

Supplementary Papers

Council

held in The Ridgeway, The Beacon, Portway, Wantage, OX12 9BY
on Wednesday 17 July 2019 at 7.00 pm

Open to the public including the press

12. Questions on notice -written responses (Pages 2 - 3)

Agenda Item 12

Council 18 July 2019 – Written responses to questions submitted by councillors in accordance with Council procedure rule 33

Question 1: Councillor Simon Howell to Councillor Emily Smith, Leader of the council

Officers put in place an excellent and detailed induction programme for new and returning councillors. Could the leader of the council summarise the level of attendance?

Written answer

There has indeed been a very good programme of training available to members. This started on 8 May with two sessions for all our councillors to meet with the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team, and other key members of staff, and all were allocated a 1:1 'Officer Buddy' as a point of contact. 37 of the 38 councillors attended. The one member who missed this slot due to a pre-booked holiday, has had a 1:1 catch up session and has the useful induction booklet provided.

Planning training sessions have been attended by 13 councillors – planning committee members and some others.

26 councillors attended the Good Governance training held in June. Members who did not attend have been provided with the slides from that session and a date for a mop-up briefing for those who could not attend is being finalised.

Question 2: Councillor Eric Batts to Councillor Catherine Webber, Cabinet member for planning.

What is the new administration's approach to the Local Plan Part 2 now that the inspector has found the plan to be sound?

Written answer

The Liberal Democrats were voted into office on May 2 2019 by Vale residents because they strongly opposed the proposed Local Plan Part 2 (LPP2) and the previously adopted Local Plan Part 1.

In particular, they opposed the excessively high housing targets, the lack of adequate infrastructure, the lack of genuinely affordable homes and the further erosion of the Green Belt.

As we have inherited this Local Plan at a stage when it is nearly complete and ready to be adopted our options are very limited.

However, the Inspector's initial letter in response to Oxford City's housing figures in their proposed Local Plan has cast doubt on the level of Oxford's unmet need and in turn the housing targets on which our own LPP2 is based.

We are exploring the implications of this and all other legal, social and economic ramifications.

Our intention is to deliver what residents voted for, within the constraints of previous decisions and the law. Once we have fully examined the facts and are able to make sound decisions, we will notify Council on how we intend to proceed.

Question 3: Councillor Elaine Ware to Councillor Emily Smith, Leader of the council

Following the appointment of Cabinet members at the annual meeting of Council, could the leader share the rationale for an expanded Cabinet arrangement to the maximum size allowed by the constitution?

Written answer

As the question states, the number of Cabinet posts are in line with the constitution and national guidelines. But we decided to use all posts allowed in year one because:

1. The problems we have been left by the previous administration are significant. We have inherited a desperate lack of truly affordable homes and a lack of infrastructure to meet existing need (let alone the levels of housing growth committed to the Housing and Growth Deal), and most importantly we need to find ways to make savings and generate enough income to make sure the council doesn't run out of money in four years time.
If we are to meet these huge challenges, as well as develop innovative new policies in line with our priorities across the council's services areas, we need to make sure we have the leadership capacity to do that work - particularly in this first year.
2. The previous Leader held two portfolios, but officer and Local Government Association mentors have advised me that the Leader should not also take on a portfolio to ensure cover and good governance.
3. We are a large group in what we intend to be a member-led administration. It's important to me that as many members of our administration as possible are involved as much as possible in policy development. The Cabinet system is far from ideal and we are looking to review the constitution, including the role and structure of cabinet and other positions.