

County Council 16 February 2017

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Written Questions and Responses for Council – FINAL

Questions from Mr Stuchbury

Cabinet Member for Transportation

In 2010, Buckinghamshire County Council assessed that new damage to the county to highways assets would be in the range of £10m-£14m per year, depending on the severity of the winter and thereby a reduction in the overall Highways asset value. I understand that costs of damage to highways assets has increased, the value of Highways assets declined, and yet within the Council's budget there is a planned reduction in road maintenance expense to £10m from next year.

1. What is the Council's latest assessment of the net new damage to the Council's highways assets?

Response

As Mr Stuchbury knows we have been investing significantly in our highway network over the last few years, taking an asset led, risk based approach to what we are doing. We inspect our highway asset on a regular basis and whilst I am sure Members will be able to name individual roads that are in need of repair, I am pleased to be able to inform him that the condition of our A, B and C roads has been improving in line with our strategic approach. We are still collating the data for our unclassified network but I am confident that this too will show an improvement.

Turning to the budget, we need to get away from the focus on carriageway surfaces and recognise that there are many other highway assets that we also need to look after. The highways Capital budget for the next two years is around £22m, of which £13m is specifically for carriageway maintenance. After this our budget reduces but this is partly because we are making prudent assumptions about the amount of grant money that we will receive from central Government. Clearly, given the improvements over recent years we will look to use the same strategic approach to the maintenance of our highways assets and will be seeking to bid to central Government for more support in specific areas of concern such as drainage.

2. How does this significant reduction in Highways asset value affect the Council's budgeting plans?

Response

The value of the highway asset in budget book terms continues to increase as new infrastructure is adopted and, as explained above, the overall condition of our highways assets are improving, albeit at a slower rate than I would like. As I explained above there are a number of elements of Central Government funding that require us to submit bids for their consideration. It is true that Government have given a clearer indication of funding over the next few years in relation to our base line funding and we are using that to plan our maintenance strategy and any

additional funding achieved through bids to government for specific work will, of course, help us to improve further.

Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care

- 3. Was there any correspondence between Buckinghamshire County Council and the Home Secretary on child refugees, in advance of the Government changing its mind on expecting 3000 child Refugees agreed through the Lord Dubs amendment?**

Response

The County Council has continued to communicate with the Government on the topic of child refugees over an extended period of time either directly or via the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration. Most discussions have been verbal.

- 4. If there was correspondence, what views did Buckinghamshire County Council express to the Government in advance of this change of policy?**

Response

Views expressed verbally have included that the UK helps those in greatest need from conflict, particularly in Syria. Contextually the UK is the biggest single aid donor relieving the suffering of the millions of people, including very many families, displaced from their homes in Syria. The UK has pledged some £2.3 billion in aid to directly help those in conflict zones close to their home locations.

Over 700 refugees and migrants have so far entered the UK under the EU wide rules (Dublin III Treaty) arrangements, these include families with children. The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme is a commitment to resettle some 20,000 refugees, including children, directly from conflict zones by 2020. So far, it is understood, some 4,400 have arrived and been accommodated by Councils. The Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Programme is aimed specifically at children from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In addition to all of the above, there are large numbers of children and adults who arrive, normally illegally, in the UK for whom a local council is normally the first point of contact. Under the Children Act 1989, these children will enter the care of a council as a looked after child and have the same rights to help and support as a child who enters the care system for any other reason. In Kent, the County Council is currently responsible for 1,400 children who have arrived in this manner. They are placed in accommodation across the south of England and this is putting a considerable strain on the ability of all councils to secure placements for both children arriving from overseas and also the domestic children for whom they are responsible. Bucks is taking part in the National Transfer Scheme to help relieve the acute pressure faced by Kent County Council.

- 5. Did Buckinghamshire County Council say it was willing to receive child refugees and had the Council made plans to achieve meeting the needs of these very vulnerable children needs? Or did the Council tell the**

Government it wasn't able to fund places for vulnerable Child refugees in Buckinghamshire?

Response

Please see above. The main pressure the Council is experiencing is locating suitable placements for these young people. We believe this situation is not unique to Buckinghamshire

6. What work had been undertaken in Buckinghamshire for planning for meeting the need of these vulnerable children refugees (prior to the Government's change of policy)?

Response

We have been working in partnership with the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration to assist with placing vulnerable children coming through the UASC system. Stakeholder meetings have taken place to try to ensure there is sufficient provision of services. Children and young people will often have experienced emotional trauma in their country of birth and in their journey, it is essential the right support is in place to meet their need.

