

Supplementary Papers

Council

held as a Virtual Meeting
on Wednesday 24 March 2021 at 7.00 pm

Open to the public including the press

11. Questions on notice

A. Question from Councillor Gascoigne to Councillor Helen Pighills, Cabinet member for healthy communities

In light of the disappearance and tragic death of Sarah Everard, women have taken to social media to share their experiences and talk about the many ways in which they have all felt unsafe when just trying to go about their lives. What assurances can the council give that it is doing what it can to protect women and vulnerable people in the district to go about their lives?

Written Answer

There has been a lot in the media over recent days about the safety of women. Figures from the latest annual crime figures show that violent crime in Oxfordshire is much lower than the national average. The recorded rates of violent crime per 1000 population are 13.7 for South Oxfordshire and 13.4 in Vale of White Horse. Nationally this figure is 76 per 1000 population and our districts remain some of the safest places to live in the UK.

The community safety team work in partnership with other organisations on issues including violence and domestic abuse. This includes the promotion of a number of national schemes:

- The Ask for Angela scheme allows anyone to discreetly ask for help if they do not feel safe. We have promoted this scheme to licenced premises across Vale of White Horse and currently have 38 licenced premises signed up.
- The Safe Places scheme helps vulnerable people if they feel scared or at risk while they are out and about in the community and need support right away. We have 26 businesses registered on this scheme which are recognisable by a sign in the window.

- Ask for Ani is a new scheme launched in January to assist victims of domestic abuse in seeking support. Pharmacies can sign up to the scheme and customers can ask for assistance from trained staff who can signpost them to support. The community safety team will be promoting this scheme later this year.

We will continue to promote all of these schemes when businesses reopen as the current lockdown restrictions are eased and expand their coverage.

We are also working in partnership with The Training Effect who are delivering online training for parents of secondary school children aimed at supporting parents at helping to keep their children safe. The current online courses have been over-subscribed so we are planning to run additional events.

In addition, one of our key priorities is tackling domestic abuse, we provide funding to the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service who deliver outreach support to victims of domestic abuse in our area. We also provide a sanctuary scheme to enable victims of abuse to feel safe in their own homes. Both the domestic abuse service and the sanctuary scheme are available to both male and female victims.

From April we plan to host the Building Respectful Families programme within the districts. This programme aims to reduce or stop child on parent violence by helping young people manage their frustrations, help parents increase their sense of well-being, reduce their isolation, to clarify clear boundaries for unacceptable and acceptable behaviour, examine and build strategies for the future.

All taxi drivers that the council licences are subject to safety checks so that residents can feel safe taking a taxi home at any time of the day or night. All of our licenced taxis that can be hailed in the street are identifiable by a roof sign displaying the council logo and the driver will be wearing an identification badge.

In addition, the district councils operate a public space CCTV service in all of our main towns. Operators monitor the cameras during peak periods including evenings and weekends and have a direct link to the police should they see anything that raises concerns. When the cameras are not being monitored, they record footage that can be used at a later time if required.

B. Question from Councillor Medley to Councillor Roberts, Cabinet member for development and infrastructure

Councillor Gascoigne and I can confirm first-hand that during the past year of the pandemic and the various lockdowns, having access to green open spaces on the Great Western Park (GWP) development has been a lifeline for many residents.

With the hope of lockdown restrictions lifting in the coming months, it would be fantastic if residents of GWP are able to finally access and use the full range of community facilities this summer. Please can the Cabinet member provide an update on the following key items of infrastructure on Great Western Park:

1. District Community Centre: when will this be open to the public and available for bookings, how will it be run and will the GWP Community Support Group be able to run their Community larder from there?
2. The Skate Park, Tennis Courts, Multi-Use Games Area and Healthcare Site: when will these be transferred to the Vale?

Written Answer

From 12 April, and in line with the government's roadmap, a phased approach to opening the District community centre will commence. We are only allowed to hire the facilities for very limited uses in the first instance such as to support groups, supervised activities for children, parent-and-child groups (with up to 15 attending plus under-fives) including dance classes, musical activities, cubs, scouts, brownies and parent and toddler groups and also for communal worship, wedding reception's or commemorative events like a wake (numbers are limited to 15 people). Other activities such as art classes, clubs, craft groups, adult exercise classes are not yet permitted. The GWP Community Support Group falls under this first tranche of uses and officers will discuss the detailed booking arrangements with them shortly.

A new team of officers will initially be responsible for running the District Community Centre together with the other two centres at Great Western Park. Detailed information about how to book and the hire charges will be available on our website shortly.

Final amendments to the transfer documents for the healthcare site are now with Taylor Wimpey and we are expecting the transfer of land and commuted sum imminently.

The complex legal processes for transferring the tennis courts and multi-use games area to the council and leasing them to Boundary Park Sports Association are in the final stages and it is hoped that transfer will take place in the next few weeks.

Unfortunately, there are matters concerning the skate park, where following legal advice, we are unable to issue practical certification for the area until Taylor Wimpey has resolved the issue of who is to adopt piped surface water drainage crossing the area. Discussions are ongoing and Taylor Wimpey are in contact with Leep Utilities who have adopted drainage elsewhere at Great Western Park to try and resolve the situation. Officers are working closely with Taylor Wimpey to push for swift resolution so that the skate park transfer can take place as soon as possible.