

QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Questions are listed in the order in which they were received. The time allowed for this agenda item will not exceed 30 minutes. Should any questioner not have received an answer in that time, a written answer will be provided.

Questions	Answers
<p>1. COUNCILLOR JOHN HOWSON</p> <p>In view of the current guidance from the Secretary of State at paragraph 115 of Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance that:</p> <p><i>“115. The Secretary of State expects that local authorities may wish to exercise this discretionary power to ensure that pupils whose parents had expressed a preference for a vocational education at a 14-19 vocational academy were not denied the opportunity to do so by the lack of, or the cost of transport arrangements to such a school. Local authorities should use this power to facilitate attendance at a vocational academy where the school’s catchment area included all, or part of the local authority’s area. Where such pupils were from low income backgrounds, then such arrangements should be free of charge.”</i></p> <p>Will the new consultation on school transport include a section on transport arrangements to the UTC in Didcot and the Studio School in Banbury?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR MELINDA TILLEY, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES</p> <p>The Council's position is to support all types of academies and it would wish to treat equally all schools in the county irrespective of their status. At present the Home to School transport policy does not do this. Schools which have catchment areas confer entitlements to free transport to those living within them irrespective of how far children live from the school (provided, of course, they are over the statutory walking distance away). The Europa Free school uses distances from a number of defined points to determine admissions but, since it doesn't have a defined catchment area, only those children for whom it is the nearest school receive free transport. The University Technical College planned for Didcot plans to use groups of post codes to prioritise admissions; again only those children for whom it is the nearest school would receive free transport from the Council. A policy of providing free transport to only the nearest school would remove this inequality and would obviate the need for the home to school transport policy to treat particular types of academy differently. Of course, if the Secretary of State chooses to issue new statutory guidance which <i>requires</i> the Council to actively discriminate in favour of UTCs and Studio Schools (but not Free Schools, converter and sponsored academies), then the Council would, of course, have due regard to it.</p> <p>The national policy of extending the free transport entitlement to children from low income families so that they can attend any one of the three nearest secondary schools between 2 and 6 miles from home (up to 15 miles in the case of faith schools attended for religious reasons) will continue to apply.</p>

Questions	Answers
	Likewise, where there is no entitlement to free transport, but there are spare seats, the charge for these is waived for children from low income families. A 'nearest school only' policy would also safeguard the Council against incurring additional expenditure through the creation of new academies, including UTCs and studio schools, or through existing academies expanding their catchment areas and conferring increased entitlements to free transport.
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION</p> <p>Will the new consultation invite discussion about whether or not there should be any changes following the participation age increase which is going through at present?</p>	<p>SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER</p> <p>Yes.</p>
<p>2. COUNCILLOR JOHN TANNER</p> <p>Does the Cabinet member agree with me that it is unreasonable to expect Oxfordshire fire fighters to work until they are 60, to sharply increase their pension contributions and to threaten them with no job and no pension if they become unfit?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR LOUISE CHAPMAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR POLICY CO-ORDINATION</p> <p>a) We have firefighters within the Service who have worked until they are 60 and only last month an individual retired from Wheatley Fire Station aged 63. The current new firefighters pension scheme already has a normal pension age of 60, but there is no restriction on how long an individual can remain in employment as long as they are capable of undertaking the role safely.</p> <p>b) Pension contributions have been raised in line with the Government Actuary Department report which identified the need to increase contributions to ensure that the scheme remained on a sustainable footing. There has been a phased implementation of these rises to reduce the impact on individuals at all levels of the service.</p> <p>c) All employees have a responsibility to maintain their ability to carry out their role to ensure the safety of the public and their colleagues. If a firefighter fails a fitness test then he/she is given the full support of our occupational health and service fitness advisor. They are given a</p>

