

CABINET – 18 JULY 2017

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Questions received from the following Members:

1. Councillor Howson to Councillor Hibbert-Biles

“During the general election campaign, and also subsequently, there have been statements that no school would lose out under the new National Funding Formula. This included a manifesto pledge to “make sure no school has its budget cut as a result of the new formula. Schools will, of course face other funding cuts. However, I can find no mention of how the High Needs funding block will be treated in terms of this extra funding. Can the Cabinet Member explain how the children of Oxfordshire funded through the High Needs block will benefit from the extra funding identified by the government?”

Answer:

“To date I have seen no firm commitments from the government to address the High Needs Block in Oxfordshire. I have written to Robert Goodwill, MP requesting a meeting with him at his earliest convenience and I will add the High Needs Block to the other matters I intend to raise with him, including the excessive time it takes to secure school places for our Looked After Children who are placed outside of Oxfordshire.”

2. Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Constance

I'd like to draw the County Council's attention to the DfT's "[Local cycling and walking infrastructure plan guidance](#)"; the Department invites local authorities to express their interest in technical support for the development of local cycling and walking infrastructure.

“Recognising that preparing LCWIPs may take time and resources not readily available to all local authorities, a comprehensive programme of technical cycling and walking support has been developed. This programme makes available technical expertise to local authorities wishing to develop local plans, through an expression of interest process. It also offers advice on how to integrate LCWIPs into local policies and strategies, and develop the local strategic and economic case for investment.”

Has the council started work on preparing it's LCWIP and will it be using advice and the resources offered by the DfT to help shape the plan?

Answer

“The Council is looking to progress work on developing [local cycling and walking infrastructure plan guidance](#), and as such has submitted a bid for technical support on offer from the DfT, referred to in Councillor Smith’s question. The submission was made at the end of June and we are awaiting the outcome.”

3. Councillor Dr Johnson to Councillor Constance

Many villages in Wheatley Division are suffering because of the cut in bus subsidies. Elderly and vulnerable people are isolated; younger people cannot get to college and apprenticeships; those who relied on buses for work are now using cars and increasing the traffic on our already congested roads. Does the member agree with me that saving up to £4 million pounds from cutting bus subsidy was a false economy, and will she work with me to find room in our forthcoming budget to reinstate bus subsidies?

Answer

“At the budget setting meeting in February 2016, all Liberal Democrat councillors present voting for the budget including withdrawing the bus subsidy grant. It is interesting to note that of the 118 bus services affected there were solutions found for 54 of the routes. Rather than reinstating the subsidies we should be looking to more imaginative ways of providing services in areas affected. For instance in my division there is a project called ‘Our Bus’ that is a successful volunteer organisation that is providing a service that was withdrawn by the bus companies prior to the February 2016 being taken, I am working with the group so that it can continue to provide such services, I would be more than happy to give you the group’s details so that you could start a similar project in your division to help those that have been affected by the February 2016 budget decision.

Although the county council has been forced by the financial crisis affecting local government to make difficult decisions - notably to withdraw funding from non-commercial bus services - we remain committed to working in partnership with bus operators to safeguard and develop the commercial bus network. In fact, Oxfordshire has a long history of doing this and as a result we have some of the best bus services and highest levels of patronage of any shire county, particularly in the South East.

However, in addition to commercial bus services there are two further ways in which the county council is supporting bus passengers. One is through our innovative Comet initiative and the other is through the use of developer contributions to "pump prime" new or enhanced bus services where there is

substantial development with a view to them becoming commercially viable in the longer term.

Comet

We have over 151 registered members, about 75% of whom regularly use the service. We are covering a large majority of the county. At least two buses are used in each district area every day. We have 8 parish groups running regular bus-replacement type routes, mainly in the south of the county - all of which have got large enough passenger numbers to sustain them and recoup their costs. We also have about a dozen care homes and schools using the service for trips out.

