

CABINET

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 28 January 2014 commencing at 2.00 pm and finishing at 4.35 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Ian Hudspeth – in the Chair
Councillor Rodney Rose
Councillor Mrs Judith Heathcoat
Councillor Nick Carter
Councillor Melinda Tilley
Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale
Councillor David Nimmo Smith
Councillor Arash Fatemian
Councillor Louise Chapman
Councillor Hilary Hibbert-Biles

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Liz Brighouse (Agenda Items 6 & 8),
Councillor Nick Hards (Agenda Item 6)
Councillor Charles Mathew (Agenda Items 6 & 7),
Councillor Anne Purse (Agenda Item 7),
Councillor John Sanders (Agenda Item 7),

Officers:

Whole of meeting Joanna Simons (Chief Executive); Sue Whitehead (Chief Executive's Office)

Part of meeting Item	Name
6	Lorna Baxter, Chief Finance Officer
7	Martin Tugwell, Deputy Director, Strategy & Infrastructure Planning; Peter Day
8	Maggie Scott, Head of Policy

The Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting, and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda, reports and schedule, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

1/14 MINUTES
(Agenda Item. 3)

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 December were agreed and signed.

2/14 QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

(Agenda Item. 4)

Councillors had given notice of four questions and the questions, responses, supplementary questions and answers are set out in the Annex to the minutes.

3/14 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item. 5)

The following requests to address the meeting had been agreed:

Petitions – David Hipkiss, Oxon School Bus Action Group (OSBAG) regarding Proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy;

Lesley Dewhurst, regarding the Housing Support Fund
Refugee Resource,- submitted on behalf of Dr Antony Kingsley

Public Address:

Councillor Liz Brighthouse,

Councillor Nick Hards

Councillor Charles Mathew,

Mark Thompson, Connection floating support

Mr Kevin Kennedy, Supporting people User Group

Mrs Sue Tanner, Convenor Oxford Advice Forum

Ms. Emily Boughton,

Gill Tishler, Oxford City Advice Bureau

Susy Drohan, Oxfordshire Welfare Rights, Barton Neighbourhood Centre

Fran Bennett, Treasurer and Trustee of Agnes Smith Advice Centre,
Blackbird Leys

Gail Hanrahan,

District Councillor David Dodds, Chairman Oxfordshire Waste Partnership

Item 7 Councillor Anne Purse,

Councillor John Sanders,

Councillor Charles Mathew,

John Taylor - PAGE Chairman

Item 8 Councillor Liz Brighthouse

4/14 SERVICE & RESOURCE PLANNING REPORT 2014/15 - 2017/18 - JANUARY 2014

(Agenda Item. 6)

Cabinet had before them the final report in the series on the service & resource planning process for 2014/15 to 2017/18, which provided councillors with information on budget issues for 2014/15 and the medium term. It set out the proposed 2014/15 budget and the draft 2014/15 – 2017/18 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

Cabinet also had before them a report by the Cabinet Member for Finance which set out the basis for the Cabinet's proposals. The proposals took into account comments to date from the public consultation on the budget as well as the latest information on the Council's financial position outlined in the report. Also considered by Cabinet was: a separate report from the Income Generation Cabinet Advisory Group and a supplementary report by the Chief Finance Officer setting out additional information and consequent recommendations.

Councillor Liz Brighthouse, Chairman, Performance Scrutiny Committee presented the comments of the Committee, set out in Annex 12. She highlighted a key concern which was to ensure that they were able to monitor the reduction in the budget and make sure that action plans were in place. She added that it was important that the Council worked together with partners including those affected in the community and voluntary sector. She referred to the Refugee Resource that had asked for the cuts to be phased to avoid loss of other funding streams and noted that at the Committee meeting this had been agreed. Councillor Hudspeth thanked the Committee for their work, and in noting that it was the first year that an opposition member had chaired the Committee thanked Councillor Brighthouse for her approach and the work she had put in to it.

Councillor Nick Hards, Shadow Cabinet Member for Finance referred to the pressures on the budget and that he was impressed by the professionalism and skill of officers at a difficult time. He commented that the Income Generation Cabinet Advisory a Group had been helpful and he hoped that something would come out of it. Looking at the broad picture he felt that Central Government were out of touch with the way the Council worked and had an unrealistic view of the demands placed on the Council. He expressed concern that the Council had still not been advised whether the referendum limit for Council Tax rises would be lowered. He hoped that the Council would be allowed to go to the limit currently included in the budget proposals.

