

## CABINET – 28 JANUARY 2014

### ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Questions received from the following Members:

#### 1. Councillor John Howson to Councillor Tilley

“Please list the projects bid for in the schools capital programme for 2015/16 and 2016/17 including any details of those approved by the DfE and those rejected alongside the number (or lack of spare) places in September 2013 (or latest available) at each school where there was a bid.”

#### Answer

“The basic need allocation supports the capital requirement for providing new pupil places by expanding existing maintained schools, free schools or academies, and by establishing new schools. Capital funding for basic need is allocated to Local Authorities on a formulaic basis, there is no bidding process.

On 18<sup>th</sup> December 2013 the Secretary of State announced basic need capital funding grants to Oxfordshire for financial years 2015/16 to 2016/17. This extends the previous allocations, meaning that basic need funding has now been confirmed for financial years 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17.

The three year funding is detailed below;

2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
£8,458,077	£1,520,390	£1,596,409

The basic need funding for 2015/16 and 2016/17 is less than expected. The capital allocation has been based principally on data submitted to the DfE in the 2013 School Capacity Survey (SCAP) collection. This collects information on the capacities of schools and academies in each planning area of each local authority, as at May 2013, and local authorities' forecasts for several years ahead. The council will have the opportunity to submit revised forecast data during 2014.

In addition to the annual formulaic capital allocation the DfE launched the *Targeted Basic Need Programme (TBNP)* in March 2013 to provide additional support to those local authorities experiencing the greatest pressure on school places. This involved a bidding process and Oxfordshire County Council submitted two bids which were both successful

- Farringdon Primary – Provision of 90 additional primary places **£875,324**
- Bartholomew School, Eynsham (Secondary) – Provision of 150 additional places **£1,831,872”**

## 2. Councillor John Howson to Councillor Tilley

“Please list the attendance record of members of the SACRE during 2013”

Answer:

### Oxfordshire SACRE - Record of Meeting Attendance - 2013

SACRE Member		Mtg Date 16.01.13 County Hall	Mtg Date 11.03.13 Matthew Arnold Sch	Mtg Date 8.07.13 Regents Park College	Mtg Date 14.11.13 County Hall	Notes
Ahmed	Alyas	x	x			Left
Bartlett	Janet	A	ü	A		Left
Bekhradnia	Shahin	ü	ü	A	ü	
Chamberlain	Valerine	ü	ü	A	ü	
Cohen	Ruth	x	ü	ü	ü	
Davies	Jean	x	ü	x	A	
Fageant	Jo	ü	ü	A	A	
Fancourt	Nigel	ü	A	A	A	
Fenn	Julie	x	A	x	A	
Lionakis	Lex	A	ü	A	A	
Long	Fraser	A	ü	ü	A	

### KEYS

No Apology given	Attended	Apology given
x	ü	A

Member
Deputy
Observer

Manley	Don	ü	ü	x	x	
Mathew	Charles	ü	ü	ü	ü	
Mirza	Sabir	x	x	x	x	
Moore	Lyn	ü	ü	A	A	
Newby	Sue	A	A	A	A	
Price	Christine	x	A	A	ü	
Sharp	Sarah	ü	ü	ü	ü	
Singh	Pritam	x	A	x	x	
Taghavi	Helina	ü	ü	ü	ü	
Vadivale	Chandra	x	A	x	A	
Viney	Carol	A	A	x	x	Left
Wallace	Stephen	x	x	x	x	
Wedell	Katherine	ü	ü	ü	A	
Willis	Jo	A	ü	ü	A	
Wolff	Dick	ü	ü	x	ü	
Wood	Nicholas	ü	ü	ü	A	
Wren	Claire	A	ü	A	A	
Abbasi	M	x	x	A	x	
Beegoo	Steve	x	x	x	x	
Bradshaw	Margaret	x	x	x	x	
Burn	Katherine	x	x	x	A	
Faust	Penny	x	x	A	A	
Godden	Margaret	x	x	ü	ü	
Hoyland	Emily	A	A	A	x	
King	Jean	ü	x	x	x	
Knagg	Rosemary	ü	A	ü	A	

Motivala	Darayus	x	x	x	x	
Singh	Manvir	x	x	A	x	
Vadivale	Sathya	x	x	x	x	
Vickers	Stephen	x	x	x	x	
Paterson	David	ü	ü	ü	ü	
Singh	Davinder	ü	x	ü	A	

**Local Authority**

Currie	Sue				ü
Gledhill	Vikki	ü	ü	ü	ü
Mitchell	John	ü	A	A	A

**3. Councillor Zoe Patrick to Councillor Fatemian**

What criteria were used to decide the capital needs for the Free Infant School Meals policy?

**Answer:**

“Given the lack of guidance from Government we have had to develop an estimate that ensures we are fully aware of the potential financial risk to the authority. We are now working through the options to limit the budget challenge that we face as a result of the limited amount of funding that has been announced by Central Government.”

