

CABINET – 19 JANUARY 2021

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

| Questions | Answers |
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| <p>1. COUNCILLOR JOHN HOWSON</p> <p>I received the following from a resident:</p> <p>'sorry to see that the gully in front of the Dewdrop, [in Summertown on east side of Banbury Road] has failed again and although it may not be much of a problem for vehicles it is dangerous to cyclists. ...This is the sixth time that same gully has had to be repaired ...'</p> <p>Could the Cabinet Member please explain why this repair keeps failing?</p> | <p>COUNCILLOR EDDIE REEVES, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS DELIVERY AND OPERATIONS</p> <p>The repairs we have undertaken to the gully were to re-bed the frame and repair the tarmac around it. Unfortunately, we have now discovered that the problem is caused by a failure in the underlying structure of the gully, which will need to be rebuilt and strengthened. When these gullies were originally constructed, they were not designed to withstand the traffic load and volumes we now have on the network.</p> <p>The need for reconstruction has been acknowledged and is on our drainage repair programme. We will endeavour to move this forward in our programme and will keep you updated on progress.</p> |
| <p>2. COUNCILLOR LIZ LEFFMAN</p> <p>Councillors have recently been sent an email from Freeclix, offering heavily subsidised unlimited data packages for families who have difficulty accessing broadband for home schooling during the pandemic. Will the County Council be taking up this offer, and if not do we have other plans for supporting children who may</p> | <p>COUNCILLOR LORRAINE LINDSAY-GALE, CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION & CULTURAL SERVICES</p> <p>Angela Turton has recently joined the Education COVID team and has been asked to lead the work on digital exclusion. There will be an initial meeting arranged with colleagues and partners who have been working on a longer-term plan to address this issue in Oxfordshire which involves community partners who have identified streams of work that involve refurbishment of donated IT equipment, access to data and publicity. Angela will raise the offer of the Internet service provider, Freeclix, that you mention, in addition to others that have been brought to my attention in the past few days, e.g.</p> |

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| <p>have limited access to lessons due to poor or no broadband?</p> | <p>Sustainable Wantage, , www.sustainablewantage.org.uk a community action group that is refurbishing and donating laptops to children.</p> <p>All councillors will receive an email from Angela encouraging the use of any remaining Councillor Priority funds and encouraging applications for laptops from the schools in their divisions. I know that many schools and councillors have already done this.</p> <p>The latest guidance from the Department for Education is that the government has now contacted schools to encourage applications not only for laptops and tablets but also for increased broadband for disadvantaged children and young people. The list of providers signed up to provide free broadband has recently increased. Schools are to place orders. (The latest government guidance can be found here (published 7/1/21) which contains information on how allocations are calculated, application criteria, etc).</p> <p>Once orders are placed and hardware is received, Angela hopes to glean a more accurate picture of remaining need. It will also be an important strand of work to measure the impact of this provision.</p> <p>If you need to speak to her directly then please contact her Angela.Turton@Oxfordshire.gov.uk</p> |
| <p>3. COUNCILLOR EMILY SMITH</p> <p>Following the concerns raised nationally about the shockingly poor provision of food during lockdown for children entitled to Free School Meals I have had several residents contact me with concerns about the food being provided in Oxfordshire. School staff seem to be doing an</p> | <p>COUNCILLOR LORRAINE LINDSAY-GALE, CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION & CULTURAL SERVICES</p> <p>All schools are providing meals free of charge to all infant pupils and pupils who meet the benefits related criteria who are currently attending school. For those at home who meet the benefits related criteria, schools are providing food parcels or supermarket vouchers as set out in the government's Free school meal guidance for schools. The quality of provision is overseen by schools. However, CEF officers provide regular opportunities to meet with all</p> |

