

## CABINET – 26 MAY 2015

### ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Question received from the following Members:

#### 1. From Councillor Rooke to Councillor Tilly

'Can the Cabinet member please explain why, given that an increase in births happened and was known about four years ago, there has continued to be an increasing lack of locally situated primary school places available to Reception pupils in the north of Abingdon (a journey to the southern Abingdon schools can take up to an hour in the rush hour), and what is being done to ensure that this problem is resolved to the satisfaction of the effected families this year and not repeated in 2016?'

#### Answer

"The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there are enough school places for every Oxfordshire child whose parents request one. I am proud of our record in making sure that the Council always meets this responsibility, a boast that not all Local Authorities can make. The Council also seeks to ensure that as many parents as possible are able to send their children to their preferred schools; this year nearly nine out of ten had their first preference met, that's over 7,000 children placed in their parents' first preference and over 600 more in either their second or third preference. So although 335 more children were allocated their parents' first preference this year, there are some who unfortunately weren't allocated any of their preferred schools, including, I'm sorry to say, some in North Abingdon.

The Council was aware that there had been an increase in live births that would translate into an increased demand for school places in Abingdon, as indeed it has in other areas of the county, and has made sure that there are enough places to accommodate all of them in September. In previous years a number of schools in Abingdon have either admitted 'bulge classes' (Carswell, Dunmore, St.Edmund's & Thameside) or have been permanently expanded (Caldecott ) to ensure that there's an overall sufficiency of places. This year, given that births data indicated there would be an exceptional demand for places in 2015, all Abingdon schools, and particularly those in the north of the town, were asked in November to consider whether they would be able to admit a bulge class, either in their existing accommodation or by having a temporary classroom put on site. The schools at that time did not think that the demand they were then experiencing for nursery places supported the prediction that there would be a shortage of reception places when the same cohort reached school age, and no offers to take more children were forthcoming. Early admissions data also suggested that there would be sufficient places, but once the full set of applications data was available it confirmed the shortage of places. At this point both St.Edmund's and Thameside schools were approached as they were known to have sufficient accommodation to admit a 'bulge class'; Thameside's head teacher was able

to agree this in time for the extra 30 places to be available at the time of the first allocation round.

I accept that Thameside is far from ideal in terms of location but it is a good school and having volunteered to accommodate the additional children promises to give them the warmest of welcomes. As the school is over the statutory walking distance of 2 miles for children aged up to 8 years the Council will provide free transport from home to school each day, making a miniscule addition to the cross-town traffic and obviating the need for parents to make a daily journey.

This year has been pretty exceptional in North Abingdon and the live births data for next and subsequent years show that overall demand north and south of the river is likely to much more closely match the numbers of children needing school places. The issue of some schools being more popular than others does mean that there may still be some families in North Abingdon who won't be able to secure a place at their catchment school and this is particularly likely to be the case with Rush Common Academy. "

## **2. From Councillor Howson to Councillor Nimmo Smith**

"How many traffic incident (accidents) involving a] pedestrians b]cyclists and c] vehicles have been recorded at the Frideswide Square redevelopment between the start of the roadworks and 16th May?"

### **Answer**

"There have been 3 accidents – one involving a pedestrian and two involving cyclists. They all resulted in slight injury. However it has been noted that whilst drivers are asked not to overtake cycles in the narrow areas there is evidence that cyclists are “undertaking” cars which could lead to accidents.”