Questions	Answers
	<p>development programme and advice to assist in them regaining their fitness. If they are unable to maintain their fitness due to a medical issue then the pension scheme still enables them to be awarded an ill health retirement. If however they do not reach an acceptable level due to personal choice then the organisation will progress them through the performance management framework. This is designed to give an individual every opportunity to improve to a level which is acceptable for the safety of themselves, their colleagues and the public. There is a significant loss in both financial terms and experience if a competent firefighter has to leave the job, and the FRS seeks to keep people in their role for as long possible. Whilst the FBU would have you believe this is a new issue due to the pension reforms, we currently have the ability to performance manage an individual if they fail to meet the required standards and we will continue to do so.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION</p> <p>Is the Cabinet Member saying that our Fire & Rescue staff should not have the right to hold strike ballots or is she simply saying that they should in no circumstances strike, I am not at all clear?</p>	<p>SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER</p> <p>The Fire Service is an emergency service and they work tirelessly on our behalf, there is not a person in this room or probably in the County that would say anything against them. Of course everybody has the right to strike, but I can assure you that our firefighters, even if they go on strike, if there was a serious incident in this County they have got the vocation to actually come forward and fight any fire.</p>
<p>3. COUNCILLOR JOHN TANNER</p> <p>Does the Cabinet member agree that the Fire Brigades Union should never have been forced into calling a ballot of its members, in Oxfordshire and elsewhere, for industrial action and that a negotiated settlement is the best way</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR LOUISE CHAPMAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR POLICY CO-ORDINATION</p> <p>I fully agree that a negotiated settlement is the best way forward and this is reflected in the announcement from the Fire Minister in making the offer of a working group to the FBU to help to address their concerns over the Pension Reforms. However, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority does not agree with the FBU balloting its members to undertake any form of industrial action</p>

Questions	Answers
forward?	that has the potential to put both the lives and property of the people of Oxfordshire – as well as the lives of any non-striking firefighters – at a heightened risk because of strike action that might ultimately result in a degradation of normal emergency cover arrangements.
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION</p> <p>Is the Cabinet Member saying in her final answer that she will not write to the government to ask that this dispute be settled quickly?</p>	<p>SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER</p> <p>I think the answer is in the answer I have already given, Chairman.</p>
<p>4. COUNCILLOR JOHN TANNER</p> <p>Will the Cabinet member write to Her Majesty's Government expressing this County Council's dismay at this unfair attempt by the Coalition to worsen the pensions of our fire fighters and urging a sensible negotiated settlement?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR LOUISE CHAPMAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR POLICY CO-ORDINATION</p> <p>The current pension scheme is unsustainable and the Hutton report on Public Service Pensions has identified the need to modernise pensions. The existing benefits earned under the two current schemes are protected for all employees with further protection offered to a majority of employees within the 1992 scheme. The pension reform proposals do offer a new set of benefits but this is still an exceptionally good scheme for our staff. It will result in a pension scheme which will be able to be funded into the future as well as delivering a good level of remuneration when an individual retires from the Service. I refer to my previous answer in that the DCLG have offered a working group to help provide a negotiated solution.</p>
<p>5. COUNCILLOR SUSANNA PRESSEL</p> <p>Thanks to the government's failed policy of austerity and benefit cuts, even many people lucky enough to have a job are struggling to cope with increasing poverty. Please can you update us on progress towards firstly paying a living wage to all our staff, and secondly</p>	<p>COUCILLOR IAN HUDSPETH, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</p> <p>Councillor Pressel seems to have forgotten the reason for the austerity programme is due to 13 years of a failed Labour economic policy racking up £1,000,000,000,000 of debt for the country. The policies include making work pay. The benefit system should be there as a safety net for those that need it. Surely Councillor Presell does not believe it's correct that somebody earns more on benefits than the average wage?</p>

Questions	Answers
<p>ensuring that all our contractors will pay a living wage to all their staff by the time any new contracts are signed? Can we also please write to school governing bodies to explain our policy and to suggest that they may like to adopt a similar policy?</p>	<p>The Council's Remuneration Committee considered the issue of the payment of the Living Wage in November 2012 and received a further report in February 2013. The Committee agreed that further information was needed and asked for research to be carried out around the feasibility and implications of any proposals relating to implementing the Living Wage. This research is continuing and a further report will be presented to the Committee.</p> <p>The Committee consulted Schools Forum, which is the accepted consultative route, and received a verbal report of their views. The majority of costs of implementing the Living Wage would fall to schools' budgets and this was a cause of serious concern to them.</p> <p>The Committee also received information on requiring contractors to implement the Living Wage which showed that most councils who have adopted the Living Wage for their own employees do not require contractors to pay the Living Wage to staff delivering council services under contract, this is the case with Oxford City Council. Legal advice received indicates that the Council could not require contractors to pay the Living Wage to their employees, but could ask them to do so. If a contractor agreed to pay the Living Wage in an offer to us, but submitted a higher priced bid than another contractor, and quality standards did not prove to be a differentiating factor in their favour, the Council would probably not be able to justify awarding the contract solely on the basis that the contractor paid the Living Wage. Clearly, this severely limits the effectiveness of asking contractors to pay the wage.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION</p> <p>Firstly why is this taking so long, and secondly Cllr Hudspeth refers to Oxford City Council and what they do is weight the payment of Living Wage heavily in the procurement process so</p>	<p>SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER</p> <p>It is very important to know that Oxford City Council do not actually ask all their contractors about the Living Wage because they have never asked us. At the County Council we do employ Living Wage and so therefore that is where I am coming from on that, the fact that Oxford City Council haven't</p>