**4. Councillor Glynis Phillips to Councillor Hilary Hibbert-Biles**

' I note with interest that the Chief Executive has approved an interim one year contract with Oxford Health NHS Trust to continue providing Smoking Cessation Services at a cost of £400k. My question is how and when does the Council intend to tender and award all of the public health contracts?'

**Answer:**

“As at January 2014 twelve public health services have been tendered of which three contracts have already commenced and nine are due to commence on 1/4/2014.

There are additional public health services which will be tendered as current contracts expire. “

**5. Councillor Jean Fooks to Councillor David Nimmo Smith**

'The Wolvercote roundabout and surrounding roads are known to have the worst congestion and consequent pollution in the county. It is currently virtually impossible to cross the roundabout on foot or bicycle. The Inspector at the Core Strategy enquiry said

he would not want to walk or bicycle in this area. The City Council is now developing an Area Action Plan for the Northern Gateway site, which lies to the north of the roundabout and the A40.

The Inspector said that the traffic issues have to be resolved to address any additional pressures caused by development on this site; it is also recognised that the current situation needs addressing in its own right to reduce the delays and pollution problems that already exist.

A strategic link road is now suggested as part of a package of measures to address the problems, taking traffic from the A40 north to join the A44 at the Frieze Way roundabout. The proportion of the A40 traffic that will take this alternative route is not mentioned but in the past it was estimated to comprise only about 15% of the total traffic. In the morning peak at present Frieze Way itself is heavily congested so cannot cope with additional traffic.

It is thus not at all clear that this link road, even with the other measures listed in the City's Options document, will appreciably reduce the traffic using the Wolvercote roundabout and Sunderland Avenue, let alone be sufficient to prevent any further problems that would be caused by new development here .

My constituents would very much like to know what alternative proposals have been considered for reducing this traffic, before any new pressures from the Northern Gateway development can be considered, and why they were rejected?'

**Answer:**

“It is important to remember that the A40-A44 strategic link road is currently proposed not in isolation but as part of a package of measures to address existing transport issues in the Northern Gateway/Wolvercote area. The strategic link road will help by removing vehicles and reducing the number of turning conflicts, particularly at Wolvercote roundabout. Our earlier work on the idea of a link road suggested that the removal of even only modest numbers of vehicles from this junction would have potentially

significant benefits to traffic flow in the area. Together with this link road, signalisation and other changes at both Wolvercote and Cutteslowe roundabouts could also help to better manage and coordinate the flow of traffic through the junctions and along the wider A40 and A44 corridors.

As part of these schemes, we will be looking to improve facilities for pedestrians and cyclists in the form of key crossings points and high quality cycle tracks as well as assessing if any improvements to the public transport network can be achieved.

A fuller understanding of the impact of emerging proposals for the Northern Gateway site will be a key part of developing the detail of any measures affecting the wider network. The County Council will look to ensure the development proposal includes adequate mitigation for the transport impact arising from it. The key to a successful development will most likely lie in carefully managing the amount and use of car parking, and ensuring making journeys to the site by sustainable means is as attractive as possible.”

## **6. Councillor Susanna Pressel to Councillor Judith Heathcoat**

' I realise that the proposed 38% cut to housing related support would be discussed with the Health Improvement Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board, if it is to take place in 2015, but we are reliably informed that this cut would probably lead to the closure of one of the three large homeless hostels in Oxford city centre. To what extent has the Cabinet or our officers discussed with the police, the NHS and the City Council the repercussions of such a closure and what was the response?'

**Answer:**

“Councillor Pressel is making sweeping assumptions that are not justified on the basis of what we have proposed. We have proposed reducing the funding of housing related support to reflect the reduction in central Government Grant funding in 2010. Does Councillor Pressel think that we should carry on subsidizing this service and reduce adult social care spending instead?”

We have not suggested how this reduction in spending should be made. Understandably those who are funded from this budget are concerned that their services might be affected. However, we are not making that decision now. If the County Council agrees to a reduction in the level of funding, we have made it clear that how the spending reduction will be made is a matter for the Health Improvement Board. That Board includes the City Council, the four District Councils, the County Council and the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group. They will want to consider the importance of the different types of service supported and how those services might change. There will be discussions with the providers of those services before proposals are discussed. Once proposals have been set out they will be subject to detailed consultation in accordance with normal practice.

I think it is misleading at this stage for anyone to conclude that one particular service will close as a result of the funding reduction.”

#### **7. Councillor Laura Price to Councillor Judith Heathcoat**

‘In light of the fact that despite receiving almost £20k per month to administrate the County Support Fund, Auriga has been a significant failure as a provider of what should be a crucial resource - the application process has lacked clarity and there has been no provision to offer a loan system, only grants. Why were more sustainable options not considered when the Fund was passed to local government?’

