

CABINET – 13 MAY 2014

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Questions received from the following Members:

1. From Councillor Howson to Councillor Louise Chapman

“Can you explain what extra work is required on the enforcement policy for weight restriction enforcement in Oxfordshire that means the policy has once again been delayed, and is not now listed to go to Cabinet before the 14th July?”

Answer:

“Many roads in the County are covered by Traffic Regulation Orders restricting Heavy Goods Vehicle traffic. These orders can be introduced to protect weak road infrastructure or for traffic management reasons. On occasion, weight restrictions are also introduced to support temporary traffic management plans, for example during major roadworks. The County Council’s Trading Standards Service enforces these Orders. Most Orders are enforced by way of Trading Standards staff undertaking proactive monitoring at the location concerned. In some areas the local community undertake the monitoring and pass evidence to the Trading Standards Service for enforcement. In one location cameras are used to detect contraventions of the Order.

Work is being undertaken to prepare a policy framework applying to the enforcement of these weight restriction orders. The policy will be used to determine how enforcement resources are allocated to enforce the weight restrictions and how detected contraventions of the orders will be responded to. The policy will not affect decisions regarding the introduction or review of the Traffic Regulation Orders themselves or future transport policy.

In preparing the enforcement policy it is important that all relevant factors are taken into consideration and that the resultant policy is fit for purpose now and in the foreseeable future. The policy needs to reflect the different demands placed on the resources available for enforcement of the orders and ensure that these resources are utilised in the most effective manner. The policy also needs to take account of current and future transport policy and plans and the views of local communities particularly affected by heavy goods vehicle traffic.

At present, work is being undertaken on a new Local Transport Plan for Oxfordshire. As part of this Plan it is likely that the County Council will be developing a freight strategy and an enforcement policy for weight restriction orders will be closely linked to any such freight strategy. In addition, there are on-going discussions about the effectiveness of enforcement of some of the existing weight restriction orders in several local communities. These discussions have prompted research into alternative approaches to the enforcement of the orders in some areas. As a result, the development of the

proposed enforcement policy has been delayed to ensure that it properly reflects any likely changes in the wider environment for the Trading Standards Service's work in this area."

2. From Councillor Howson to Councillor David Nimmo Smith

"What action is being taken following the petition he received regarding the cycle path at the junction of Kings Cross and Lonsdale roads?"

Answer:

"Since the petition was presented at my decisions meeting in November I know officers have been looking at options for an engineering solution to the issues raised but have so far not been able to reach a conclusion which would improve safety for cyclists and pedestrians but still allow reasonable manoeuvrability for motor vehicles. I have asked the officers to redouble their efforts and to involve you and the petitioner in the discussions"

3. From Councillor Howson to Councillor Melinda Tilley

"Will the Cabinet Member list the schools eligible for the additional small school grant of at least £3,000 for capital works associated with the introduction of free meals for pupils age 5-7 this September?"

Answer:

"The small schools grant will be made available to all schools with a role of up to 150 (on the basis of the January 2014 census). I shall send a list of those schools to you and all other Councillors. The grant is available for schools to use in any way they wish in support of the implementation of the initiative which might include a contribution to necessary capital expenditure."

4. From Councillor Pressel to Councillor Rodney Rose

"Agenda Item 6 - I'm pleased to see this at last - but what a pity it took two years to write!

It was even originally due to come to Cabinet last July!"

Answer:

"A common thread that runs through all these questions is the lack of recognition of the "Gordon Brown Legacy", and its resultant effect on the size of the team engaged in flood issues – people who are dealing with extreme flooding do not have time to also work on office-based tasks. Changes in Government aspirations have also had their effect. Whilst officers intended to bring this document to Cabinet last July, this was deferred as details of new legislation which was due for implementation in April 2014 had not been made available as had been hoped. A decision was therefore taken to defer the plan

to ensure that the new legislation was adequately addressed and that it could be aligned with other developing strategies such as the Highway Asset Management Plan and emerging national best practice. It was hoped thereafter to bring it to Cabinet again at the beginning of this year, however as you will be aware, the County had another significant flooding event and it was considered that it was important to draw any further learning from those events and the subsequent Flooding Summit to ensure that the strategy remained relevant. Whilst, there has been a delay in producing the document to Cabinet it is not considered that this could have prevented any flooding as many of the most influential provisions within the strategy have already been adopted into operational practice including effective cross agency communications and working.”