Questions	Answers
<p>that gives an advantage to good employers who do meet the Living Wage aspiration. In the past year the overwhelming majority has gone to Living Wage contractors and if he does know that could he ensure that the County Council also does that in the procurement process?</p>	<p>asked us the question – do we do it</p>
<p>6. COUNCILLOR SUSANNA PRESSEL</p> <p>The Flood Management Strategy was supposed to come to Cabinet in July. Why has it been put back to October?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR RODNEY ROSE, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</p> <p>The Strategy has been developed in close consultation with the City, Districts, Environment Agency and Thames Water and a draft was circulated for comment and a meeting arranged with all parties to discuss feedback to finalise the document in May 2013. Whilst there was broad agreement with the proposed strategy the feedback from the Environment Agency was that, having simultaneously been involved with several other strategies across the region, there were opportunities for sharing some of the good practice they had identified elsewhere, which would improve the County’s strategy. The working group therefore agreed that this opportunity should be taken to ensure that the document was as finalised as possible prior to consultation. Feedback from the consultation will be taken into account when finalising the Strategy.</p> <p>It should be noted that this is a new responsibility for Lead Flood Authorities and therefore no set template of what should and shouldn’t be included within such a strategy. Whilst Oxfordshire was ahead of many other authorities in developing their strategy the opportunity to share information and ideas to ensure that the strategy was effective as possible was welcomed.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION</p> <p>Do people think we have all the time in the world to finalise this, many people in my ward have</p>	<p>SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER</p> <p>We had the Flood Management Strategy ready to go in May and then got communications from the Environment Agency asking us to relook at it</p>

Questions	Answers
<p>been heavily and horribly affected by flooding three times in the last 13 years, please can you develop a sense of urgency?</p>	<p>because they preferred that it was written their way. We could not make that decision ourselves without going back to the districts involved for further talks with them, which we are doing and it is now ready to go to consultation. But this is a direct result of the Environment Agency asking to rewrite that strategy. We could not do anything else but comply with their wishes.</p>
<p>7. COUNCILLOR SUSANNA PRESSEL</p> <p>The government promised to introduce superfast broadband to 90% of people in rural areas by May 2015. Will we meet this target in Oxfordshire, and if not, why not?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR NICK CARTER, CABINET MEMBER FOR BUSINESS & CUSTOMER SERVICES</p> <p>The target is (a) premises, not people, and (b) 90% coverage, not specifically rural.</p> <p>In Oxfordshire, our contract with BT is expected to deliver superfast broadband to *at least* 90% of premises by the end of 2015. As the most rural county in the South-East, this is a considerable achievement given that many counties will not complete until May 2016.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION</p> <p>Yes, so what the answer seems to be saying is that the government made a promise and in many counties they are breaking that promise is that correct?</p>	<p>SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER</p> <p>There seems to be a tendency in some quarters of this chamber to apply personal interpretation on information that is generally somewhat different to that interpretation. The interpretation in this case is that there was ever a date of May 2015 applied to anything of this nature. The date was always the end of 2015 and that is the date we are currently working towards. With other county councils in fact it is worth noting that that date is not achievable and has never been achievable.</p> <p>It is a source of some pride and achievement that we are actually ahead of schedule and that is because of the efforts and initiatives that our officers have taken at every stage of this very tortious procurement process. So I am sure that Cllr Pressel will be delighted to hear that we are on track and actually ahead of schedule.</p>