Sub Bus continued Commercially

The council purchased season tickets for the following routes / schools, involving approximately 290 students overall.

Route Number and Operator	Schools served	Outcome
94, Thames Travel	Didcot Girls School, St Birinus School Didcot	Operator wanted to withdraw service as was no longer considered viable. S106 funding has been used to postpone this withdrawal until Easter 2018 at which point there may be further options available to secure its continuation.
114, Thames Travel	Larkmead School Abingdon, John Mason School Abingdon, Fitzharry's School Abingdon	Service being withdrawn as no longer considered viable by the operator. OCC has increased the size of its private school transport buses that were running alongside this route. This will ensure transport still exists for children to Abingdon schools from Berinsfield (children who would

		previously caught the 114). This solution however will only be viable for one further year.
136, Thames Travel	Wallingford School	New arrangement of purchasing season tickets
X8, Pulham's Coaches	Chipping Norton School	Continuation of purchasing season tickets
X9, Pulham's Coaches	Chipping Norton School	Service being withdrawn as no longer considered viable by the operator. OCC changing other school transport routes to ensure children are still taken to school. As it happens, this should also be at a reduced cost to the council

S106 funds have been used to continue some of these routes until the contract end dates:

Service, Operator	Description	Outcome through providing S106 funding
B2, Stagecoach	Bodicote-Banbury	Contract for service continues until at least July 2017. There will be slight changes to the timetable after 20 July.
B10, Stagecoach	Hanwell Fields-Banbury	Contract for service continues until at least July 2017. There will be slight changes to the timetable after 20 July
488,	Chipping Norton-	Contract for service continues until end

Stagecoach	Banbury	<p>date of June 2017.</p> <p>No changes to current service.</p>
S3, Stagecoach	Chipping Norton-Woodstock-(Oxford) Sunday	<p>Contract for service continues until end date of November 2017.</p> <p>No changes to current service.</p>
233, Stagecoach	Burford-Witney-Woodstock	<p>Contract for service continues until end date of June 2018.</p> <p>There will be a revised timetable and route after 20 July. Further details in the attached.</p>
X15, Stagecoach	Witney-Abingdon	<p>New contract in place to support this service</p> <p>There will be a revised timetable and route after 20 July. Further details in the attached.</p>
19, Stagecoach	Carterton-Bampton-Witney	<p>New contract in place to support this service</p> <p>There will be a revised timetable and route after 20 July. Further details in the attached.</p>
136 and 139-Sunday Service, Thames Travel	Cholsey-Wallingford-Henley	<p>Contract for supporting the Sunday services continues until end date of June 2017.</p> <p>136 - No changes to existing Sunday timetable.</p> <p>139 - Sunday timetable to remain largely the same, but with routing now via Crowmarsh Gifford rather than Shillingford.</p>
139, Thames Travel	Henley-Wallingford	<p>Contract for service continues until end date of June 2017.</p> <p>Service route to be amended to operate hourly Wallingford – Crowmarsh Gifford – Nettlebed – Henley on Mondays to Saturdays with effect from 24/07/16. Peak</p>

		journeys will be extended to serve Henley College. Benson Village and RAF Benson to now be served on service 136.
X2, Thames Travel	Oxford- Abingdon – Milton Park - Didcot	Continue to support service under a new contract until June 2017. Service frequency increased to two buses per hour Monday to Saturday. Service will co-ordinate with service X1 (re-numbered to 32A) to provide three buses per hour between Abingdon and Didcot. New extension in Wallingford to serve Hithercroft Industrial Estate with one bus per hour.
X1, Thames Travel	Oxford- Didcot- Harwell Campus- Wantage	New contract in place to support this service until June 2017. Service re-numbered to 32A. Will operate hourly between Wantage and Abingdon on Mondays to Saturdays. Route between Didcot and Abingdon will serve Culham village partly replacing service T2. Further information about the new service can be found in the attached route update document.
275, Red Rose Travel	Oxford City Centre- High Wycombe	S106 funding used to part fund Buckinghamshire County Council's contract to continue this service until July 2018
94, Thames Travel	Didcot – Blewbury – Hagbournes – Didcot	New contract in place to support this service until June 2017. Service will operate to a revised route and timetable on Mondays to Fridays. Peak journeys will be extended to serve Didcot schools.