Councillor Mathew speaking as Vice Chairman of the Income Generation Cabinet Advisory Group stressed that they were keen to discuss the opportunities for income generation within operations. He referred to the initial ideas set out in the paper and added that there was still much work to do.

Councillor Mathew, speaking as a councillor then indicated that he could not support crowd funding. He believed it would cost more than it would bring in. Councillor Hudspeth thanked those involved in the Cabinet Advisory Group and noted the initial suggestions and on-going work of the Group.

Mark Thompson, Connection and floating support team spoke on the importance of continuing the support for homeless people and the danger that this important work not fall between funding stools.

Kevin Kennedy, Housing Support User Group, spoke in support of the housing support fund and the services it made possible. As a former

homeless person the support he had received had been vital in rebuilding his confidence and self-belief. A place to sleep and the support services available in hostels enabled people to rebuild their lives and provided a vital link to family and friends.

Sue Tanner, Convenor Oxford City Advice Forum, spoke against the proposal to cut the Oxfordshire Support Fund and asked that it continue until March 2015 when Government funding would end. This would enable time to find other ways to help people in urgent need.

Emily Broughton, spoke about her experience of the Advice Centres at a time of need for her and opposed the cuts to vital services to vulnerable people.

Gill Tishler, Oxford City Advice Bureau commended the comments of the Performance Scrutiny Committee. She gave examples of where the support provided by information and advice centres secured additional money for clients that then allowed them to stay in the community. Their early intervention saved money for local public services including the Council.

Suzy Drohan, Oxfordshire Welfare Rights, Barton Neighbourhood Centre, spoke in support of the services provided referring particularly to their successful work for clients in tribunal hearings.

Fran Bennett, Treasurer and Trustee of Agnes Smith Advice Centre, Blackbird Leys, speaking against the proposed cuts to the advice and information services detailed the role they played in supporting Council priorities to enable people to live at home and to keep well. She welcomed the community network but felt that Advice Centres provided a comprehensive service. She added that whilst grateful for advance notice of the cuts she felt that the assumption that it would allow other funding to be found was wrong. In her experience charitable organisations were not willing to replace withdrawn state funding.

Gail Hanrahan stated that her organisation was working with the Council but could only see cuts for so long before it affected the service provided. She felt that as eligible needs would still need to be met it would cost the Council more in critical care.

District Councillor David Dodds spoke against the proposed withdrawal of funding to the Oxfordshire Waste Partnership.

Councillor Hudspeth thanked all those that had attended the meeting to speak to Cabinet. He referred to the difficult choices and decisions to be faced in order to set a balanced budget. He would always listen to alternative suggestions about how the necessary savings could be made.

Councillor Fatemian in proposing the recommendations emphasised that every saving made, made each subsequent saving harder to find and there were no easy decisions with every saving being challenged as part of the

process. The budget proposals were built on the basis of fairness and protecting the most vulnerable. Some savings were reinvested to manage pressures. He noted that final information was still awaited from central Government including on capital funding. He made it clear that he was continuing to take note of and give careful consideration to representations made and would continue to do so.

During discussion Cabinet Members agreed that within their own areas of responsibility difficult choices were having to be made. Essential services were being protected. The Leader referred to the careful use of reserves but the need to ensure that reserves were available for emergencies such as the recent flooding. There was some discussion about the response to the flooding in Oxfordshire and Cabinet was advised that the Deputy Leader was holding a flooding summit in March. Responding to a comment from a Cabinet Member the Leader confirmed that he would explore all possible sources of funding to address flooding problems.

RESOLVED: to:

- (a) **RECOMMEND** Council to approve the updated Financial Strategy;
- (b) (in respect of revenue) **RECOMMEND** Council to approve:
 - (1) a budget for 2014/15 and a medium term plan to 2017/18, based on the proposals set out by the Cabinet Member for Finance;
 - (2) a council tax requirement (precept) for 2014/15;
 - (3) a council tax for band D equivalent properties;
 - (4) virement arrangements to operate within the approved budget;
- (c) (in respect of treasury management) **RECOMMEND** Council to approve:
 - (1) the Treasury Management Strategy Statement ;
 - (2) that any further changes required to the 2014/15 strategy be delegated to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Finance.
- (d) **RECOMMEND** Council to approve the Prudential Indicators as set out in Appendix A of Annex 7;
- (e) **RECOMMEND** Council to approve the Minimum Revenue Provision Methodology Statement as set out in Appendix B of Annex 7;
- (f) (in respect of capital) **RECOMMEND** Council to approve:
 - (1) the updated Asset Management Plan and Transport Asset Management Plan;
 - (2) a Capital Programme for 2013/14 to 2017/18;