Questions	Answers
<p>8. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>The County Council Cabinet recently agreed to defer the decision regarding home to school transport for further consultation but would it not be better by way of response to this question to announce that the proposed cuts will not take place and that Oxfordshire will be following the example of the Staffordshire County Council who recently decided to withdraw a similar proposal as it was not cost effective, had a severe impact on rural schools and legal issues related to parental choice.</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR MELINDA TILLEY, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES</p> <p>The original consultation consisted of a number of proposals not all of which were intended to reduce the net amount (currently c.£14.5 million) on home to school transport e.g. a two stage appeals process and using the GB Road Safety guidelines as a consistent framework for assessing the safety of walking routes. Others were explicitly to deliver savings e.g. increased charges for 'concessionary seats' and providing free transport only to the nearest school.</p> <p>Officers are doing further work to identify who/which areas/schools would be affected by the original proposals and more extensive modelling of the potential savings/increases in income which they could deliver.</p> <p>As an area of controllable expenditure it would be wrong to simply ring fence the home to school transport budget when other important Council services are having to identify ways of making savings which could see severe reductions. The Council also needs to ensure that as more schools become academies, and so set their own admissions rules including defining their catchment areas, that it is not exposed to the potential of uncontrolled growth in entitlements to free Home to School Transport.</p> <p>Any changes to the Home to School Transport policy will only be made after a thorough and extensive consultation; the impact on families and communities will be given due consideration when Cabinet considers policy changes.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION</p> <p>Could I take it that she is not accepting my invitation to (at this meeting) announce the</p>	<p>SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER</p> <p>Yes.</p>

Questions	Answers
abandonment of the concept of making massive cuts in the Home to School Transport policy?	
<p>9. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>Would the Cabinet Member agree that the decision to limit the access to free transport only to the nearest school will mean that effectively this will change the catchment of particular schools especially those in more rural areas?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR MELINDA TILLEY, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES</p> <p>No. Catchment areas are used to determine which children will be prioritised for admission to schools when there are more applications than places available. As most secondary schools in Oxfordshire are academies the Council has little and declining say over these as they are set by the relevant academy trusts. One important reason for considering whether to cease to provide free transport to 'catchment' schools when they are not the nearest school is that academies can extend their catchment areas and thereby confer an increased entitlement to free Home to School Transport. Some academies already provide transport to out of catchment children at their/parents' expense; under the current Home to School Transport policy they could pass the financial liability onto the Council by extending their catchment areas.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION</p> <p>Would the portfolio holder agree that academies being able to charge for Home to School Transport is actually the thin edge of the wedge as we go towards more and more charges being introduced in the state sector, and if this happens the burden will be shifted ever progressively on to parents and we will have abandoned the idea of universal free education.</p>	<p>SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER</p> <p>I have absolutely no control over what academies do and they can set their own catchment areas.</p>

Questions	Answers
<p>10. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>Is the Cabinet Member concerned that this move will put a further financial pressure on families at a time of austerity especially considering that Oxfordshire does have pockets of rural deprivation least able to cope with the withdrawal of these services?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR MELINDA TILLEY, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES</p> <p>At present most parents who are provided with free Home to School transport only receive this when the school their children attend is their nearest school; a minority of parents are in the advantaged position of receiving free transport to their catchment school as well. The proposal to phase out free transport to catchment schools which are not also the nearest school would not affect any children currently benefiting but would affect some currently in primary schools.</p> <p>Children from low income families are entitled to free transport to any of the three nearest secondary schools between two and six miles from their home; this is a statutory entitlement which would not be affected. In addition, where a child is not entitled to free transport but there are spare seats, these are offered on a concessionary basis upon the payment of a subsidised fare. This fare is waived for children from low incomes and this would continue.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION</p> <p>If this is the case, and some people who are desperately poor will get free Home to School Transport where is the savings? If you have a large section of people who are not affected by this policy why on earth are you pushing it forward? Only one stator of the people will be influenced is that not the case?</p>	<p>SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER</p> <p>There is £14m spent on Home to School Transport at the moment, my department has to save around £22m. I am not suggesting we save all of that but I am suggesting that in some places parents will have to take their own responsibility and get their own children to school.</p>
<p>11. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>Would the Cabinet Member also agree that this</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR MELINDA TILLEY, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES</p> <p>No. In the previous consultation all schools received an e-mail which drew</p>

