

CABINET – 20 JULY 2010

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Questions received from the following Members:

To Councillor Mitchell from Councillor Patrick

1. Why has no single member champion produced a report (to be published on the intranet) since January, and some for considerably longer than that?

Answer:

Champions' reports were due on 31 March 2010 and on 30 June 2010. Given that 31 March was immediately before the calling of the General Election and the commencement of a period of purdah, I took the view that members would be busy campaigning and that Champions' reports might fall foul of the purdah rules and were, therefore, best avoided. I have reviewed and changed some of the Champion positions. They all know they are expected to produce quarterly reports and these are being collated and finalised at the moment and should be on the Intranet by the end of this month.

2. What is the status of the "member champions" mentioned in the Business Strategy 2010-2013 dated June 2010? Cllr Shouler was appointed at Cabinet on 22nd June 2010; when were the others appointed? Will they be providing quarterly reports?

Answer:

All of the Champion Appointments were made at Agenda Item 14 (see Annex) at the Cabinet Meeting on 22 June 2010.

To Councillor Mitchell from Councillor Fooks

3. Is the Leader intending to appoint someone to take over as Design Champion? As he clearly has had difficulty finding someone to appoint in the last six months, has he considered asking a member of another group?

Answer:

The position of Design Champion has been discontinued on the advice of the last Champion.

To Councillor Hudspeth from Councillor Fooks

4. Can the Cabinet Member give an update on the progress of the City/County partnership bid for Plugged-in Places funding, and any information on the performance of the two electric vehicles on loan to the Council?

Answer:

Plugged-in Places

At the end of June 2010, the City and County submitted an expression of interest for the second round of Plugged in Places. This application was supported by a range of other partners.

We have subsequently met with the Office for Low Emissions Vehicles (OLEV) and were advised by them that our Expression of Interest was good.

The new Government has made policy commitments to this agenda, most clearly in the coalition agreement which announced they will mandate a national charging infrastructure for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles. We are further advised by civil servants that Ministers are taking an active interest in the Electric Vehicle arena and are considering the detail for how to take forward the wider OLEV programme, including the Plug-in Car Grant and Plugged-in Places.

However, we also understand in discussion with OLEV, that decisions are being taken in the wider context of a need to reduce the budget deficit and unfortunately, at this point in time, no firm decisions have been made as to the future of Plugged in Places.

OLEV has said that once it has a clear decision from Ministers, it will issue updated guidance and application templates as well as a clear list of those projects that it is asking to carry forward to final bid. In the meantime, OLEV has asked all those that submitted an expression of interest to continue work, with a view to submission of a full application at the end of September 2010.

Electric Vehicles

We are coming to the end of phase one (the first six months) of the Mini E car trial, with the second phase due to begin in September.

BMW is able to share only very limited technical information with the Council but we will in due course get feedback from the Oxford Brookes University research into driver behaviour, although not until the end of the trial in March 2011.

Locally, we have observed a tendency for drivers to be concerned about the distance they can comfortably travel (so-called "range anxiety") but this was perhaps understandable and has lessened with more frequent use. Most drivers have been very positive about the overall performance of the vehicles but would like an easier method of hooking up for recharge. Of the five cars we had allocated in phase one, four were used as 'pool' cars and one allocated permanently to an Advisor for Hearing Impaired Children. The permanent user very quickly became comfortable with the minor peculiarities of the vehicle, was able to perform her duties in a normal manner and was sad to see it go at the end of the trial.

The first phase included the very cold spell of weather during which a number of technical and other performance issues were revealed.

In phase two of the trial the number of our vehicles will reduce to four. The intention is for two to be based at County Hall, one at Samuelson House (Banbury) and one to be placed with the Fire Service.

To Councillor Fatemian from Councillor Larry Sanders

5. With reference to Agenda Item 11 on Revised Carers Commissioning Intentions within Oxfordshire how does the Cabinet think it will be possible for the revised budget and revised plans to meet the needs of the 45,000 carers it aims to target?

Answer:

The target of 45,000 carers contacted and offered services needs to be approached by ensuring we have a good understanding of what informal family carers might want and need, and to respond appropriately. We need to target face-to-face time at those with the greatest needs and focus other resources to meet the needs of the less critical. Crucially, we need to harness the functions of new technologies, be they telephone or internet based, to maximise the use of the resources we have.

We do know that support to carers in the form of information can go a long way to improving a carer's situation to allow them to make the choice to continue to keep caring if they wish - when perhaps they might have felt the need otherwise to make a more difficult choice - that might, for example, mean a change of accommodation or similar.

There are new opportunities to meet this need to reach out to many more carers:

1. The new Customer Services Centre will offer services to all callers to the Council. The Customer Services Centre is expected to handle approximately 85,000 callers per year. Agreement has been reached for all of these callers to be screened for caring responsibilities and offered information where needed. We estimate that that 10% of these will be Carers based on the current available demographic data.
2. We expect that, with Self Directed Support, carers' needs will be explicitly identified and taken into account in support plans and will be given named contacts within locality teams. In addition to this, the new brokerage service puts carers, along with the cared-for, at the centre of support planning and carers will receive individual support. We expect this to improve markedly the number of carers we can identify and support. We want to ensure that all carers are clearly recorded as such.
3. Peer Support and Voluntary schemes - Adult Social & Community Services is continuing to invest into community services and will expect to expand investment to further strengthen infrastructure. This is a very popular service and we want to increase its coverage, but it is difficult, at present, to assess the number of carers we can expect to reach by this route.

In addition:

1. The Carers' Support Service will employ members of 6 staff including a specific Marketing Post, the role of which will be to improve our ability to reach new carers more effectively. This is to be put out to tender shortly.
2. The Emergency Support Service - 1 Staff – currently 2000 carers identified.
3. The Transformed Social Care Services - 45 Coordinators delivering carers and cared for access to specialist provision including direct payments
4. Improved partnership working with Districts, City Council and PCT through the Carers Strategy action plans. Specific training for staff
5. Carers will be further identified through initiatives like direct payments through GPs surgeries which encourages GPs to register as carers. The pilot projects have proven very successful so far.
6. Investment remains in place to increase identification of hidden carers such as members of black and ethnic minority groups or those in rural communities.
7. The new Alert Service contract offers the opportunity for self-referral from carers when they request this service.