

CABINET – 29 JANUARY 2013

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Questions received from the following Members:

1. Councillor Jean Fooks to Councillor Rodney Rose

“The addenda to Cabinet on Dec 18th listed key announcements in the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement. Under capital investment, paragraph 18 mentioned an extra £1bn funding for the road programme and £42m for cycling infrastructure. There is also the Community Linking places fund and money for Improving Cycle Safety at junctions.

I should very much like to know what bids for cycling projects the County Council has made to these funds – which projects were successful and which might be on the long list for which extra money was announced on November 28th 2012?

Please can you give me the details?”

Answer

“We have bid to the DfT Cycle Safety Fund for a scheme in the Wotton Road area of Abingdon, one of the main objectives being the need to reduce casualties at this location. The scheme value is just over £300,000. At present, there are no further bids planned for purely cycling schemes, as we are focusing resources on securing investment for larger infrastructure projects, for example from the national pinch-points funding programme.

The extra £1bn that was announced in the Autumn Statement was mostly allocated to a small number of large national trunk road schemes (none of which are in Oxfordshire or neighbouring areas), but some of it is funding the Local Pinch Point Fund, for which we are preparing a bid for converting Milton Interchange into a “hamburger” design.

Although “extra” funds were allocated for cycling infrastructure in the statement part of this appears to be through additional funding being made for the Local Sustainable Transport Fund and part through making funding available to match fund private initiatives to which the County Council is not eligible to bid.”

2. Councillor John Goddard to Councillor Rodney Rose

“Today’s papers for Cabinet rightly give prominence to transport policy and improvements but there is a an ominous silence on the A40 between Witney and Oxford, the previously mentioned link between the A40 and the A44 just

west of the Wolvercote roundabout and the consequent reduction of overload on that dangerous and accident-prone roundabout.

Will the Cabinet member explain what priority he will give to obtaining funding for this link and its early implementation as an essential part of any strategic plan for transport improvement in the county?"

Answer

"The problems on the A40 west of Oxford and as it passes through North Oxford are recognised as among the most serious transport problems that we need to deal with in order to unlock the potential of the Oxfordshire economy and protect the county's environment. However the solutions to these problems are going to be extremely expensive and the opportunities to bid for funding to solve them are likely to be scarce. The A40-A44 link has been included as part of the county's City Deal bid and we will continue to look for appropriate means to fund these schemes. In the meantime, as part of the review of the Local Transport Plan planned for this year our intention is to produce a document which centres on a clear, justified, costed and prioritised picture of the infrastructure needs of the county which will place us in a better place to take advantage of future funding opportunities."

3. Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Rodney Rose

"As you know London Road, Headington, is the major approach road into Oxford City from London and experiences a very high volume of traffic. The road surface is in an appalling state and drainage problems are experienced during heavy rain. Could the cabinet member consider bringing forward plans to alleviate the drainage problems and improvements to the road surface from the centre of Headington upto the Green Road roundabout?"

Answer

"A scheme is planned for London Road, Headington for 2014/15. This is a combination scheme whereby Improvement to bus lane widening (from the Policy & Strategy Unit) and carriageway resurfacing (Asset Management) will take place. Both teams have been liaising to find the optimum time to carry out the works and some temporary patching has been necessary pending the official start date that seeks to minimise disruption by combining the two elements of work.

The current programme anticipates that utility diversion works will commence in January 2014 and the bus lane widening and full-depth reconstruction works will follow in April 2014. It is not possible to bring this forward from the date due to the need to liaise with the utility companies and complexities involved with a combined delivery which is satisfying two differing needs."

4. Councillor Susanna Pressel to Councillor Rodney Rose

“Highway maintenance -- Please can you tell me how you can possibly justify dividing the money available for day-to-day highway maintenance equally between the five districts? Surely the money should be allocated according to *need*? We must look at the *number* of buses, pedestrians, cars, cyclists and other road and pavement users, since this dictates the level of wear and tear. Some of the roads and pavements in my division (and of course elsewhere in the City) are in a disgraceful state, especially some sections of the most heavily used bus lanes. Will you please stop being so blatantly unfair in your allocation of the available budget?”

Answer

“The County allocates the day-to-day highways maintenance money for the classified network (A, B & C roads) based on road length within the county. The unclassified road network (all other adopted roads) forms approximately 5.5% of the county’s total road network (based on roads length) which receives an allocation based on this fact. The City Council chooses to undertake the Section 42 responsibilities and 6% (5.5% rounded up for the unclassified network) is paid directly to the City Council for the unclassified network, and they have total discretion in how to spend this on the unclassified network.

In addition to the day-to-day highways maintenance budget, the County receives a capital allocation grant that is prioritised by need on the total network and delivered via the Structural Maintenance programme, as do all other districts. The City Council provides a list of non-classified road schemes (footways and carriageways) to the County for consideration each year and receives funds for these (which varies from year to year dependent on countywide needs factors). The County also provides the 6% of the surface dressing capital allocation to the City Council which is assessed and prioritised by the City Council engineers.”

5. Councillor John Sanders to Councillor Rodney Rose

"If the LTB is to be comprised of members of the ruling party, what measures does the cabinet propose to ensure adequate scrutiny of its decisions by opposition party representatives?"

Answer

“The Assurance Framework appended to the report sets out the intention for the work of the Local Transport Board (LTB) to be as open and transparent as possible. I would particularly refer Cllr Sanders to clauses 16-17 and 21-23. The proposal is to establish the LTB under the auspices of the Spatial Planning & Infrastructure Partnership (SPIP) whose work is currently scrutinised by the Growth & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee on which opposition councillors are well represented. As Cllr Sanders is aware there is a Corporate Governance Review underway and he is at liberty to make

suggestions as to how the scrutiny function should operate going forward and I look forward to hearing his proposals.”

6. Councillor Gill Sanders to Councillor Arash Fatemian

“Could the Cabinet Member for Adult Services please assure me that they he will monitor carefully the impact of the proposed increases to day centre charges and, if the figures show a significant fall in the numbers of people attending the centres, will he be prepared to review any decisions on increases that the Cabinet may make today?”

Answer

“I have already given a commitment that we will monitor closely the use of the centres. If there are any significant changes then we will consider carefully what we shall do in response. Any proposals will come forward for consideration by members.”