

CABINET – 18 JUNE 2019

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

1. Question from Councillor Emily Smith to Councillor Lindsay-Gale

'In light of reports by the BBC that the DfE are paying the extra travel costs for pupils at an academy in Hertfordshire where the building work has been delayed, will the Cabinet Member confirm that the DfE will also pay any additional travel costs incurred by Oxfordshire due to delays in the opening of the Swan School on its permanent site?'

Answer

'I have been in contact with Hertfordshire and I have been told that the DfE will be paying for the cost of transport for around 100 children from the Harpenden area for 2.5 weeks at the start of the September term until the new secondary school in Harpenden, Katherine Warington, is available. Transport will be provided from close to the new school site to and from temporary accommodation at the University of Hertfordshire in Hatfield.

Hertfordshire will be paying the costs of transporting entitled children to and from the permanent school site in Harpenden.

I have also been told that the building work has not actually been delayed – I understand that mid/late September was always the planned completion date which means there was always a need for contingency arrangements of some kind.

I will be seeking further information from Hertfordshire.

The Swan School is in temporary accommodation on the Cherwell School lower site playing fields adjacent to the future location of the permanent buildings and so there is no requirement for transport to another site. Only 1 child is eligible for free home to school travel to the Swan School.'

2. Question from Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Constance

"Why has the council not installed an electric vehicle charging point at the front of County Hall?"

Answer

'Workplace electric vehicle (EV) charging points (dual 22kW - wall mount unit) are installed at County Hall to enable the upgrade of the County Council's pool car fleet to EVs. A detailed site survey carried out by the approved contractor Swarco UK Ltd identified the rear of County Hall as the easiest and most cost-effective location for installing the EV charge points. This was because the rear of County Hall already had a dedicated power supply from old, outdated EV charge points installed many years ago from an earlier trial, we just needed to upgrade the electric cable to support the new points. To install an EV charging point at the front of County Hall

we would need to overcome the following issues, identified in the site survey as follows:

- **Listed Status** of County Hall including the low boundary wall at the front – restricting us from installing certain types of charge points.
- **Power Supply:** A longer cable run was required to get 3-phase supply from the mains meter room to the front, resulting in high installation cost
- **Site security overnight:** Not as secure to park pool cars at the front of the building for overnight charging.

However, we are still considering the possibility of installing an electric vehicle (EV) charging point at the front of County Hall, not least because this would provide an opportunity to publicly showcase the work the County Council is doing towards electrifying our fleet. We are actively working with the installers to look at cost-effective options and hope to install an EV charging point at the front of County Hall in the near future.

3. Question from Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Lindsay-Gale

‘What concerns does the cabinet member have regarding the request for parents to pay a regular £10 a month by an Oxfordshire Secondary School Head teacher to fund school budgets?’

Answer

School budgets are under considerable pressure in many parts of the country and within Oxfordshire. Schools are being asked to do more and continue to raise standards of achievement and attainment. We want to recognise the commitment of Headteachers, staff, governors and parents in supporting schools and ultimately children and young people. In some case schools are asking parents on a voluntary basis to provide additional financial support for the school. This is not just a recent phenomenon.

In April 2019 the Deputy Director for the Department for Education’s Funding Policy Unit told school leaders that budgets for 2019-20 will leave schools ‘with real pressures to face’ as he acknowledged some schools would face ‘tighter finances’. The Department is seeking to secure more money from the Treasury for future years on the need to improve outcomes and social mobility. Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister, told the Parliamentary Education Committee on 3 April 2019 that there is a case for more funding in education, and that post 16 and high needs funding is the priority. We are pleased that the needs of schools are documented in that statement and that the pressure schools and Councils are facing on the high needs block for special educational needs is recognised.

This may refer to Lord Williams’s School Annual Fund Appeal. This school is an academy (and not an Oxfordshire County Council maintained school); thus it is regulated by the Regional Schools Commissioner and ultimately the Secretary of State for Education.

The school is asking for direct and regular contributions 'Regular gifts can be made monthly, quarterly or annually for as many years as you choose and this helps the school plan ahead and make good use of donation income.' This request is to support the school budget.

The Council is aware that budgets are tighter in some academies and schools than in others.

4. Question from Councillor Tim Bearder to Councillor Hudspeth

'In light of the fact that the official timetable from Highways England is that they will produce a short-list of 6 or 7 expressway routes this Autumn for a non-statutory public consultation, can you press The Secretary of State for an answer to your previous letter with a follow up asking whether we are likely to get any indication of his plans before the events unfold anyway in the official timetable.

Could you also send a copy of the letter to new Transport Minister responsible for the Expressway, which is Michael Ellis, so that he is also able to respond in his capacity as the minister responsible for the expressway scheme.'

Answer

'I am still awaiting a reply and as soon as I receive one I will pass on to all councillors.

I am sure that the new Minister for Transport has been briefed on the Expressway and has had sight of my letter however given the current situation in Westminster it may be wiser to wait in case there are changes within the Department.

I can assure Cllr Bearder that once the team at the Department of Transport is known I will press the Government so that Highways England stand by their own words in the stage 3 report on page 17:

3.4.6 Reduced congestion along the A34 corridor would improve the quality of life for local residents. There are residential properties located along the A34 corridor including the section through Botley which is subject to an Air Quality Action Area, which would directly benefit from reduced congestion and delays.

I am sure Cllr Bearder will work with me to ensure that the residents of Westminster Way and Stanley Close along with nearby roads do not suffer their current inequalities enabling them to have a better lifestyle with improved air and noise quality along with reduced congestion.'