

CABINET – 23 JUNE 2015

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Question received from the following Members:

1. From Councillor Howson to Councillor Tilley

" What are the consequences for Oxfordshire of the letter from Lord Nash, the PUS at the DfE taking away the responsibility of the local authority to help choose sponsors for new schools from 1st July 2015?"

Answer

"Up until now decisions about sponsors for underperforming schools have, ultimately, been taken by the Secretary of State acting on the advice of 'brokers' who have worked with Council officers to identify the most appropriate sponsor to tackle the underlying issues and to support long term sustained improvements. Delegating the decision making to the Regional Schools Commissioner who will, over time, develop an understanding of the 'education landscape' of Oxfordshire, strikes me as much more sensible than a remote Secretary of State, or PUS, making the decision. Officers will be meeting with the Regional Schools Commissioner next week and Lord Nash's letter will be on the agenda. I hope that we can build upon our already positive working relationship with him and I am confident that he will wish to call upon officers' local knowledge and expertise in order to make the best possible decisions about which organisations are best placed to sponsor Oxfordshire schools in need of support."

2. From Councillor Godden to Councillor Carter

"The message below was received from Botley School on 1 June. My question is not What has happened since then, but How did this happen in the first place, and what measures are we taking to improve performance and communication?"

"The building work has been delayed unfortunately, as it should have been finished by now. The initial delay was due to the steel structure (to support the new reception classroom) being built to incorrect measurements which caused a 12 week delay. There was supposed to be a meeting with Carillion staff to complete a snagging list on 20th May, but this was cancelled as the build wasn't sufficiently advanced for that meeting to happen. I have not had a response from Carillion with an update, since my last meeting with them on 20th April."

Answer

The last progress meeting with Botley School was held by the Project Manager on the 18th of June, as part of regular formal monthly progress meetings, in addition to weekly site meetings which are held between the construction lead and the School site representative, during this meeting the practical completion date was communicated to the school as being the 15th of July, the team also agreed that a snagging session would be completed on the 25th of June, with the school invited, with a view to have all outstanding snagging items cleared by the practical completion date.

The delays during construction have been approximately 6 months, attributable to the following reasons.

- 6-8 weeks for an unidentified Gas Main which required re-routing before commencement of work. This was not present on any existing service drawings was not picked up during ground surveys
- 12 week delay due to inaccuracies in the steel frame when delivered, which required the Frame to be re worked. This was a subcontracted package of works, the reworking of which did not financially cost Oxfordshire, however there is recognition of the disruption to the school by being on site longer than anticipated.
- There have been another 4 weeks or so of minor delays which have contributed to this delay.

All of the delays have been communicated with the school and have been verified by Oxfordshire's Employers Agent and have been managed to their conclusion in the context of the contracts that were agreed at the outset of the project. These delays have materially not affected the cost of the project to Oxfordshire, however final accounts are still to be established.

In order to mitigate these types of delay's in the future the Properties & Facilities Department and Carillion are currently redefining the requirements, outputs and processes needed during the design phase of projects as the length of time it has taken for some jobs to progress through this process has been longer than originally scheduled and has put subsequent pressure on the construction periods. In addition to this all School Projects will be targeted for completion 8 weeks prior to when the Asset is required for use, which will allow some time for unforeseen events to be addressed should they occur, prior to their required need.

3. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Carter

"Both the primary schools in my division of Wolvercote and Summertown have suffered from delays to building work being carried out at the schools. Will the Cabinet member tell me how he will ensure that such delays do not happen in future, as it is immensely disruptive to the education of the children in the school?"

Answer

“There has already been a major overhaul of personnel who are working on the professional services and construction teams within the Property and Facilities contract, some of the current issues we face are as a result of work that had been progressed prior to this overhaul, given that most building projects are several years from inception to delivery the time lag is a critical factor that has to be taken into account.

Coupled with the changes to the professional services and construction teams, the Properties & Facilities Department and Carillion are currently redefining the requirements, outputs and processes needed during the design phase of projects as the length of time it has taken for some projects to progress through this early part of the process has been longer than originally scheduled and has put subsequent pressure on the construction periods. As part of the review of our processes all School projects will be targeted for completion 8 weeks prior to when the Asset is required for use, which will allow some time for unforeseen events to be addressed should they occur, prior to their required need. To further improve efficiency, Carillion are introducing Standardised Design processes and alternative construction routes (such as Modular Buildings) to reduce overall project durations.

In addition to this the OCC Corporate Landlord Function (Contract Performance Management) will be ensuring that a robust Project closure process is in place to capture lessons learned and ensure that these are incorporated into future projects.

Specifically regarding the project at Wolvercote, the time taken in design meant that there was little or no time to absorb delays due to unforeseen events, in this case an ancient well was discovered during the excavation of the foundations for the new building, upon this discovery works were halted for Archaeological investigation to take place in order to establish whether anything of significance was found. As part of this work a Roman Brooch was found and is currently with the Archaeological team in OCC.

With regards to Cutteslowe the other school in this area which has had works completed recently, these were practically completed in time for September 2014, however the snagging at this site took an unacceptably long time to complete. The process for this has been addressed and is now part of pre completion works, prior to handover, there have also been several other works which have continued into this Academic year, these were either not in the original scope or were late variations to the design as a result of the school not being happy with the agreed final design once it was observed when finished. There have also been some on-going work with the school to close out issues affecting previous phases of work from the past.”