- (g) delegate authority to the Leader of the Council, following consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, to make appropriate changes to the proposed budget;
- (h) Note the confirmed collection fund surplus for 2014/15;
- (i) Note the amount of funding per infant school meal taken notified by the Department for Education; and
- (j) Note the provisional education maintenance allocation for 2014/15.

5/14 OXFORDSHIRE MINERALS AND WASTE LOCAL PLAN - CORE STRATEGY: CONSULTATION DRAFT

(Agenda Item. 7)

The County Council has a statutory duty to prepare a new Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Plan, to provide an effective planning strategy and policies for the supply of minerals and management of waste in the county, consistent with environmental, social and economic needs. The Plan must be prepared in accordance with current government policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) and having due regard to the emerging new National Planning Practice Guidance.

In line with the revised Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Development Scheme (Fifth Revision) 2013, setting out the programme for preparing the Minerals and Waste Local Plan Cabinet had before them a report recommending a draft Minerals and Waste Local Plan: Core Strategy for public consultation.

Councillor Purse, spoke in respect of the findings of the Cabinet Advisory Group who she felt had done a good job of scrutinising the documents. Although not surprisingly unable to come to any conclusions about specific areas they had reached a view on the balance between West Oxfordshire and elsewhere. She also asked that in the final consultation documents the maps be in colour. She highlighted specific recommendations made by the Group and included in the draft before Cabinet. She commented that it would be helpful for the Plan to be tied back to Planning & Regulation Committee in some way. Councillor Hudspeth thanked Councillor Purse and the cabinet Advisory Group for their work.

Councillor John Sanders, Shadow Cabinet member for Environment, queried the role of the Cabinet Advisory Group and was informed that many of their recommendations had been included in the draft Plan before Cabinet.

Councillor Mathew welcomed the amendments to the earlier versions of the Plan but highlighted a number of aspects he felt still needed to be addressed. These included the need for: expert witnesses to be paid for by the applicant but chosen by the County Council to preserve independence; an annual review of fees; enforcement and time limits on the start date following approval.

Mr Taylor, Chairman of PAGE, commented that the descriptive map at Figure 12 was impossible to interpret and felt that there was a lack of certainty about specific sites. He still felt that the balance referred to between

North and South was vague. Table 12 was unclear and he had a query regarding the Caversham and Gill Mill areas. He was concerned that the consultation document would blight large areas and alarm residents.

Councillor Nimmo Smith, Cabinet Member for Environment in proposing the Plan for consultation emphasised that material could only be dug out where it existed and that therefore areas not in the Plan today were not ruled out forever.

During discussion Cabinet Members in welcoming the balance set out in the report considered the definition of the term broad balance, with some expressing the view that this should mean that 50:50 was the aspiration whilst other suggested a wider interpretation. There was discussion about the removal of some areas from Figure 12 and it was agreed that the Plan be unchanged prior to consultation. Councillor Lindsay Gale felt that the areas should be removed prior to consultation.

RESOLVED: (by 8 votes to 0 with one abstention) to:

- (a) agree the draft Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan: Core Strategy at Annex 1, subject to final detailed amendment, updating and editing, as a draft for consultation;
- (b) authorise the Deputy Director for Environment & Economy (Strategy & Infrastructure Planning) to:
 - (i) carry out final detailed amendment, updating and editing of the draft Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan: Core Strategy, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Environment; and
 - (ii) publish the draft Oxfordshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan: Core Strategy for public consultation.

6/14 CABINET BUSINESS MONITORING REPORT FOR QUARTER 2

(Agenda Item. 8)

Cabinet considered a report that provided details of performance for quarter two. The report is required so that the Cabinet can monitor the performance of the Council in key service areas and be assured that progress is being made to improve areas where performance is below the expected level.

