I stand behind. If we are to influence this development, we need to engage in the process set out by Government, and use the limited powers that are given to us by the process wisely and at the appropriate time.</p> <p>In that regard, short term political grandstanding is unlikely to result in the best solution for WODC and its</p>

"We will carry out any assessment as considered necessary to inform our response to the Planning Inspectorate."

Our Planning Officers are about to report to the Development Control Committee being held on Monday 5 February 2024.

Can you confirm why, despite being Leader of this Council, and County Councillor for Woodstock, which Division includes a number of parishes that are currently blighted by the scheme, and in light of our Council organising a bus tour of the whole site (to better inform every member of what is involved) plus a number of walkabouts at key view points within the site, you decided not to join the 11 members (on a 40 seater bus hired, one assumes at some public expense) who did come on the tour; neither did you encourage your Executive colleagues (or indeed all Members) to all come along too.

Given the sheer scale of this proposal - roughly 2500 acres stretching over 7 miles long in our District and Cherwell, let alone more in the Vale of White Horse, this absence does seem an oversight – would you agree?

Do you think your constituents will be happy that you missed the opportunity to view the whole site and hear what your

residents, and a more nuanced and considered approach is needed. I am satisfied, having been kept abreast of this development in some detail by Officers, that we are on the correct course to have the most influence.

I would certainly have loved to have been on the site visit, but I am afraid that I could not attend due to two significant meetings – one of which was with leaders of other Councils on matters of equally significant importance to this Council.

As advised above however, I am fully aware of the extent of the scheme and the concerns being raised such that I know the importance of this development to our local residents – as I am sure is the case for all those who will be looking into this matter at the upcoming Development Control Committee.

This is why I want to ensure we do this right. Sometimes doing it right means that it does not give best political advantage, but that is in my view what real leadership is about.

<p>officers were saying on site? Isn't that what Leadership is about? Taking the lead on a key issue? (I fully realise that the final decision on this proposal is not going to be ours, but our initial response will carry a lot of weight hopefully – given most of the site is in our domain!).</p> <p>Do you agree that you and some of your/our colleagues could well be at a disadvantage when this matter comes to be debated at WODC's Development Control Committee, having not made your/themselves available for the tour?</p> <p>As they say, I think we should be told and welcome your response.</p>			
<p>Question 5 – Does he feel it's appropriate for his Deputy Leader to be now working for a communications company that is involved in work between this Council and developers given his role in the Council?</p>	<p>Councillor Michele Mead – Conservative, Carterton South.</p>	<p>Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council / Giles Hughes – Chief Executive.</p>	<p>The Deputy Leader refers to his role as an associate with the Community Communications Partnership in his register of interests, and mentions that the CCP is communications company providing a link between the community and a range of service providers. The Deputy Leader is clear in his statement that in his role with the CCP he is not involved in any way, nor is he privy to any information, regarding developments within or impacting Oxfordshire or West Oxfordshire. Therefore, there is no conflict of interest with his role as Deputy Leader and Executive Member.</p>
<p>Question 6 – How much is the new interim programme director costing, and is this cost coming from the £200,000 set aside for the Publica transition?</p>	<p>Councillor Michele Mead – Conservative,</p>	<p>Councillor Alaric Smith – Executive Member for Finance</p>	<p>The Interim Programme Director has been appointed on a day rate of £1287. This cost will be shared equally between West Oxfordshire District Council, Cotswold District Council and Forest of Dean District Council.</p>