Questions	Answers
<p>is being done with a without a full consultation with all school governors, staff and parents?</p>	<p>attention to the consultation which was accessible on the Council's public website. Those schools where the 'nearest school' policy would have the potentially greatest impact were also furnished with a letter to circulate to their parents. The fact that hundreds of responses were received from parents and large numbers of governors and staff, some of whom also addressed Cabinet, demonstrates that the consultation was known about by all who had an interest in the proposed policy changes.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION</p> <p>Would it not have been better when you launched the consultation to do that at the beginning of term not during the summer period when schools are winding down?</p>	<p>SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER</p> <p>No.</p>
<p>12. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>Is the Cabinet Member aware that reducing the number of school buses will, without doubt, mean more cars on the road and more parents involved in a 'school run' something that can only lead to more congestion, air pollution and parental pressure?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR MELINDA TILLEY, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES</p> <p>No. In the previous consultation all schools received an e-mail which drew attention to the consultation which was accessible on the Council's public website. Those schools where the 'nearest school' policy would have the potentially greatest impact were also furnished with a letter to circulate to their parents. The fact that hundreds of responses were received from parents and large numbers of governors and staff, some of whom also addressed Cabinet, demonstrates that the consultation was known about by all who had an interest in the proposed policy changes.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION</p> <p>My question is surely this response does not actually address the question that I have put down. There is no indication of numbers or the consequential impact on the roads of extra cars</p>	<p>SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER</p> <p>I did ask my own daughter who lives in an area where there are two secondary schools and only one will receive Home to School Transport. I asked her what she would do about it. She said she would organise a school bus from the village to the other one. I think that people will organise their</p>

Questions	Answers
<p>being used by parents for school run.</p>	<p>own buses and I think that schools will organise buses and I think that people will organise their own transport. It isn't necessarily the case that more people will drive their children to school.</p>
<p>13. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>Would the Leader of the Council give an explanation as to how we get into the ludicrous situation of Atkins Ltd selling their contract to undertake work for the authority and what is the legal liability of their actions for Atkins the sub-contractor and the County Council?</p>	<p>COUCILLOR IAN HUDSPETH, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</p> <p>In February 2013 Atkins PLC announced to the Stock Exchange its' intention to focus its' business on consultancy work and move away from blue collar work such as the highways contract they have with Oxfordshire. The decision whether to allow our contract to be carried out by a different organisation lies solely with the County Council and Cabinet considered that decision on 16 July and decided that in principle this was the best course of action for the authority to protect the quality of highway services to the residents of Oxfordshire. To mitigate any risks associated with this action the County Council have been working with colleagues from other councils' who have contracts with Atkins to ensure appropriate indemnity and legal arrangements are in place both with Atkins Ltd and Skanska. In this way we are ensuring that Oxfordshire County Council and its residents are not impacted on by this change in strategic direction from Atkins PLC. The County Council's legal liability in relation to all this is to ensure that, should the move take place, it is not in breach of any procurement or contract legislation and we have sought legal advice and are taking appropriate actions to ensure that this is the case.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION</p> <p>Would the Leader of the Council agree that the Atkins fiasco actually indicates something quite fundamental in the contractualisation of services where a provider suddenly decides that they don't want to do this anymore and throws in the towel? Would you agree that that is a consideration whenever we start to</p>	<p>SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER</p> <p>First of all one has got to remember that a business is able to change its policy change and its mind and that is what Atkins have done. They decided that they don't want to be on this end of it. Skanska has come along and seen a contract that they think they can provide good efficient services to, it is still the same contract. Monitoring performance is within that contract. If you look across the Country, Skanska are a good engineering company that are providing services right across the road network.</p>

Questions	Answers
contracturalise and have out sourcing of any service for the local authority? Clearly in my own opinion this is a contract that should have been kept in house. Would he give any assurance that these sorts of considerations are taking into account whenever you go to analyse whether a service should be contracturalised.	
14. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS Would he confirm that the transfer to another provider will in fact increase the costs?	COUCILLOR IAN HUDSPETH, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL I can confirm that the transfer to Skanska will not have any increase in costs to the Council.
SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION The Leader of the Council says that there is no extra charge for transferring the contractual obligation to another provider. He would in my opinion be wise to ask this question again next year to see if in fact whether there really has been an increase in the amount that is given to this particular contract?	SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER It won't increase the cost to the Council. It is the same contract, there has been no increase in cost in this contract. We hope that Skanska are going to provide as good a service and if not better service.