The following is the update that Thames Travel about the services they were continuing:

Service	What is happening?
T1	Service extended to serve Chinnor and Lewknor. Peak services will continue to operate into Oxford City Centre, off-peak service will terminate at Cowley Centre with through ticketing available for onward journeys to City and Rail Station on Oxford Bus Company City5 and BROOKESBus U5 services.
T2	Service will cease to operate at end of service on 23/07/16. New 3A service to be introduced by Oxford Bus Company and Stagecoach in Oxfordshire to serve Iffley Road, Littlemore, Sandford and Oxford Science Park with two buses per hour Monday to Saturday. Culham Village will be served by service 32A providing links to Abingdon.
T5	New peak commuter service introduced, operating between Oxford Rail Station, Oxford City Centre and Oxford Business Park on Mondays to Fridays.
X1	Service re-numbered 32A and will operate hourly between Wantage and Abingdon on Mondays to Saturdays. Route between Didcot and Abingdon will serve Culham village partly replacing service T2.
X2	Service frequency increased to two buses per hour Monday to Saturday. Service will co-ordinate with service 32A to provide three buses per hour between Abingdon and Didcot. New extension in Wallingford to serve Hithercroft Industrial Estate with one bus per hour.
X32	Minor timetable changes only at this time
X34	Minor timetable changes only at this time
X39	No changes
X40	No changes
17	New off-peak service introduced between Jericho and Oxford City Centre on Mondays to Fridays.
22 & 23	Withdrawn

24	Service will cease to operate at end of service on 23/07/16
25	Service will cease to operate at end of service on 23/07/16
25A	Subject to contract, service will continue to operate hourly Monday to Saturday. Revised timetable with amended service routing within Bicester to be introduced from 24/07/16.
32A	This is the former service X1 renumbered operating between Wantage and Abingdon only but via Culham Village instead of Drayton.
38	Service to be replaced by revised service operating 15 journeys per day between Grove and Wantage on Mondays to Fridays, and hourly on Saturdays from 24/07/16
41	Service to be enhanced to operate half hourly on Mondays to Fridays between 08:30 and 15:00. Service routing extended to serve Tesco and Fairacres retail park.-Service now ends 23/7/17
67/67A/67B	Subject to contract, services will be replaced by revised 67 service, operating hourly between Wantage and Faringdon via Stanford-in-the-Vale on Mondays to Saturdays. Through connections to Harwell, Milton Park and Didcot will be guaranteed and passengers wishing to make through journeys can remain on the bus. Uffington, Childrey, Fernham, Shellingford, the Letcombes, Kingston Lisle, Sparsholt, Westcot and Baulking will no longer be served.
94 (Bicester)	Service will cease to operate at end of service on 23/07/16
94 (Didcot)	Service will operate to a revised route and with reduced hours of operation on Mondays to Fridays only, with effect from 24/07/16. Peak journeys will be extended to serve Didcot schools.
95	Service will cease to operate at end of service on 23/07/16
96	No changes
97	Service will cease to operate at end of service on 23/07/16
114	Service will operate to a revised timetable, with one journey in each direction on Mondays to Fridays (schooldays only).

