

## **CABINET – 25 NOVEMBER 2014**

### **ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS**

Questions received from the following Members:

#### **1. From Councillor Howson to Councillor Melinda Tilley**

'It is disappointing that the early years foundation stage profile (EYFSP) results for Oxfordshire published by the DfE on the 20th November were among the worst of all the authorities in the South East region for achieving appropriate standards in all early learning goals (ELGs) despite the efforts of many professionals working with young children: what further steps does she think are possible to at least raise the standard in Oxfordshire to that of the regional average?'

#### **Answer**

- “Firstly, it is only the second year of this specific assessment, which is conducted through adults observing children during classroom activities. The assessment is not as objective as, for example, the marking of examination papers. In Oxfordshire there has been very rigorous training of teachers and other adults conducting the assessment. Oxfordshire works with a number of neighbouring local authorities to check that assessments are consistent across different local authority areas, but not with all the local authorities that you mention. Oxfordshire scored the second highest ‘Good Level of Development’ out of these six local authorities.
- Secondly, Oxfordshire’s results increased considerably from 2013 to 2014, with a 12% increase in the number of children reaching a ‘Good Level of Development’.
- Bearing in mind these contextual factors, the results are not as disappointing as might initially be thought. However, you are right to ask what is being done to address under-achievement in the Foundation Stage.
- From analysis of the data, it is scores in Literacy which have been lower in Oxfordshire, specifically in writing, and particularly boys’ writing.
- The following activities are funded by the County Council to address this, and to aim to raise the standard in Oxfordshire to the regional average:
  - Training is delivered to schools where the results were particularly low.
  - In schools where teachers working in the foundation stage are inexperienced, additional training is offered.

- Advisors and lead teachers work with pre-school settings (day nurseries, playgroups, childminders etc), checking that their assessments are accurate, so that accurate assessments can be passed to schools when children transfer.
  - Advisory support is provided for schools and settings that are inspected by Ofsted as offering less than a good standard of early education.
  - Children's centres work with their local pre-school providers to help children facing difficulties to enjoy and benefit from their early learning experiences. Children's centres also help parents to develop strong learning opportunities at home.
- Examples of locally successful work, such as a storytelling project in Banbury, are shared so that Oxfordshire schools and settings can learn from success elsewhere”

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

“Having told full Council on November 4th that the Oxford southern by-pass road works would finish on time at the end of November, does the Cabinet member now feel he should have been more cautious? Would he estimate the costs to local businesses of the road works over-runs and the daily traffic delays, and would he apologise to drivers in and around Oxford for the disruption to their personal and working lives?”

### **Answer**

The information I provided at Cabinet was correct at the time, and I was very disappointed to subsequently have to announce that the contraflow will be in place for a few more days at Kennington.

We recognise that the work we are doing at the moment is causing frustration for all road users, including business. Ultimately, while the delays that people are experiencing at the moment are frustrating, the work is being done to ensure that the transport system is sustainable and able to meet the ambitions of residents and business.

I know that many people will be upset that after months of delays and were looking forward to the road being back to full capacity. I am sorry that this has not happened.

The start of work at Kennington was delayed significantly by work Thames Water needed to do, however major schemes like this throw up challenges and you have to work hard to overcome them. In addition the recent wet weather delayed crucial waterproofing work on a number of bridges, meaning that resurfacing will now take place around a week later than hoped. Allowance for delays had been built into the programme, but this had been reduced by one of the specialist subcontractors involved in the work recently going into liquidation, and an alternative subcontractor needing to be found at short notice.

Given the delays to the start of work, and challenges like the discovery of an unmapped electricity cable earlier in the project, the team on site have done well to accelerate the remaining works. The team will be continuing to work at nights and weekends to complete the work as quickly as possible.

With regard to your request for me to estimate the cost to the economy of undertaking the work, I am not going to do this but what I can say is that this cost would pale into insignificance against the on-going impact of not doing anything.

The good news is that there is relatively little work left to be done now and work is progressing well. Drivers can look forward to the roadworks being removed very soon and long term significant improvements to their journeys.

### **3. From Councillor Hards to Councillor Rodney Rose**

“Please would you confirm that you will put pressure on Thames Water to complete the upgrade to the sewage pumping station on Mendip Heights, Didcot, where my constituent had raw sewage on his door step and no functioning drains AGAIN on Tuesday/ Wednesday 11/12 November? According to my contact, one of the new pumps tripped out several days before the problem arose but Thames Water did not fix it promptly. Thames Water proposed in June to fit more modern and reliable pumps and a second “line”. The second line was I believe approved by Thames Water’s Board but has not yet been installed.”

#### **Answer**

“Clearly I have every sympathy with your constituent and the difficulties they are facing as a result of failures by Thames Water however this appears to be an issue that you should be raising with the Consumer Council for Water who are the appropriate bodies for this matter. The guidance from the Council is that you must follow the Companies complaints process first and go to them if you have an unsatisfactory response. I suggest you let Thames Water know that this is what you will be doing if they do not respond promptly to the problem.”

### **4. From Councillor Phillips to Councillor Hibbert Biles**

'Cabinet Member for Public Health and the Voluntary Sector, Professor Sir Michael Marmot has advised that 75% of local authorities have taken on board his 2010 recommendations from his report 'Fair Society Healthy Lives' and used them to formulate their local plans and strategies. Is Oxfordshire included in the 75% and if not why not? and if so is there an example of how these recommendations have influenced policy implementation?'

## **Answer**

“As there was a similar question from Cllr Pressell at Council I suggest Councillor Phillips looks at the minutes printed in the November Council papers.”

## **5. From Councillor Phillips to Councillor Melinda Tilley**

"Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Families, The Regional Education Commissioner has recently not supported this Council's recommendation for the sponsoring academy for the new primary school on the Barton development. What is the reason for this decision and what action has been taken to challenge this decision?"

## **Answer**

The reasons for the rejection of the Council's recommendation that Cheney School be the sponsor of the new Barton primary school were not stated in the letter advising the Council of this decision. At a meeting between officers and the Regional Schools Commissioner on the 17th November, he stated that if Cheney School wished to submit a new bid as part of the re-run of the Council's sponsor selection process, he could see no reason why it shouldn't be allowed so to do. He also said that a further letter would be sent to Cheney School giving reasons why its sponsorship of the new Barton school had not been approved.

We now understand that the headteacher will submit a revised and more comprehensive bid.