Questions	Answers
<p>15. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>Clearly with Conservative control there is a strict ideological commitment to privatise and contractualisation of everything but would he agree that in the real world outsourcing of services holds a great deal of risk in terms of continuity of service, maintaining the quality of provision and reducing final costs?</p>	<p>COUCILLOR IAN HUDSPETH, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</p> <p>Conservatives are committed to finding the solution that best delivers services; we examine all options.</p>
<p>16. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>In view of this fiasco would the Leader consider keeping the Road Maintenance contract in house and for once forgoing the urge to contractualise and instead have a real analysis of the pros and cons of outsourcing in this area?</p>	<p>COUCILLOR IAN HUDSPETH, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</p> <p>The decision by Atkins PLC has not changed the service delivery position for the County Council, of course, when the contract has run its course we will seek to use the most appropriate delivery mechanism for the service bearing in mind the conditions prevailing at the time.</p>
<p>17. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>Would he at least give a commitment that he will have deeper analysis of the consequences and risks of giving the contract to Skanska than clearly took place when Atkins were the provider.</p>	<p>COUCILLOR IAN HUDSPETH, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</p> <p>A detailed analysis of the contractual offer was undertaken as part of the award of the initial contract to Atkins and similar due diligence is being undertaken as part of the current process. It was not possible for us to foresee either change in Chief Executive for Atkins PLC two years after the contract was awarded or that he would wish to change the strategic direction of the company that would have such direct relationship with out contract.</p>

Questions	Answers
<p>18. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>Would the Cabinet member for Education agree with me that ‘School Crossing staff both men and woman provide a vital contribution to children’s safety whilst walking to school especially in the primary sector?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR MELINDA TILLEY, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES</p> <p>School crossing staff provide a valuable, and highly valued, service which contributes to the safety of children when crossing roads, particularly when they are not accompanied by their parents.</p>
<p>19. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>Research conducted by Living Streets shows that in 66% of local authority areas the numbers of school crossing staff helping children safely across the road has been reduced and that this may be a contributory factor in the 63% increase over a year in the number of children killed and seriously injured whilst walking to or from school in the UK.</p> <p>Would the Portfolio holder join with worried parents and give a pledge that the number of Crossing attendants will not be reduced in Oxfordshire and that our children will be safe on the roads?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR MELINDA TILLEY, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES</p> <p>Although from the cited research we can also deduce that Authorities around the Country are facing similar to ours budgetary pressures we mustn't forget that it is parents who are predominantly responsible for the safety of their children travelling to and from school when they are not entitled to free Home to School Transport. Even where a School Crossing Patrol is provided, parents remain accountable for ensuring their children’s safety, just as they do when a zebra crossing or pelican crossing is provided. While I can't guarantee that no school crossing patrols will ever be withdrawn, I can however confirm that the implications of so doing will be thoroughly considered before any such decision is made.</p>
<p>20. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>Could the Cabinet member assure parents that if school crossing staffing is withdrawn from a</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR MELINDA TILLEY, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES</p> <p>The current procedure adapted by the Council is for a Road Safety Needs Assessment to be carried out for new school crossing site requests or for</p>

Questions	Answers
school a full risk assessment will have been carried out to confirm that it would be safe to do so?	reappointment of posts that becomes vacant. The assessment follows the Road Safety GB School Crossing Patrol Guidelines as revised in June 2011. These guidelines provide a mechanism of assessing the risk based on the traffic conditions (volume and speed) and the site (width of the road, presence of junctions, parking, and obstructions to visibility), together with the number of school children crossing. This information along with any other relevant factors forms the basis for any decisions regarding future deployment of a school crossing patrol officer.
SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION Would the portfolio holder agree that simply taking vacancies as they arise of school crossing personnel is not really a planned way to doing this because it could quite easily be that the schools which perhaps has the least risk has a person who retires or goes to another job and a vacancy is created. That is not the way to plan something where risk assessment is critical. Would the portfolio holder agree that this process that she has laid out is not the best solution to this particular programme.	SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER No I wouldn't agree.