	Carterton South.	/ Madhu Richards – Director of Finance.	The West Oxfordshire component of the cost will be funded from funding set aside for the transition and preparatory work.
Question 7 – While presenting the Draft Budget, Councillor Smith alluded to the cost of vehicle hire for waste lorries due to the ageing fleet. Can he tell us how much it has cost this council this year?	Councillor Michele Mead – Conservative, Carterton South.	Councillor Alaric Smith – Executive Member for Finance / Simon Anthony – Business Manager, Environmental Services.	<p>The forecast hire costs for 2023/24 are £694,000. The hire of waste vehicles is part of the Ubico contract sum, the annual growth or saving for which is highlighted in the MTFS. In 2024/25 growth in the Ubico contract is £826,000 which includes employee costs, diesel, inflation, service & maintenance and vehicle hire.</p> <p>The hire of vehicles provides service reliability and reduces the repair costs to maintain the ageing fleet as vehicles at the end of economic life are not used for daily rounds. Hire vehicles will be necessary until there is an agreed fleet replacement strategy, work for which has already started with a report to Executive planned for June 2024.</p> <p>Savings in the Ubico contract have been included in the MTFS in 2025/26 in anticipation of the reduction in hire costs and repair costs as new vehicles are purchased, initially 4 before the end of this financial year, but other costs and savings in 2025/26 related to other contract items cannot be estimated at this stage.</p>
Question 8 – Can the Executive Member confirm when the A4095 between Witney and North Leigh will have a visit from the street cleaning team to collect rubbish?	Councillor Liam Walker – Conservative, Hailey, Leafield and Minster Lovell.	Councillor Lidia Arciszewska – Executive Member for the Environment / Simon Anthony – Business Manager,	Ubico are currently litter picking the A40. The A4095 cleanse will start on 31 January, however this will be the low-speed sections of the road, or the sections of the road that can safely be cleansed without a lane closure. The high-speed sections of the road that

		Environmental Services.	<p>require a lane closure are scheduled to be completed in March.</p> <p>Ubico litter picks all A roads twice a year, this frequency is built into the contract. There will be occasion where Ubico are required to complete a third cleanse in a year which is typically as a result of a third party having cut the grass without Ubico's knowledge which then exposes litter which needs to be cleansed.</p> <p>The A4095 was litter picked throughout 2023 in stages as following a pre-pick survey it was deemed that a full litter pick across the whole length wouldn't have been an efficient use of staff time, this approach is industry practice and allows targeted attention to key areas. However, a full litter cleanse of A4095 was completed in August / September 2022.</p> <p>Officers will provide a 12-month schedule for litter picking around West Oxfordshire to give members an indication of when the litter picks may occur, this will be available in March. However, it should be noted that these times are only indicative as litter picking events can move as they are dependent on a number of factors including other urgent works which may be required across the district.</p>
Question 9 – Can the Executive Member confirm what funding was used for the purchase of the Marriotts Walk shopping centre?	Councillor Liam Walker – Conservative, Hailey, Leafield	Councillor Duncan Enright – Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member	The purchase price of Marriott's Walk Shopping Centre was £9.4m, and this was financed from cash reserves available at the time (this is known as internal borrowing). These reserves are a combination of Council Tax, Business Rates, Grants and Section 106 monies. As

	and Minster Lovell.	for Economic Development / Madhu Richards – Director of Finance.	the capital programme was significantly curtailed last year due to a lack of suitable investments opportunities, this method of internal financing from cash reserves was available for this purchase, without the need for external borrowing.
Question 10 – Can the Executive member update Council as to what progress has been made to secure sites in or around Witney for new 3G pitches?	Councillor Liam Walker – Conservative, Hailey, Leafield and Minster Lovell.	Councillor Tim Sumner – Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects / Rachel Biles – Leisure Specialist.	<p>Over the last year, Officers have been working hard with Woodgreen School in Witney, about potentially developing the 3G pitch on the school playing fields, parallel to the existing sand based artificial turf pitch. In order to support their proposals, the Council tasked the school with developing a business case to include the following sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic need for 3G pitch at the site; • Research and consultation; • Management and operational structure; • Potential usage and community use; • Sustainability (including sinking fund); • Marketing; and • Environmental consideration. <p>Despite numerous meetings and email exchanges, the Council is still yet to receive a comprehensive business case from the school. Therefore, have highlighted to the school that we are going to start looking at other locations. Officers are very aware of the details and expiry clause on the Section 106 agreement (16/01450/OUT), which specifies that the contribution has to be spend on grassroots football in Witney by 2029.</p>

			<p>Officers from the Leisure team have also been in discussions with colleagues in planning, around alternative locations, as sports lighting is a requirement and total amount of land required for just the fenced 3G area is 7,420m². Officers have started looking previously identified sites and met with Sport England, Oxfordshire Football Association, Oxfordshire Cricket Board, Rugby Football Union, and England Hockey on 26th January 2024 to discuss the pros and cons of these sites from a national governing body of sport perspective and also to determine any sites that are viable to take forward. Officers now plan to write up a summary of the findings.</p>
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