7. What is the number of children Buckinghamshire County Council had found safe places for after the Cabinet Member for Children's Services gave a commitment to welcoming such refugee children in Buckinghamshire?

Response

We currently have 21 UASC under the age of 18 in our care as well as 21 over 18 year olds who we support as care leavers, who were previously UASC.

Questions from Julia Wassell

Cabinet Member for Transportation

8. I am awaiting an update from you about proposals for the London Road A40 in High Wycombe. Please can you let me know what the proposals are and when I will be meeting with yourself and the Transport Strategy Team so that there can be Member input into the detail?

Response

The Transport Strategy team is modelling a number of proposals which were developed as part of the Reserve Sites work which were subject to extensive stakeholder engagement and have now been published as part of the Wycombe Draft Local Plan evidence. The modelling work will be used to support possible future funding bids for Highways England investment.

I am happy to meet with you concerning this work together with the Transport Strategy team.

Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

9. Please can you update me about the progress of the transfer of Buckinghamshire Care Limited Services back to Buckinghamshire County Council?

Response

We have set up the 'Buckinghamshire care Transfer Management Group' (chaired by the Managing Director of CHASC) to monitor and oversee the transition of staff and services to the Council – as well as the legal closure of Buckinghamshire Care Ltd.

The transfer of nearly 390 staff has taken place as planned with little or no disruption to the 900 clients and their families who were using BCL services. We are now simultaneously legally closing down BCL, while continuing to put systems and processes in place to support the ongoing delivery of former BCL services.

We are also reviewing all former BCL services and, where needed, putting in place improvement plans. This includes engaging with services users and their families to understand what they want from these services. Consequently, lessons are being learnt and reports are being made back to the appropriate bodies including the independent Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Adults Board.

We anticipate that Buckinghamshire Care Ltd will be closed by April 2017.

10. Why was the severity of the situation not notified to the Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee last summer?

Response

The role of the Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee (HASC) is to hold decision-makers to account for improving outcomes and services for Buckinghamshire. It has the power to scrutinise all issues in relation to Health and Adult Social Care. Anyone can raise an issue of concern with HASC or suggest a topic for the committee to consider but it is not a reporting a line.

As such, constitutionally, this would not be used as a direct route to inform members about the operational progress or issues of a commissioned service.

The correct reporting lines were used to notify both Officers and Members about the situation with Buckinghamshire Care Ltd (BCL). Initially this would have been through the Shareholder Commissioning Group (SCG).

11. Do you have a clear financial account of how £2.4 million pounds cost of the transfer will be recovered?

Response

The cumulative losses are actually £1.8m as £0.6m is a technical accounting figure related to how pensions are shown in the accounts. These losses are outweighed by the savings achieved since Bucks Care went live. These savings amount to £1.4m per annum and have built up over the last few years. The outcome at the end of March 2017 will bring us close (pro-rated) to the original (2013) forecast of £2.5m after 5 years.

Cabinet Member for Community Engagement

12. Please can you update me on the work being undertaken to place libraries in a Trust. Who is undertaking this work and how will Members be consulted?

Response

The Library Services tasked with making savings of over £500,000 during the next three years.

An options appraisal was undertaken last autumn and 'spin out' was identified as the preferred option. The Cabinet Member at the time, the late Martin Phillips, asked that officers develop a business case and that this be brought to Members for consideration. The Business Case was taken to One Council Board (OCB) in December but a decision has yet to be made as to whether 'spin out' represents the best option for our service.

OCB considered that, given the impending decision on unitary status, it made sense to complete work on a range of options for the library service and to defer any decision until the unitary issue has been resolved.

The library service has a vital role to play in our vision for modernising local government. The place they already occupy in communities provides the foundation for our ambition to establish a network of multi-agency community hubs across the county. A lot of work has been carried out by the library service over recent months in discussion with a wide range of stakeholders, and this has been very helpful in

identifying a series of options for the future development and delivery of the service. The debate around the potential for community hubs has accelerated during this period - both locally with our partners and also nationally. We now need to carry out further work around these models and the implications for the library service. When this work is completed, a consultation plan will be developed and elected members engaged through seminars and workshops.

