

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

It is clear that the growing budget deficit cannot be bridged by income raising activity; to claim otherwise would be to mislead councillors and residents.

As the budget is a Council responsibility and not limited to the administration, will the Leader ask the Section 151 Officer to bring a report to Cabinet and Full Council on the full impact of all decisions taken?

Answer

The council's finance position was laid out in detail in the budget setting report for 2021/22 that Cabinet and Council considered in February and which Councillor Murphy and her group supported. A report on the background to budget setting for 2022/23 will come forward in the Autumn for Cabinet to consider. The budget setting reports for 2022/23 will come forward, as usual, to Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Council in February 2022. In the meantime, all cabinet and council reports include a section on financial implications that details the impact of all decisions on the council's finances.

The budget deficit is significant, and it will need a raft of measures to be implemented over time to reduce the draw on reserves. However, the deficit is something that we inherited from the previous Conservative administration and has been exacerbated by the Coronavirus pandemic. We also still have no idea what our future funding will be as the Conservative government continues to give us one year settlements. With no indication of future funding financial planning is very difficult. As the previous administration took decisions that meant that we inherited the budget deficit, perhaps they would like to identify their solutions for the problems they created?

**B. Question from Councillor Ken Arlett to Councillor Sue Cooper,
Leader of the council**

At the end of June an inspector granted planning permission on appeal. The reason given was that South Oxfordshire District Council only had 4.21 years of land supply instead of the minimum five years. South Oxfordshire District Council is suggesting that it has 5.33 years of land supply.

What was the land supply level at the time of the appeal? If the answer is over five years as has been suggested, what action will the Leader and district council planning officers be taking against the inspector's decision?

Answer

As the elected member will no doubt note from the published appeal decision, at the time of the appeal *“the difference between the main parties comes down to the Council’s position that there is a 5.08 year supply of deliverable housing sites and the Appellant’s assertion that it is instead a 4.21-year supply.”*

Members will appreciate that land supply is never constant, and can be subject to significant changes at times as development moves forward or not, indeed I previously wrote to the Secretary of State in July 2020 specifically seeking relaxation of the 5 YHLS through the period of the COVID pandemic specifically because of the possibility that some of the wider impacts of the pandemic on housing completions could have a detrimental impact on housing completions during that period and temporarily impact our 5YHLS. Several of the Council’s group leaders also supported this view. Regrettably, the Secretary of State did not support such a change, perhaps because at that time he did not consider the pandemic as something that would still be significantly impacting residents and businesses across the Country some 12 months later.

The Council is reviewing the inspector’s decision carefully and will take a view on any appropriate action or response in due course.

C. Question from Councillor Stefan Gawrysiak to Councillor Anne-Marie Simpson, Cabinet member for planning

Recently “Bioabundance” have pursued three requests for permission to pursue a judicial review through the courts.

Can the Cabinet portfolio holder for planning please state:-

- a) The cost of these cases to the district councils
- b) The hours of officer’s/legal time spent preparing the district council’s defence

Answer

- a) The Council spent £6,765 on external legal advice, drafting of documents and court appearances. A costs Order was made in the council’s favour to reclaim costs of £8,265.69 from Bioabundance, in respect of external legal expenditure and a contribution to in-house legal officer time.
- b) Not all staff record their time but we estimate that in-house legal staff, planning officers, communications officers and senior management team have spent in excess of 200 hours in total on this judicial review.

D. Question from Councillor Celia Wilson to Councillor Sue Cooper, Leader of the council

Will you, as Leader of the council, support (and encourage others to support) the principle and process of achieving a Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) in Didcot, to serve

people living in both the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse parts of Didcot town and in the surrounding villages ?

If so, would your support include any or all of the following measures, or others:

- work cross-authority and cross-party to encourage South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and Oxfordshire County Council to make it their policy to promote the proposal actively to Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (OCCG)
- become active in pressing the OCCG to commit to providing Didcot MIU as a matter of urgency
- provide financial support and attendance at public meetings on the matter
- Be instrumental in introducing appropriate public transport to serve the Unit from the more difficult areas
- other financial and community involvement led by local councillors and organisations

Answer

As Leader, and with the support of officers, I met with Directors for the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (OCCG) on 24 May 2021. A meeting is still in the process of being arranged with Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group.

The discussion with OCCG included discussion of how population forecasts are used to plan healthcare requirements in the district and how the council can improve working with the CCG to ensure healthcare needs are included in S106 agreements and ensuring the associated monies are spent in a timely manner.

Following that meeting, officers have put in place regular meetings with the OCCG to maintain these discussions and to provide an opportunity to discuss particular site issues, including Didcot. Personally, whilst I would like to see an Minor Injuries Unit in Didcot, as I believe it would reduce the need for residents to travel further afield to receive treatment, and would therefore align with our commitment to address the climate emergency, it is not within the district council's remit to put this in place. Consequently, I will ask officers, and work with them, to get a better understanding of the CCG's position and their evidence base, specifically around the need for an MIU in Didcot or elsewhere in South Oxfordshire, ensuring the Council is a positive and constructive partner to them.

Officers are also in the process of arranging a presentation for all councillors by the OCCG, which hopefully will give us all a greater understanding as to how they operate and propose and prioritise future reforms.

We have worked closely with the OCCG through the pandemic, developing a strong partnership approach which I look forward to continuing to develop, and as Leader of SODC, I fully support the principle of working with partners to deliver the very best possible health care provision for all our residents.