

Written Responses to questions

1. Question from Councillor Jane Murphy to Councillor Sue Cooper, Leader of the council

Can the Leader of the Council detail what she has already done and how she will continue to support this Council's decision to adopt the Local Plan; and can she confirm she acknowledges that as Leader of the Council she is required to represent Full Council's decision in this (and any other) regard

Answer

The Council adopted the South Local Plan 2035 on 10 December 2020 and it is being used by the Planning Committee and officers in all planning decisions. All councillors must act in accordance with adopted policy when making council decisions.

2. Question from Councillor Jane Murphy to Councillor Anne-Marie Simpson, Cabinet member for planning

Can the Cabinet Member for Planning confirm that she has informed the Department of Transport, as agreed by Full Council, of this council's opposition to the building of a car based third road bridge over the Thames at Reading, and could she make this available on the website.

Answer

On 10 October 2019, Council resolved that the Leader should write to the leaders of Reading Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council and Bracknell Forest Council, together with MPs John Howell, John Redwood, Matt Rodda and Theresa May. This action was undertaken on 14 October 2019 and a press release along with the letter was published on our website and circulated to all Councillors. More recently, a further letter was sent by the Leader to the leaders of Reading Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council, Bracknell Forest Council and Oxfordshire County Council confirming that South Oxfordshire District Council does not support a car-based designed bridge. This was sent on 7 December 2020 and is also available on our website. I am happy to ask officers to ensure that this letter is copied to all relevant Government departments, asking them to confirm that our position is noted.

3. Question from Councillor Ian Snowdon to Councillor Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Cabinet member for community services

During the last eleven months South Oxfordshire has witnessed so many incredible residents rise to the challenge of helping each other in these difficult and unprecedented times, finding solutions to problems to ensure our most vulnerable are cared for during this worldwide emergency. Can the Cabinet member for community services give an update on the number of these groups in our district and what plans the council has for recognising these wonderful volunteers and their amazing dedication to their communities?

Written Responses to questions

Answer

In South Oxfordshire, a total of 106 voluntary and community groups have directly supported the Covid-19 response. Of those 106 groups, 58 are informal groups set up by residents. Our voluntary and community groups have helped their neighbours with shopping, friendly phone calls, errands and other acts of kindness too numerous to list. As a council, we have been able to connect residents to these groups for ongoing support and the relationships that have formed within communities as a result of this work have made all the difference to those residents as this pandemic has developed. Quite simply, we would not have been able to deliver the response we have and continue to do so without them, and we are enormously grateful to be working alongside our voluntary and community groups.

The council funds 17 of the formal VCS organisations who have increased their efforts during this time by providing food, debt advice, helping those who experience loneliness and isolation or counselling those who have experienced domestic abuse or mental health issues. In recognition of this, Cabinet agreed to conditionally extend their grant for a further year towards the provision of COVID -19 response and recovery services in 2021/22. We were also able to provide 8 grants through the emergency assistance grant to VCS's who were directly supporting residents with food provision.

We have acknowledged throughout this pandemic the vital role of our voluntary and community groups, and to continually thank them for their work in regular email bulletins, direct phone calls from our community connectors, through social media bites raising their profile and letters and greeting cards sent from officers and councillors. We look forward to a time when we can thank and celebrate their work in person.

Based on our experience of the pandemic and the partnerships forged as a result, we will be considering innovative ways in which we can maintain, equip and support the network of local groups/VCS's so that we can ensure that we can together advance the wellbeing agenda as per the corporate plan post-Covid.

Showing appreciation as we have is important, but we want to go further and put in place a framework which recognises these groups as valued partners.

4. Question from Councillor Ian White to Councillor Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Cabinet member for community services

Why do we no longer promote the South Oxfordshire Charitable Lottery, nor publish the results of the weekly draw on Twitter, whilst continuing to do so on Facebook? The last results were posted on 3 October 2020 with three subsequent Christmas and New Year's best wishes postings during December.

How much officer time is used to run the Lottery?

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Given that a paper was presented to the Vale of White Horse Cabinet and approved on the subject of establishing a Lottery following on from an initial approval in 2018, is consideration being given to the possibility of merging our Scheme with the Vale's Scheme, and benefiting from any cost savings, whilst at the same time giving a greater opportunity for successful promotion of the Scheme(s)?

Answer

One of the main benefits of the council's community lottery scheme, is that Gatherwell (the provider) manages the majority of the administration required to operate it successfully. The support needed from our officers is minimal, and is managed by Community Enablement alongside their other priorities.

Gatherwell provides a high level of support to existing and potential good causes, but also regularly produces marketing and promotional materials for them to use to encourage their supporters and stakeholders to purchase tickets. In Gatherwell's experience of running these schemes up and down the country for many local authorities, this has proved the most effective way of raising awareness of a community lottery and generating income for good causes, much more so than centralised promotion and marketing.

We do promote the lottery alongside the good causes, however Covid-19 communications has taken priority this year. We are planning some promotional activity to mark the scheme's 3rd anniversary in March.

From recent discussions with Gatherwell, if there was appetite from the Vale for a shared lottery, it would be possible to create one. We are happy to discuss the potential for a merged scheme with the Vale, if they indicate an appetite to do so.