

CABINET – 16 OCTOBER 2012

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Questions received from the following Members:

1. **From Councillor Alan Armitage to Councillor Rodney Rose**

“Why were the local councillors not informed at the right time of the demise RH Transport and the effects on the local bus services for their divisions?”

Answer:

“County council staff briefed councillors and made sure all updates on the hard work undertaken to find new bus operators for RH Routes were emailed to county councillors throughout Thursday, 4 October and Friday, 5 October. The website was updated promptly at each important juncture and the media linked in with the council as part of a managed public information exercise – both inside and outside of normal working hours. The initial suggestion that RH Transport were facing problems only came to the attention of officers during the course of Wednesday, 3 October.”

2. **From Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Charles Shouler**

“Will the failure of RH Transport end up costing the council more for the services provided?”

Answer:

“The cost to the Council is likely to be more than £400,000 although absolute final costs are still to be settled.”

3. **From Councillor Jenny Hannaby to Councillor Arash Fatemian**

“Would he agree that putting up the charges for Day Centres, some as high as 700%, might lead to the demise of our centres so vital for the health and wellbeing of elderly residents?”

Answer:

“Increasing charges is a difficult issue but we are committed to finding a way to continue providing these services and it is important to note that these charges will **only** apply to people who do not meet the criteria to receive services under FACS (Fair Access to Care). Those in greatest need and

those who cannot afford to pay will continue to have their care funded by the council.

As you say the proposed changes do appear to be a high increase and that is mainly due to the fact that charges have not been reviewed or increased to date. The current charge of £4.81 in the seven social and community managed centres is not sustainable and we are consulting on an increase of £15 per day for 5 hours of attendance. This represents approximately half of the actual cost to provide the service so the County Council would continue to subsidise the centres by up to 50%. I think the 700% you refer to must be in regards to the Centre run by Leonard Cheshire in Witney, which currently charges a much lower rate, so there will be a bigger gap between current and proposed charges.

We have looked at how best to sustain these centres, which we know provide important support to people, their families and carers in local communities and as such have had to look at all options regarding funding. As part of that work, we looked at what other similar Local Authorities are doing and we found that many are charging the full cost, which we believe would be too cost prohibitive, so in Oxfordshire we are only consulting on an increase in charges to people, as we have decided not to charge at full cost.

I am mindful of the potential risks due to the proposed increases and our aim is to avoid, as you say, “the demise of our centres” by finding a pragmatic outcome, which can sustain these services into the future.

As you know the consultation ends on 31st October and we will need to analyse the feedback and including whether customers are indicating they could not use the centres if the proposed rates were introduced. At that point we can fully assess the risks and consider options to mitigate those accordingly and report to cabinet in the New Year.

We are statutorily obliged to consult with the people who would be directly affected by any policy change. For that reason we have gone directly to the resource centre users and asked for their views and also held a number of face-to-face events. People using the centres have been given all the information they need to take part, using a variety of methods in this consultation and over 50% of service users have given us their views so far (that is 459 out of 800). Organisations such as Age UK and other stakeholders have also asked to consult directly with their members.”