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| <p>excellent job ensuring families in need can access the support available, but how is the county council working with our schools to ensure the quality and quantity of the parcels provided as part of the Covid Winter Support Grant funding? Would the County support food vouchers or cash as opposed to food boxes to enable families to ensure the free school meals meet the dietary requirements of the children in receipt of this desperately needed support?</p> | <p>head teachers to offer advice and support and share best practice.</p> <p>This term-time provision is funded by government and is separate from the Winter Support Scheme managed by the County Council. Current national plans are that government funding will not be available over the February half-term holiday. However, as part of our Winter Support Scheme, we have already agreed to provide funding for free school meal provision over the February and Easter school holidays at the level of £15 per week for each child known to be entitled to benefits-related free school meals. This follows the successful funding round that paid out more than £350,000 to approximately 12,000 children and young people in schools, colleges and early years settings ahead of the Christmas holiday period. It also sits alongside local welfare schemes being administered by the city and district councils for those families and individuals who have additional urgent need for support with food, basic utilities and related costs. The majority of schools issued food vouchers for the Christmas holiday period rather than food boxes and we expect this to be largely unchanged for February. We will work with schools to provide the February support in the ways that are most effective for their families and to ensure consistency with the term time offer. Where schools opt to issue food boxes, we will require them to only do this where they are now confident in the quality of provision from their providers.”</p> |
| <p>4. COUNCILLOR EMILY SMITH</p> <p>I am regularly asked by residents about the poor state of some of our footpaths and the long wait there is to get a response from the Council and then a suitable solution. Two live examples are the public path which runs from the Abingdon to Sunningwell bridleway, by the A34 bridge, to Lodge Hill and the 'Quarry' footpath in Bayworth.</p> <p>Given this councils policy position to support</p> | <p>COUNCILLOR EDDIE REEVES, CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS DELIVERY AND OPERATIONS</p> <p>The 2600 miles of Public Rights of Way are managed by four Officers and their Manager, with works being carried out by the councils own in-house works delivery team.</p> <p>They manage all aspects of the public rights of way network including, but not limited to, dealing with all reported issues, responding to planning applications, ensuring landowners are carrying out their responsibilities, liaising with volunteers, and arranging the practical work that's passed to the</p> |

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| <p>active travel and encourage people to exercise close to their homes during lockdowns how would the cabinet member describe the current allocation of resources to the footpaths team? Do we need more than one footpath officer for the county? And what plans does he have to improve the service to residents and the provision of safe walking routes?</p> | <p>Delivery Team. The large caseload is managed using the agreed 'Priority Caseload Approach'. This ensures that issues of an urgent nature, such as broken bridges, are given a high priority and dealt with quickly, while others have to be given a lower priority and may take a number of years to resolve and is to be expected with any system of prioritisation. During the Covid crisis, more people have been out using their local paths, which is beneficial to residents' health and wellbeing. There has, however, been a corresponding increase in reported problems. The team of dedicated public rights of way officers are doing their best in difficult circumstances to respond to reports and keep the network of paths open and safe for people to use.</p> <p>The bridleway between Abingdon and Sunningwell could well be an ideal cycling route if an all-weather surface were installed in future. Opportunities for improvements are always welcomed and most are realised through s106 funding. It is therefore likely to be a positive project for the future, subject to the necessary funding being found. There are some cracks in the tarmac surface over the A34 bridge and these have been added to the 'crack sealing programme', which sits with Highways colleagues. Large sections of the route are wet and muddy as are many routes at this time of the year. This has been exacerbated recently by the large amount of rain we've had together with the extra footfall due to more people exercising locally. There are similar issues all across the county but unfortunately there is very little the team can do to help in these circumstances.</p> <p>The issue at Bayworth is a longstanding one and not one that is easily resolved. There have been various discussions between CAT and Countryside Records to look at opportunities to divert the footpath onto a more suitable alignment. Whilst these discussions are yet to yield a solution, we remain upbeat. The Parish Council has proposed a way forward and this needs to be discussed further with them on site which will be arranged in due course.</p> |