

Written responses to supplementary questions – 21 February 2024 Council meeting

7. Supplementary question from Councillor James to Councillor Thomas, Leader of the council and Cabinet member for climate action and the environment, strategic partnerships and place

Supplementary question

Thank you for the reply on how we are engaging through our partnerships on our future electricity supply and distribution infrastructure. My supplementary question relates to the parts of my written question which haven't yet been answered by the written response.

Are we also already working through any partnerships or other forums with the local Distribution Network Operator SSEN on the resilience of the current infrastructure which is subject to frequent failures, and what can we do to help residents get a reliable supply?

As a Council, is there anything that we are already doing, or could be doing, to ensure that vulnerable residents are kept safe when power cuts occur?

Written response

Thank you for your supplementary question.

As we have no direct role in holding SSEN to account, there is a limit to what we can do. Of course, we can seek to influence them and to that end we wrote to SSEN collectively as the Future Oxfordshire Partnership early last year. In that letter we asked to meet with them and to hear their plans to improve resilience of the power network.

In response SSEN met with the leaders of all the Oxfordshire councils last April. They talked about their plans which included a number of infrastructure upgrades over the next few years. As we are working with SSEN on local area energy planning we will continue to take every opportunity to discuss matters of current supply and resilience.

There is some advice available on the SSEN website on dealing with power cuts:
<https://www.ssen.co.uk/power-cuts-emergencies/what-to-do-during-a-power-cut/>

Most cuts are of short duration and don't lend themselves to council intervention, but in the event of major disruption we would obviously look at invoking emergency plans.

8. Question from Councillor Foxhall to Councillor Coleman, Cabinet member for Environmental Services and Waste

Supplementary question

Thank you for the detailed answer to my question about proposed introductions of charging for public toilets. I am sure we are all disappointed that so much of our residents' money is being spent repairing vandalism, and that the result of that is the need to charge residents a second time to use our toilets.

The response to my question states that a charge will be introduced at Abbey Meadows. This is not surprising given the well-publicised vandalism experienced there. But the final spreadsheet of charges that I was sent as Scrutiny chair did not include a proposal for a charge at Abbey Meadows for 2024/25. On the other hand, the spreadsheet does show a definite charge at Portway in Wantage, which the answer to my question now says is only potentially to be introduced in the future. This may be a case of a single 20p in the wrong spreadsheet box but please could it be clarified which of these plans are correct?

I'm still very concerned that charging for toilets using a digital card access system will continue to particularly disadvantage elderly residents and visitors. Will the Cabinet member commit to communicating these charges with town and parish councils and ensure that the Vale website is updated to clearly identify which of our toilets charge a fee, and to direct residents to how they can apply for a RADAR key. For example, that these keys are available to purchase through AGE UK?

Written response

I have received clarification from the Head of Development and Corporate Landlord that it is in fact Hales Meadow that has a charge rather than Abbey Meadow. I confirm that there are no plans to introduce a charge in 24/25 for the use of public toilets at the Abbey Meadows facility, however vandalism is an issue at this location, and for that reason introducing a charge at this location will need to be kept under review.

- There is an existing fee of 20p for entry at the toilets in:
- Hales Meadow car park, Abingdon (as you leave Abingdon over the bridge on the RHS)
- School Lane, Grove (at the end of the parade of shops)
- Plus new for 24/25 the newly renovated unisex toilet in the Charter car park, Abingdon

All are cashless – access by contactless card only no cash accepted. All the above have **free** access using a Radar key. These keys are available by contacting facilities@southandvale.gov.uk

With the newly refurbished toilet in Portway, the Changing Places toilet is accessed via Radar key only. The other toilets are still free at Portway.

Our webpage has also been updated to reflect this and detail added regarding the availability of collecting RADAR keys: <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/sports-and-activities/getting-out-and-about/parks-open-spaces-and-play-areas/public-toilets/>. The team will also work with the communications team to update Town and Parish councils about the charges.