Councillor Brighouse, Chairman of the Performance Scrutiny Committee highlighted the following points from its meeting on 9 January 2014: some of the efficiency saving targets had not been made and were therefore a financial risk for Cabinet to be aware of and address; secondly she referred to the performance indicators around re-ablement and the importance of not

treating the figures in isolation and recognising that there were a range of issues including the recruitment of care workers. She queried whether with regard to young people not in education, employment or training enough was being done to encourage them into the care sector.

Councillor Hudspeth responded to the points made and commented on the importance of following through when setting savings to see them realised. He added that staff had done well to provide the savings made whilst delivering services.

Following discussion Cabinet:

RESOLVED: to note the performance reported in the dashboards and to note the concerns of the Performance Scrutiny Committee that, across all three Directorates, resources are stretched due to an increase in demand, which is not mirrored by funding streams, and is threatening the future performance of the Council.

7/14 DELEGATED POWERS OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE - JANUARY 2014

(Agenda Item. 9)

RESOLVED: To the following executive decisions taken by the Chief Executive under the specific powers and functions delegated to her under the terms of Part 7.4 of the Council's Constitution – Paragraph 1(A)(c)(i).

<i>Date</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Decision</i>	<i>Reasons for Urgency</i>
1 October 2013	Transfer of the performance of the Highways Contract from Atkins to Skanska in fulfilment of a decision of Cabinet 93/13	Approved the transfer of the performance of the Highways contract from Atkins to Skanska	To fulfil the decision of Cabinet and to ensure continuity of provision.
8 October 2013	Oxford Health – Smoking Cessation Services (“Core services”)	Approved an exemption from the full tendering requirements of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules for an interim one year contract with Oxford Health NHS Trust from 1	To allow time to formally agree the variation with the provider in writing so that there is sufficient time to implement the variation and allow continuous service delivery

		April 2014 at a cost of £400,000	
25 October 2013	Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust – Oxfordshire Harm Minimisation Service with LASAR Service	Approved an exemption from the full tendering requirements of the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules with Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust for a variation to the remainder of the existing contract to 31 March 2015 at an aggregate cost of approximately £1,151,440.	To allow time to formally agree the variation with the provider in writing so that there is sufficient time to implement the variation and allow continuous service delivery.

8/14 FORWARD PLAN AND FUTURE BUSINESS

(Agenda Item. 10)

The Cabinet considered a list of items for the immediately forthcoming meetings of the Cabinet together with the following change notified at the meeting:

Future of Schools/Back Office Facing Services – Externalisation
Next Steps – Deferred from 18 March 2014 to a date to be confirmed.

RESOLVED: to note the items currently identified for forthcoming meetings.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing

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 18th 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

- Farrington 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	

KEYS

No Apology given	Attended	Apology given
x	ü	A

Member
Deputy
Observer

CA3

Lionakis	Lex	A	ü	A	A	
Long	Fraser	A	ü	ü	A	
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.”

Supplementary: Councillor Patrick sought further detail requesting information about what the estimate was based on? Councillor Fatemian replied that he would provide additional information to Councillor Patrick and that this was the infrastructure required to deliver the policy.

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. “

Supplementary: Councillor Phillips expressed concern that 12 contracts had already been awarded and sought information on the scrutiny arrangements and governance around the specification and award of contracts. Councillor Hibbert Biles gave an assurance that governance was taken seriously and that there was a governance panel in place and contracts were awarded in line with agreed procedures.

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.

Supplementary: Councillor Fooks asked what was proposed and how it was intended to cope with the additional numbers. Councillor Nimmo Smith replied that it was work in progress and he would keep Councillor Fooks informed.

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.”

Supplementary: Councillor Pressel indicated that her question was about the housing related support grant. She knew the role of the Health Improvement Board and asked that the cuts be phased in more gradually? Councillor Heathcoat replied that the original

question made assumptions that were not justified. Central Government funding had been reducing since 2010. The County has been subsidising it and had to stop.

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."

Supplementary: Councillor Price stated that her question referred to what people know as crisis loans. Given the underspend what will happen to that money or will it be lost? Councillor Heathcoat replied that she had given a very detailed response to the question. Auriga had met the Council's specification and were open to them fulfilling their contract.

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)."

Supplementary: Councillor Tanner asked what steps the Council was taking to ensure more children went to their local school and how much could be saved if they did so. Councillor Tilley replied that this was a problem that was being looked at and there would be a report in due course