Question:

“I hope you will not just be consulting town and parish councils (of which there are none in my division) but also community and residents' associations.”

Answer:

“The consultation will be open to everyone via the internet, we normally send a copy to Town and Parish Councils as well, but we will get a list of community and residents associations from the City Council and include them in it as well.”

Question:

“Please can you tell me what work you have done with riparian owners in my division (paragraph 10);”

Answer:

“Any consultations with riparian owners in the City has been carried out by the City Council as The Land Drainage Authority or by The Environment Agency. Having put in place all that we can do at this time to further the chances of providing the Western Conveyance Channel, I and available staff will now be looking at creating workshops to help and inform ALL riparian owners across the County.”

Question:

“Also in paragraph 10 please can you tell me why there has been a long delay in filling the post of the officer who helps with local resilience plans, and who uses those plans, if anyone, after they have been written?”

Answer:

“We interviewed in November for two posts; one candidate started in January but unfortunately, the other successful candidate chose to take up another post instead, which meant we had to repeat the recruitment process. We

restarted the recruitment in February, once our commitment to flood response reduced, and interviewed in March and are expecting the successful candidate to start in June.

However, whilst the officer who used to lead on certain response plans moved on from the organisation, that doesn't mean that her duties have not been covered, as the remaining team is flexible and multi-skilled to ensure there is no single point of failure for exactly these occasions. I am also looking at staffing numbers for when OCC become the Approving Body for SUDS [Sustainable Drainage] when the legislation comes out in October. [Miss reported in the Press as a District function]."

From Councillor Glynis Phillips to Councillor Nimmo Smith

- 5 "Local residents in Barton and Risinghurst have for many years identified the need for a pedestrian crossing across 2 stretches of the A40 dual carriageway which is used by the local residents to access essential amenities such as schools, the Post Office, local shops and leisure facilities. On 21 November 2013 you requested officers to conduct a survey of traffic management in the area as soon as possible. I am sure that you did not think that 'as soon as possible' would be interpreted as happening over 6 months later. When will the survey take place and can you advise on its terms of reference?"

Answer:

"The A40 is part of the county's strategic road network and as such the knock on implications of delays for all users need to be carefully considered as demonstrated by the Barton Development Public Inquiry. A survey of pedestrians crossing the road at grade, rather than using the underpass near the roundabout, has shown approximately 200 crossing movements during a 12 hour period. The logical solutions are either a reconfiguration of the signals arrangement between Collingwood Road and the roundabout or a pedestrian bridge. Both options require significant finance and whilst officers continue to look for opportunities to gain funding no obvious funding streams are available at this time."

- 6 "The residents of Headington and all users of the London Road have been waiting patiently for news of when the substantial resurfacing work will begin. Residents and all users understand that this will be a major undertaking and are bracing themselves for months of delays and diversions. However we have yet to receive any definite start date. Can you advise when this work will begin and when letters will be sent to residents setting out the timetable for the work programme?"

Answer:

“The Improvement Scheme at Green Road roundabout and London Road is scheduled to commence in July 2014.

Maintenance work is also planned and was to be coordinated with the improvement works. However, additional DfT funding has recently been received and this provides the opportunity to widen the scope of the original scheme – the implications are currently being considered. The works would then cease in early December and recommence in January for completion during April. Further design and consultation will also be necessary before these timescales can be confirmed.”

7. From Councillor Nick Hards to Councillor Nimmo Smith

“On Saturday afternoon the ditch alongside the north side of the A4130 east of Hadden Hill golf course was overflowing onto the road on Saturday following over 25mm of rain on Friday 25th April. I understand from Gordon Hunt, the county’s Drainage Engineer, that there have been drainage problems from the golf course for some time. This water is affecting the very busy main road between Didcot and Wallingford. What practical steps is the County Council taking to ensure that water doesn’t end up running down this road in these circumstances.”

Answer:

“From Cllrs Hards comment I am not sure if the drainage flows discharging onto the A4130 East of the golf course are flowing back towards Didcot or towards Wallingford, but depending on the area of the golf course discharging into the existing ditch it may well have overwhelmed the capacity of the ditch. If the ditches require maintenance, we would normally ask SODC as the Land Drainage Authority to approach the riparian land owner on this matter.

Gordon Hunt would be happy to meet Cllr Hards on site for him to show where the ditches overflowed so we can look into this problem.”