

CABINET – 16 December 2014

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Questions received from the following Members:

From Councillor Howson to Councillor Tilley

"1. In the Resource briefing last week pressures of over £1 million were identified in the Home to School budget for this year. Can the Cabinet Member identify where these pressures have arisen since the budget was agreed in February."

Answer

"The pressure in Home to School Transport was identified through the Financial Monitoring Reports towards the end of the 2013/14 financial year. At this time the budget setting process had been substantially completed and it was not clear whether this would be an on-going pressure or a one off. At the end of 2013/14 there was an overspend of £1.35m and there is expected to be an on-going pressure in the near future which has now been included as part of the budget proposals for 2015/16. There are plans in place to deal with the pressure and also to make savings over the coming years which should result in a reduction in the budget over the medium term.

Analysis of the home to school budget across financial years 2011/12 to 2013/14 found that expenditure has been steadily rising over this period. In total, expenditure rose by £1.9m (14%) between 11/12 and 13/14 (N.B some areas of expenditure were excluded from the analysis – circa £600K).

The majority of this (£1.4m) is attributable to increased spend on four-seater taxis, which rose by 42% over the three years. £760,497 of this increase is attributable to SEN transport, £346,342 to mainstream transport, £158,745 to Meadowbrook transport (pupil referral units), and the remainder to others. Spend on 5-seater wheel chair accessible vehicles also increased substantially over this period – by £296,466 (42%).

Oxford City saw the highest increase in spend, at £849K (28%). This reflects the high concentration of Special Schools in the city, many of which cater to students from all over the county, and a temporary lack of primary school places which meant students had to travel further distances to get to school.

As a result of these findings, efforts are now focused on reducing spend in the categories / areas identified above. A programme of route assessment and rationalisation has already begun and has delivered substantial savings in 14/15, particularly to mainstream transport. From January onwards, work will focus largely on SEN transport and reducing usage of taxis through a combination of initiatives, including independent travel training, personal budgets and merging of multiple taxi routes into lower cost minibus routes."

2. What has been the spend on taxis in the first six months of the current financial year compared with the same period last year on:

- a) taxi for SEN pupils
- b) taxis for pupils other than SEN pupils.

Answer

"The below two tables show expenditure for SEN and mainstream students on vehicles which could be classed as 'taxis', compared between the first six months of 2014/15 and the same period in 2013/14.

SEN Expenditure

Vehicle type	2013/14 (Apr - Sep)	2014/15 (Apr - Sep)	£ change	% change
4-seater Taxi	£ 1,260,882	£ 1,309,807	£ 48,925	3.88%
7-seater Taxi	£ 156,425	£ 176,756	£ 20,330	13.00%
5-seater Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle	£ 390,545	£ 468,382	£ 77,836	19.93%
8-seater Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle	£ 273,586	£ 267,671	-£ 5,915	-2.16%
TOTAL	£ 2,081,439	£ 2,222,615	£ 141,177	6.78%

Mainstream Expenditure

Vehicle Type	2013/14(Apr - Sep)	2014/15 (Apr - Sep)	£ change	% change
4-seater Taxi	£ 338,930.01	£ 285,495.29	-£53,434.72	-15.77%
7-seater Taxi	£ 54,308.44	£ 75,127.66	£20,819.22	38.34%
6-seater Minibus	£ 23,516.28	£ 19,308.54	-£ 4,207.74	-17.89%
8-seater Minibus	£ 181,721.50	£ 146,272.51	-£35,448.99	-19.51%
TOTAL	£ 598,476.23	£ 526,204.00	-£72,272.23	-12.08%

3. From Councillor Smith to Councillor Stratford

"I note in the September list for County Council invoices paid with a value of £500 or more the following and I am concerned about these two payments shown on the public website:

Line 822, Conservative Group Association paid £812.16 to Oxfordshire Labour Councillors Line 1914, Publicity & Advertising paid £10,000 to Venturefest Oxford Limited.

Could the cabinet member explain why the Conservative Group Association has paid an invoice to Oxfordshire Labour Councillors through the County Council's finance system?

Does the cabinet member believe £10,000 paid to Venturefest Oxford Limited for advertising and publicity is good value for money for Oxfordshire tax payers?"

Answers

"Reply to question 1 re Line 822: Conservative Group Association paid £812.16 to Oxfordshire Labour Councillors :

The Council's payroll initially posts deductions from Councillor allowances relating to payments to the relevant party association to balance sheet code B7123. This is narrated "Conservative Group Association" but is actually used for deductions for all parties. The Council then pay the deductions to either the Conservative, Labour, or other group associations on behalf of each Councillor as appropriate. In this case the deductions paid over on behalf of councillors related to the Labour Group.

Reply to question 2 re: Line 1914: Publicity & Advertising paid £10,000 to Venturefest Oxford Limited

The £10,000 was paid from the Local Enterprise Partnership cost centre which is fully funded by the Local Enterprise Partnership Core Funding grant of £0.500m noted in Annex 3 to the Financial Monitoring Report. The Council is acting as the accountable body for the LEP so the grant income and associated expenditure is included as part of the Council's accounts but has a net nil effect overall."

That explains the WHAT, but as to "Is it good value" I have to presume those that made the decision within the LEP gave appropriate consideration before making the decision.