

CABINET – 19 APRIL 2011

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Questions received from the following Members:

1. Councillor Jean Fooks to Cabinet Member for Transport

“Residents in Lower Wolvercote are very alarmed at the possibility that the Godstow Road bridge over the canal and the railway may not be strengthened or rebuilt to an adequate capacity. As part of the only road access to the village which is suitable for heavy goods vehicles, the bridge must be capable of taking vehicles up to at least 26 tonnes, if not 44 tonnes, gross laden weight. Until February this year, the County Council, in partnership with Network Rail, was proposing to replace the bridge with a new one which would take vehicles up to the higher limit. County engineers feared that if the bridge was removed from the capital programme, it might even be restricted to a 3-tonne limit – and probably Network Rail would only strengthen or rebuild to their liability, an 18-tonne capacity.

As an 18-tonne limit would prevent refuse vehicles, large construction vehicles, removal lorries, and other heavy goods vehicles from accessing Lower Wolvercote, I should like an assurance from the cabinet member that the County Council will either reinstate the bridge in the capital programme or obtain an assurance from Network Rail that they would maintain the bridge at a carrying capacity of at least 26 tonnes. “

Answer

“In July last year ALL Capital schemes were placed in moratorium due to Oxfordshire County Councils need to aid the National Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in its attempts to correct the massive deficit left by the outgoing Labour Government, in the hope we in the UK would not follow the route taken by Countries such as Ireland and Portugal. This is still the aim of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition, and of this Council. All Capital schemes have been prioritised since that time by the Council. I am sure Councillor Fooks would be hard pressed to make a case for OCC to spend £3.6M on a bridge belonging to others in the current financial climate, while, say, school classrooms are not built and prevent Oxfordshire’s children getting an education. All Councillors have been made aware that ANY change to the Capital program requires an equivalent saving somewhere else, but Councillor Fooks gives me no clue as to what this Council should NOT do to release £3.6 million.

Councillor Fooks is also somewhat economic with the truth in stating that HGV’s and dustcarts will be prevented from gaining access to Lower Wolvercote, should there be any change to the weight limit on the unrestricted rail bridge, as there is another route into the area. This alternative route does carry a 7.5T Environmental weight limit, but this only prevents access to through traffic – any vehicle needing access can lawfully use this way into the

area. Should Network Rail only give strengthening or replacement to their bridge to an 18 tonne limit, then buses will be unaffected. This project was not envisaged to be completed within the Medium Term Plan, and I intend to keep dialogue with Network Rail over this period. I am also considering continuing the design side of collaboration with the bridge owners.

So the answers to the two questions posed by Councillor Fooks are:

1. The County Council will NOT reinstate bridge works in the Capital program in the Medium Term
2. Discussions will be ongoing with Network Rail, but I can give no guarantee on any capacity over 18 tonnes”

2. Councillor Richard Stevens to Cabinet Member for Adult Services

"Annex 2 to the Director for Social & Community Services' report to Cabinet on 21 December 2010 contained an Option Appraisal Summary. Option D was a transfer of "most" internal home support staff to a social enterprise. Will Cllr Fatemian circulate the Council's evaluation of this rejected option?"

Answer

"Annex 2 to the Director for Social & Community Services' report to Cabinet on 21 December 2010 contained an Option Appraisal Summary. Option D was a transfer of "most" internal home support staff to a social enterprise. Will Cllr Fatemian circulate the Council's evaluation of this rejected option?"

This option was not pursued for a number of reasons which were summarised in the options appraisal included in the report last December and updated in the report to the Cabinet today. The main reason was that any transfer to a Social Enterprise organisation would mean that under TUPE arrangements, current terms and conditions as well as pension arrangements would continue to apply making this option as unaffordable to people on a personal budget as maintaining an in-house service. As Annex 2 of the report on today's agenda makes clear this option would not make the service viable.

Small groups of staff are able to get around this by leaving the Council to set up their own organisations with their own terms and conditions. This is being encouraged where staff are showing an interest in pursuing this route. Under this arrangement they may be able to provide clients with a cost effective competitive service.

We reviewed in great detail what had happened in Essex in the formation of Essex Cares. However this service is certainly much smaller than its home support predecessor as well as being able to maintain its relatively high cost of operation by delivering enablement services. In Oxfordshire, enablement services are provided currently by Oxford Health.”

3. Councillor John Tanner to Cabinet Member for Growth & Infrastructure

“Does the Cabinet member agree that the proposed closure of Oxfordshire’s largest recycling centre, at Redbridge, to the public during the week, will be a significant deterioration in service to the overwhelming majority of Oxford people and will the County Council continue to talk with Oxford City Council, which owns the land on which Redbridge HWRC sits, to ensure that, within the County Council’s financial constraints, Redbridge is open to the general public as much as is possible?”

Answer

“I refer Cllr Tanner to the answer I gave to him to a similar question at December's Cabinet”