#### **Answer:**

“The Oxfordshire Support Fund was established in April 2013 year to replace Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans which used to be provided by the DWP through the Social Fund. In establishing the Fund in Oxfordshire the county council gave very careful consideration around what type of assistance the Fund should provide and who would be eligible for assistance under the scheme.

Based on 2011/12 figures published by DWP, as a county we were expecting up to in the region of 10,000 applications a year to the Fund, with approximately 70 % resulting in payment. This represented a significant volume of work which would not be easily incorporated into our existing services therefore the decision was made to seek a partner to deliver the Fund on our behalf. It should be noted that the majority of people who applied to the DWP Fund were single men of working age and therefore not people eligible for help from Social and Community Services or Children Education and Families.

A full procurement process was carried out and Auriga Services Limited, a social enterprise, was contracted to deliver the Fund. The commissioning team were impressed by Auriga's mixture of professionalism and experience of helping vulnerable people in hardship and financial distress – the kind of people who would be applying to the Fund. Auriga's portfolio includes a number of similar assistance funds which are run on behalf of a number of utility companies which means they bring added value to the service by not only processing applications but also signposting applicants to other potential support funds and sources of information. In addition to programme funding DWP provide administrative funding to Oxfordshire for running the scheme, so the majority of Auriga's annual charges are covered by this funding. It was felt that their expertise and the potential high demand for the service warranted this spend.

The main aim of the Oxfordshire Support Fund is to help vulnerable people to meet their basic needs, particularly in an emergency, and to support and enable people to remain in or to return to living in the community. In light of the potential for high demand, the criteria for the Fund when it was launched purposefully focussed on the most vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, disabled people and those responsible for young children. A lot of attention was given to the application forms and processes for the scheme and feedback was sought from advice agencies to make sure these were as simple and clear as possible.

It was agreed not to offer loans as the administrative costs for recovering them would likely be prohibitive - when the Fund was run by DWP, loan repayments were recoverable via benefits payments but as a county council we did not have recourse to this kind of straight-forward method for loan recovery. At the time of launch it was felt that to service loan debts via the Fund itself was not an acceptable route to take especially in light of the fact that future demand on the service was highly uncertain.

It was also agreed to, wherever possible, provide successful applicants with goods and services in preference to cash. However cash would be provided where goods and services were not suitable, ensuring the scheme had the same breadth of support as was available when the Fund was administered by DWP.

The Fund has been closely monitored since its launch. As part of the Fund's six month review it was acknowledged that applications and awards were on track to be significantly lower than expected when the Fund was designed. In light of this, the council worked closely with Auriga to change some of their procedures and make it easier for people to apply, as well as relaxing some of the eligibility criteria. The council contacted again those key partners and agencies who refer people to the Support Fund to remind them of the service and how it could be accessed. From day one the Fund had its own page on the Oxfordshire County Council website. As part of the review the council surveyed Fund applicants and advice agencies, and was encouraged by the broadly positive feedback received about Auriga's service and the way they dealt with what could be extremely challenging applicants and applications, and processing claims in a prompt and supportive way. Good working relationships have been established between Auriga and the county council, for example, the county council's housing team have established processes with Auriga to support their clients' application to the Fund.

By the end of December 2013, 2292 applications had been received and a total of £236,139.51 in crisis and care grants had been paid to Oxfordshire residents. Clearly these figures are significantly lower than those experienced when the Fund was run centrally out of DWP. However, after close review it is apparent that there is no one stand out reason as to why this is. It should be noted that the relatively high administration costs for the fund are partly as a result of the work that Auriga carry out in working to support and signpost unsuccessful (ineligible) applicant to other sources of help. There is also anecdotal evidence that other county councils have experienced a similar drop in demand since DWP passed over responsibility for the Fund. Therefore the assertion that Auriga has been a significant failure as a provider cannot be supported."

## **8. Councillor John Tanner to Councillor Tilley**

'This County Council is spending £352,000 a year in Oxford alone on ferrying 142 children to and from school by taxi. In most cases (70%) this is because these children cannot find a place at their nearest school. Given the financial pressures on the County Council how can this waste of taxpayer's money possibly be justified?'

### **Answer:**

"The money spent on transporting some children to school in this way is not a "waste"; it enables children to get to school to receive the education that is their right. We do, however, recognise that this is a large sum and officers are looking at ways of reducing the current reliance on taxis through, for example, use of the council's own fleet vehicles and close scrutiny of current routes to see whether minibuses could be used instead. We have also had a major school expansion programme in the City which means more school places are available close to where families live than before. This question gives me the opportunity to make a plea to all councillors to encourage their constituents to, (a) apply on time for school places and, (b) use all three preferences, including (even if only as third) their catchment school as it is those who don't do this who are most likely to be allocated a school place over 2 miles from their home which is the trigger for free home to school transport (including by taxi if necessary)."