Questions	Answers
<p>21. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>Lastly, if cuts are to be introduced has the Cabinet member thought of accepting sponsorship to underpin the financing of school crossing personnel, a process that other authorities have considered?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR MELINDA TILLEY, CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES</p> <p>I am open to considering any and all creative approaches which could enhance the safety of children and encourage more of them to walk, cycle or use public transport to travel from home to school. 'Walking buses' are an excellent example of schools and parents taking collective responsibility for the home to school journey which also has significant health benefits for the participating children (and their parents!) A recent study has revealed how few children, particularly girls, participate in the recommended level of physical activity each day so I'd like to see more of them walking and cycling.</p>
<p>22. COUNCILLOR SAM COATES</p> <p>What stance has the County Council taken with regard to the proposed HS2 High Speed rail link that that will pass through Oxfordshire and has the Cabinet Member made any representations to the Government as a result?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR RODNEY ROSE, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</p> <p>The Council's general approach to HS2 is set out in the Local Transport Plan 2011-2030, Policy PT6: 'Oxfordshire County Council is opposed to the High Speed 2 rail proposals on the grounds of the scheme's business case viability and impact on local communities', and paragraph 11.52: 'With no intermediate stations proposed, the line offers few direct benefits to the county. Oxfordshire County Council is unconvinced about the overall business case for HS2. Therefore we are opposed to HS2. Oxfordshire County Council is particularly concerned about the impacts of the current HS2 proposals on the villages of Newton Purcell and Finmere and will keep under review the potential environmental effect on these areas as the design progresses'.</p> <p>Our on-going position is expressed through our membership of 51m, the group of councils opposed to HS2, although I should point out that Oxfordshire County Council has made no financial contribution towards this group or the legal challenge to the project.</p>

Questions	Answers
<p>23. COUNCILLOR SAM COATES</p> <p>The massive increases at County Council Day Care Centres charges will mean that many of the poorest pensioners will no longer be able to afford to attend. Could the Cabinet member give an indication if the numbers attending have started to decline and how she intends to ensure that the least well off pensioners who generally are in the most need of the services can continue to enjoy the community spirit, activities and life support networks that the Day Centres bring.</p> <p>What is the Cabinet Member doing to ensure charges don't continue to spiral in the near future?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR JUDITH HEATHCOAT, CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE</p> <p>The revised charges are being introduced during September. Managers facilitated meetings in each centre with users and family carers throughout July to explain the revised charges and answer questions. Each user received a letter confirming this at the end of July and local managers are able to answer queries and concerns from people on an individual, personal basis.</p> <p>At present there are no indications that people will stop using the centres although a few people did say they may use them for fewer days as the prices increase over the next two years but would review this as and when. So far we have not seen any decrease in use and local managers will be monitoring this closely so that we can respond quickly to anyone who feels they can no longer afford to use the centres. People on the lowest incomes are most likely to already be in receipt of financial assistance through a personal budget and this will continue.</p> <p>There are options whereby if a person who currently pays the charges is assessed as needing the service but the charges are cost prohibitive, and not attending would be particularly detrimental to them, this could be taken into consideration and potentially result in a reduced or waived charge and this would be determined through a financial assessment. Local managers are making sure that anyone who wants to consider a financial assessment is given the information to do so.</p> <p>As local managers are monitoring the situation and know their customers well it is envisaged that they can support continued attendance and refer people for assistance as necessary.</p> <p>The increase in charges reflect the decision made by the Cabinet t in January 2013. This was as follows:</p>

Questions	Answers
	<p><u>Tier 3 Health & Wellbeing Centres</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As of September 2013 introduce increased transport charge of £5 per return journey. 2. Phase the implementation of increased attendance charges commencing September 2013. 3. As of September 2013 increase charge to £7.50 per person for 5 hours and £4.50 per person for 3 hours. 4. As of April 2014 increase charge to £10 per person for 5 hours and £6 per person for 3 hours. 5. As of April 2015 increase charge to £15 per person for 5 hours and £9 per person for 3 hours. <p>There are no plans to increase the charges further.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION</p> <p>I would like to thank the portfolio holder for the answer and it is good to hear that there are no future plans to increase the charges, but at what point will that position be considered again?</p>	<p>SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER</p> <p>We will be making sure that we keep constant watch on numbers attending centres so it is going to be a review that is taking place all the time.</p>
<p>24. COUNCILLOR SAM COATES</p> <p>Over the past three years County spending on cycling has averaged just half a percentage point of the Highways capital budget. Given the popularity of cycling in Oxfordshire and our duty to encourage sustainable means of transport does the Cabinet Member agree that we should be increasing the amount we spend on cycling</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR DAVID NIMMO-SMITH, CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT</p> <p>The County Council continues to look for opportunities to improve the conditions for cyclists. With capital budgets continuing to be under pressure, this increases the importance of ensuring that we take the needs of cyclists into account at every opportunity possible. For example, the revamp of the central section of High Street saw improvements for both cyclists and pedestrians; we also took the opportunity whilst re-constructing Iffley Road to remove on-street day time parking between James Street and the Plain so</p>