Library service savings targets have now been re-modelled in recognition of this decision and the first year of savings will now be realised in 2018/19 rather than in 2017/18

Cabinet Member for Resources

13. How will monies earmarked for the upgrade of the old Wycombe library building be spent exactly?

Response

The monies earmarked for Old Wycombe Library within the current MTP round are intended to:

- a. Carry out structural repairs to the building's external envelope – including roofing, pointing, window replacement.*
- b. Carry out internal structural repairs and alterations to create office space and a hi-tech start-up business hub including meeting areas, kitchens, WC's etc.*
- c. Upgrade the information technology to a high level to support the proposed uses*
- d. Replace the existing heating, ventilation and hot and cold water systems with new*
- e. Replace existing lighting and power provision with new*
- f. Upgrade facilities to comply where possible with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act*
- g. Incorporate security upgrades*
- h. Internal fit out – furniture, carpets, decorations etc*

14. For what purpose is the old library being refurbished?

Response

We are reviewing other options and also that we will only carry out essential works at this stage to ensure that the building does not deteriorate.

Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

15. Please can you confirm what support parents are receiving if their child does not have a school place as a result of the closure of Penn school?

Response

All the children and young people that were at Penn School at the time of closure were offered support and placed in appropriate provision.

Cabinet Member for Children's Services

16. It is positive that steady progress is being made. What are your current priorities to improve services for children with disability?

Response

The Children's Strategy, approved by Cabinet on the 12th September, highlights the importance of supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disability and is a key part of our Strategic Plan. It is essential that children with complex needs have a single plan that coordinates all the help they need from different services and that schools feel confident in supporting children and young people. There continues to be a focus on this area and the Children's Social Care and Learning Business unit are continuously reflecting on their work to ensure better outcomes for children. Work includes improving service delivery and robust interventions for children and families. This is also one of the work streams in the Change for Children programme to ensure we have integrated services that enable better outcomes and support to help children achieve their full potential.

Cabinet Member for Planning & Environment

17. Please can you inform me of the whereabouts of the foundation stone for Spring Garden School, High Wycombe which was demolished in 2002? The foundation stone was to be displayed near the site and this has not happened.

Response

Spring Garden School was subject of a Wycombe District Council planning application for residential development in 1998 (98/07124/OUT) and was granted permission with conditions in 2004. None of the available conditions provide any detail of landscaping or other issues.

Relatively few current staff are able to recollect that period and we have no relevant information within the Historic Environment Record or in Property Services. Similarly planning staff at Wycombe District Council do not have any information on the foundation stone but have suggested a number of avenues for further research.

Wycombe Museum and High Wycombe Society have both been consulted and any further information will be provided in a future update

Questions from Mr Ditta

Cabinet Member for Education & Skills

18. Do you anticipate any loss of funding to primary and secondary schools between now and 2020? I would like you to reassure me that the schools in my division will not face any staff loss.

Response

Under the proposed national funding formula 85% of schools in Buckinghamshire will receive per pupil funding increases by 2020. Some schools will lose funding per pupil, but this is being limited to a cumulative reduction of 3% by 2020. Until the consultation has closed and the Government issues its final proposals in summer 2017 the impact on individual schools cannot be confirmed. The characteristics and number of children also change each year and this can have an even bigger impact on the level of funding in any single school.

Cabinet Member for Transportation

19. Please can you inform me why County Councillors are no longer able to nominate pavements to be resurfaced?

Response

County Councillors have recently attended meetings with Officers to discuss future capital programmes on both carriageways and footways. For 2017/18 the likely budget for footways is £1.5M. The initial strategy is to identify short sections of more heavily used footways in the worst condition for repair. Dealing with the worst and most noticeable sections of damaged footways will enable the County to move to its preferred strategy of preventative repairs and larger scale, more holistic repairs over the period of the Medium Term Plan. Councillors were asked for recommendations for footways at these recent meetings and a programme is to be drawn up.

20. In 2015 I was informed that a set of bollards which had been knocked over in Adelaide Road had had an order raised for repair. Why have they not yet been replaced?

Response

The High Wycombe LAF bollards scheme was developed in 2014-15 to install bollards in various locations to prevent vehicles parking on verges. The location of Adelaide Road was not on the original location list but there were two roads close to this site which were Arnison Avenue and Mayhew Crescent. An order was raised to install bollards on the grass verge from about No24 Arnison Ave to the junction of Adelaide Road where the existing bollards started. A TfB crew did start work on site but due to the location of various underground services including electricity cables work had to stop for safety of the crew carrying out the work, bollards were also marked up on site at the junction of Mayhew Crescent but this work also had to be cancelled due to underground services. This was reported back to the LAF and a further site (Tyzack Road) was identified which has now been completed.

This is our only record for bollard work in the area and so if this does not answer your question Mark Kemp, Director of Growth Strategy and Highways is happy to meet with you to discuss your concerns.