	Service ending 23/7/17
135	Limited Saturday service introduced providing one journey in each direction between Wallingford and Goring. Incorporated into service 143 from 3/7/17
136	Service to be enhanced from 24/07/16 to operate half hourly between Cholsey, Wallingford, Crowmarsh Gifford, Benson and RAF Benson on Mondays to Fridays, with an hourly service on Saturdays. Peak journeys will be extended to serve Wallingford School. No changes to existing Sunday timetable at this time. Better timed connections with trains at Cholsey Rail Station.
139	Service routing to be amended to operate hourly Wallingford – Crowmarsh Gifford – Nettlebed – Henley on Mondays to Saturdays with effect from 24/07/16. Peak journeys will be extended to serve Henley College. Benson Village and RAF Benson to now be served on service 136. Sunday timetable to remain largely the same as current, but with routing now via Crowmarsh Gifford rather than Shillingford.
143	No changes to Monday to Friday timetable at this time. Saturday routing and timetable revised to no longer serve Whitchurch Hill or Goring. Incorporates part of 135 3/7/17

4. Councillor Dr Johnson to Councillor Hibbert-Biles

“Oxfordshire Mind is seeking £308K funding for Mental Health Awareness for children and young people. This investment in Public Health would potentially save the NHS and Social Care millions of pounds a year in Oxfordshire. Will the Cabinet Member meet with Mr Dan Knowles, CEO of Oxfordshire Mind, and me regarding funding this scheme of prevention, ensuring better mental health for young people in this county in years to come?”

Answer

“Thank you for your question. I will answer it in two parts, firstly the request to meet and discuss specific funding with local representatives of MIND – an organisation which is well respected locally, and which I strongly support – and secondly, I will provide some background information about the Council’s wide role in mental health promotion.

So first the governance issues. I understand that Cllr Johnson’s intentions are good, but I think it would be improper for me to proceed as she requests. There are several thousand charities in Oxfordshire, many of which regularly

put forward proposals for sensible projects across the range of Council functions. We invest considerable sums in our local voluntary services, including Oxfordshire MIND, but we commit these funds through proper business processes which ensure that competition is fair, and much of our officer's time is spent in ensuring that these processes are handled within the Council's strict and proper regulations. We receive many proposals and many requests for funding each week, and it is important that these are dealt with in an even-handed manner – hence our governance arrangements. I would propose therefore that this proposal is put to our officers in the same way as proposals are from other organisations and it can receive due consideration through that route and, come to me or to Cabinet for decisions at the proper time.

I would however underline the fact that the Voluntary Sector is highly valued by the Council and I understand that my Cabinet colleague Cllr Gray has recently met with leaders of Oxfordshire's larger Voluntary Sector Organisations (including Oxfordshire MIND), with the Council's most senior officers, to review how that relationship can be strengthened going forward.

We need to spend every penny with care and that means that we follow the established processes for considering bids from any quarter.

With regard to mental health promotion, the Council has a wide range of services already in place. We aim to promote mental wellbeing as part and parcel of wider services so that mental and physical health are dealt with as a whole. Much of the time for example of our successful School Health Nursing service is spent on promoting mental health in precisely the young people you refer to. Also, our Health Visiting, Sexual Health and drug and alcohol services, all aim to promote mental as well as physical health. Similarly, mental health is promoted by exercise, diet and keeping fit, and our work on promoting physical exercise is also part and parcel of our drive to improve mental wellbeing. We also coordinate our prevention services with the NHS whose duty is to treat mental ill health when symptoms begin to show – again, Cllr Johnson will be aware that the NHS has recently strengthened its services in schools aiming at the vulnerable group of young people she mentions, and of course our school health nurses work hand in hand with these services as indeed they do with schools' own mental health counsellors.

Mental health is notoriously difficult to measure, but several indirect measures point to successful mental health promotion in Oxfordshire – teenage pregnancy rates are low and falling, exercise rates are high and addiction services show good results. Young people themselves are increasingly willing to come forward for help, and demand for help in schools and in NHS services attests to this. This is not to say that there are not challenges ahead and we are all well aware of the stresses modern life puts on young people. This is a problem for all of us to address – parents, schools, the NHS, the Council, and not least, young people themselves. We are well sighted on these issues – they were featured last year's annual report by our Director of Public Health - and we have good services in place. We are moving forward and will continue to do so and these challenges will require everyone to play their part.”