Questions	Answers
schemes?	<p>that an outbound cycle lane could be introduced. These investments build upon initiatives, such as the introduction of a city-wide 20 mph speed limit in central Oxford, that have helped to improve conditions for cyclists. More recently investment in Old Road and the Slade in Headington, together with the works underway to connect Rippington Drive in New Marston with the Parks cycle route, show our continued commitment to cyclists. I was particularly delighted with our recent success in securing an additional £835,000 of Government funding specifically to deliver substantial improvements for cyclists at the Plain by March 2015.</p> <p>In addition to schemes in Oxford we have also supported the following schemes within the County.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Burford Road cycleway, Carterton - £133,000• Cycle parking in Witney, Carterton, Chipping Norton, Eynsham, Woodstock and Charlbury - £35,000• Cycle lanes and by-pass as part of Bicester Town centre Access improvements which included transforming a busy through route into a cycle friendly residential street providing direct access to Bicester Town Centre.• Hanwell Fields mineral railway line pedestrian and cycle path• Various cycle maps produced (Bicester, Witney/Carterton)• Cycle lanes on Boston Road, Bicester
SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION Do the Cabinet agree with me that we should be committing to spending a greater proportion of our overall highways budget to cycling?	SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER Everything is based on the finances available and the demands on the systems and the benefit from the particular thing in question so I can't really give a yes or no answer.

Questions	Answers
<p>25. COUNCILLOR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>How many 'employees' of Oxford County Council are on zero hour contracts?</p>	<p>COUCILLOR IAN HUDSPETH, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</p> <p>None.</p>
<p>SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION</p> <p>Thank you for the response Cllr Hudspeth saying that there are none and that is a very good thing for the County Council. However would he comment on the fact that in the care homes run by private organisations and largely funded by County Council monies this particular practice of zero hours contract is actually rife. He may be able to say none and hold his head up high for direct employees of the County Council unlike the City Council who have 11 of these people on zero hour contracts.</p>	<p>SUPPLEMENTARY ANSWER</p> <p>I would like to speak from a business perspective actually on zero hour contacts, because everybody turns round and says they are awful but actually, when you are running a business, the view you take is employing that next person. Zero hours contracts have the ability for an employer to risk something without putting too much risk to it, by giving an opportunity to someone and if you actually give a zero based contract then it means that you give an indication to the employee how many hours they are going to work. I will take an example of my daughter last year she took a zero based hour's contract on the understanding that it would be 10 hours per week she would be given, she was fine by that. The great thing about it was it mitigates the risk for the employer but do you know how many hours she was actually working – 20 hours per week because they realised what a good worker she was. Be very careful in just saying zero hours are no good because actually they given benefit and opportunity to provide more work for people.</p>
<p>26. COUNCILLR DAVID WILLIAMS</p> <p>Could the Cabinet Member give an assessment of the likely impact of the enormous rail fare increases recently announced on the County's Transport Strategy? Does he think that commuters and other passengers will continue to pay these rip off prices or does he think it will mean a large scale shift from rail to roads and the consequential congestion and pollution this</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR RODNEY ROSE, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL</p> <p>The rail system in Oxfordshire will continue to benefit from the commitments made by the Government for significant investment: in terms of electrification of the Great Western main line to Paddington, the introduction of new trains, the introduction of new services from Oxford to London Marylebone and Milton Keynes/Bedford. Our forecasts show that, taking into account current Government policy on fare increases, this investment will continue to result in significant growth in the number of passengers. The investment in the rail system will provide Oxfordshire residents and businesses with improved</p>

Questions	Answers
<p>will generate. Oxfordshire has been a prime mover in opening up new rail links. Could the Portfolio holder say if these tremendous increases, well above inflation for the last 10 years, will undermine the viability of these new extensions and proposed new rail lines?</p>	<p>options for travel choice. Over the 10 year period that you describe, successive governments have increased fares by above inflation each year, while over that same period, passenger numbers have more than doubled. On that basis, it does not look as though passengers consider that they are being ripped off, as you put it.</p>