

## **Council**

**Monday 16 December 2024**

### **Written Questions – responses from the Leader**

**Question From: Councillor Eddie Reeves**

**Question To: Leader of the Council, Councillor David Hingley**

**Topic: Small Business Champion**

#### **Question**

“Small businesses, especially those in our retail and hospitality sectors, are the lifeblood of our local economy. They keep our town centres and larger village centres alive.

Regrettably, the Leader of Oxfordshire County Council has so far refused to appoint a Small Business Champion to act a single point of contact for local businesses concerned about the impact of *that* Council’s policies on their trade.

Will the Leader of *this* Council now appoint a Small Business Champion, drawn from an opposition political group, to ensure that businesses across Banbury, Bicester and our larger villages have a meaningful voice in local decision-making?”

#### **Response from the Leader**

*According to the Councils constitution (10.7), Member Champions will only be appointed in support of policies and objectives where not directly covered by existing Executive portfolios. The Council’s responsible Executive member supporting local economic growth, including for small businesses, is the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Property & Regeneration, and of course all elected members are a point of contact for businesses within their own wards (with officer support available, as required)*

*On behalf of the Council, officers (especially the economic growth service) provide a point of contact for all businesses throughout the district, for inward investors, and for residents starting businesses or seeking work/careers with local employers.*

*In 2024/25, the Council has also - through its UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) – offered support to Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) throughout the district through, including:*

***Support programme for pre-start and start-up businesses – Cherwell Business Spark.***

***Support programme for growing SMEs – Cherwell Business Accelerator.***

***Rural Business Grants (REPF for small and micro businesses).***

***Economic Forum – in addition to day-to-day contact, an annual event for the Council to engage with key employers and partners.***

***Cherwell Business Awards - Headline sponsorship to engage all businesses and to champion/spread best practices.***

***Business Needs Survey – occasional detail research to identify the assistance required by businesses - to inform projects and services to respond to those needs.***

***Vacant premises survey – to identify and facilitate the restoration of business premises in our urban centres to become available for businesses to occupy.***

***Decarbonisation support – to engage with businesses through a Sustainable Business Development Officer, and to provide free carbon assessments and tailored decarbonisation plans.***

*The Council also works in partnership with local business networks, attending and supporting events (subject to available resources).*

**Question From: Councillor Donna Ford**

**Question To: Leader of the Council, Councillor David Hingley**

**Topic: Local banking Facilities**

**Question**

“Further to Cllr Pruden's motion of 18 December 2023, please confirm what, if any, positive action has been taken to improve access to local banking facilities, especially for our vulnerable and elderly residents?”

**Response from the Leader**

*Officers met with Cllr Pruden shortly after the motion to discuss next steps.*

*This included continuing to market empty units within our commercial estate. At this point, no banking services providers have approached the council seeking additional space in any of our assets.*

*In terms of current provision, Post Offices continue to provide local access to a range of essential banking facilities including savings, banking, borrowing and money transfers.*

*There are 5 post offices in Banbury, 5 post offices in Bicester and 5 post offices in and around the Kidlington area (including Bletchington and Cutteslowe). There is a Post Office concession within WHSmith at Castle Quay.*

*A number of village centres also have post offices which provide banking facilities across the rural areas of Cherwell.*

*Importantly, this council extended its money advice service through Citizens Advice in September 2024.*

*The money advice service access is predominantly through telephone or online however there is a drop-in service at hubs. It has been well used by residents facing financial hardship who may not be able to access other forms of financial advice and support and was extended through to 2026, in September 2024.*

**Question From: Councillor Donna Ford**

**Question To: Leader of the Council, Councillor David Hingley**

**Topic: Oxfordshire County Council Recycling Centres**

**Question**

“Can you confirm if this council was consulted by Oxfordshire County council before they brought in compulsory advance booking for visiting the county’s recycling centres?”

**Response from the Leader**

*Officers in Environmental Services were made aware through the Oxfordshire recycling and waste partnership of the proposed changes to Household Waste Recycling Centres to introduce a booking system for all visits. We are not aware of a formal consultation with the Council.*