

Public Question Time
Cabinet
17th August 2016

Mr Brian Cockbill, Stratton St Margaret has asked the Cabinet Member for Communities:

1. To ask the authors of the Community Governance Review Report (Agenda Item 5) to confirm the estimated "new income" of between £2.7m and £5m referred at 5.3 means a nett increase in local taxes for Swindon tax payers to change the current administration arrangements?

The Cabinet Member has responded:

Thank you for your question.

1) Yes, the new income would be raised from tax payers as an additional charge on council tax bills but the figures represent the cost of continuing to provide services that would otherwise not be provided rather than relating to the cost of changing the governance arrangements. The cost of the new governance system of any new parish councils created is estimated to be around £10 per household per annum for residents currently living in an area that does not have a parish council.

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Helen Jackson, 106 Victoria Road, Old Town, SN1 3BG has asked the Cabinet Member for Sustainability, Highways, and Transport

2. If the proposed financial cuts to the Swindon Dial a Ride (SDAR) contract are implemented, exactly how much of a cut in £s will there be?
3. Further to Question 1, how much funding/ financial support will SDAR receive over the next two years?
4. In my opinion, as this is not a purely 'Transport' issue, is there a possibility of funding being given from both the Transport Budget and also the Adults Health and Social Care Budget as withdrawal or reduction to the SDAR service will affect users health and wellbeing considerably if this lifeline is withdrawn, and will have knock on financial and time constraints on other bodies e.g. Social Services, Care Workers, Doctors, Community Nurses, and many more.
5. Representatives of SBC have often in the past been heard to speak about 'Care in the Community' and for people of all abilities being encouraged to retain their independence as far as they are able to. Do the Councillors here understand the adverse health implications of disabled passengers using SDAR of potentially losing their independence and dignity if this service has to end, or operate a greatly reduced service, and will it still comply with the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995?
6. I and a number of other SDAR users, use the service to get to and from work. Withdrawal of the service will impact on these users as I, for one, will have to give up work if this service has to be withdrawn or reduced, so what alternative 'like for like' service is SBC proposing to replace SDAR with if the service goes? People with disabilities able to access the conventional bus and other transport services e.g. Thamesdown Transport, already do so, what about the rest who cannot do this?

The Cabinet Member has responded:

Thank you for your questions.

2) Cabinet, and Full Council, approved in February 2016 a part year saving of £100k in 2016/17. The full year reduction will be £200k.

3) The Council is currently in discussions with Swindon Dial A Ride concerning the extension of their contract, and this will all depend upon what type of service they are able to supply if they continue. I sincerely hope a new contract is mutually agreed.

If a contract is agreed before 31st August then Dial A Ride can expect atleast £100,000 in 17/18 and 18/19. If no new contract is agreed then a contingency plan

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will be implemented from 1st September which may mean vouchers per passenger and no direct funding.

4) I am keen to see a new pilot scheme happen between Dial A Ride and Swindon Borough Council involving Council Education transport services. Services such as taking Children with Special Education Needs to and from School. If the pilot is successful then Dial a Ride would be in a position to bid for up to £1.5m of social care and education transport contracts in 2018.

I am happy to discuss approach again with Social Care, but any change will depend upon if the users of Swindon Dial A Ride individually qualify for funding from Social Care, and there would still be a cost pressure to be resolved within the Council's overall revenue budget.

5) Yes. We appreciate as a Council the importance of this service to the users and understand their concerns. However, the Council is facing financial pressures so it is our duty to look at providing this service in as cost effective way as possible, and still meeting the needs of the individual users. This is why we are working with the current contractor to see if we can provide a service at reduced costs that still meets the needs of the users. Any service provided would comply with the relevant legislation.

6) I do not accept that Dial A Ride is under any threat of "closure", and any suggestion of this is going to cause unnecessary alarm and confusion for Dial A Ride users.

Over the last two years, Swindon Dial a Ride has received £600,000 from Swindon Borough Council, while the charity has built up more than £500,000 in its deposit bank account. It is entirely reasonable to find ways which can see some of this money spent on the service and passengers, rather than sitting in a bank. For example, basic things could involve depreciating vehicle values over a longer period, and keeping reserves in line with their management policies. I hope that these kind of ideas are taken up before any service cut is made by Swindon Dial A Ride.

If no agreement is reached with Swindon Dial A Ride before 31st August, then we would either replace them with an alternative contractor or look at offering individuals travel vouchers for use of with Dial A Ride.

While I sympathise with your situation, I am still awaiting the final outcome of the Council's negotiations with Swindon Dial A Ride, our existing contractor, before I can fully comment on the implications of any potential change.

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Bridget Coady, Penhill Drive, Swindon has asked the Cabinet Member for Sustainability, Highways, and Transport

7. Are you going to cut the funding for the Dial A Ride service or not. If so by how much?
8. If you are, do you understand a lot of the Dial A Ride users, due to lack of mobility, will be severely affected and will remain housebound or even end up in care homes?
9. Do you understand that the suggested bus hub will be next to useless for people with mobility issues as they will not be able to get to the hubs?
10. If you are shutting the libraries and saying this money is going to the vulnerable and disabled why can't some of this go to fund the Dial A Ride service?

The Cabinet Member has responded:

Thank you for your questions.

7) Cabinet, and Full Council, approved in February 2016 a part year saving of £100k in 2016/17. The full year reduction will be £200k.

8) We appreciate as a Council the importance of this service to the users and understand their concerns. However, the Council is facing financial pressures so it is our duty to look at providing this service in as cost effective way as possible and still meeting the needs of the individual users. This is why we are working with the current contractor to see if we can provide a service at reduced costs that still meets the needs of the users. Any service provided would comply with the relevant legislation.

9) The “suggested bus hubs” are being consulted on as part of the Bus Services review which is currently being undertaken, and due to report back to Cabinet in September. 95% of the bus network is run commercially by bus operators, so the question is how can Swindon Borough Council continue to support those areas with . For example, the villages around the town which could end up with no bus service. The bus hub concept has the potential to use minibuses to ensure local residents can access the commercial bus network.

The bus hubs are largely irrelevant to users with mobility issues. However, Dial A Ride could easily bid for the hub contracts if this is the direction approved by Cabinet, and has the potential to increase Dial A Ride income and improve passenger accessibility.

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10) The key problem is that the money remains a cost pressure within the overall revenue budget of Swindon Borough Council. Instead of being £300,000 being paid for by the Highways department, the £300,000 would transfer to the Adult Social Care department. No saving is actually made, only the movement of money between budget lines.

If a new contract can be agreed with Dial A Ride by the 31st August then the service will be on a sustainable footing for the next couple of years. This will provide reassurance to passengers, and avoid the need for future cuts or create problems in other Council department budgets.

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Mr Martin Newman, Swindon, has asked the Cabinet Member for Communities:

11. In response to an FOI Request SBC has said that no budget was set for the Community Governance Review and that there is no estimate of the total cost of the review. I would like to ask why the review was embarked upon without a budget being set for it or an estimate of its overall cost produced?

The Cabinet Member for Communities has responded.

Thank you for your question.

11) As stated in paragraph 5.1 of the Cabinet Report that will be considered tonight, "The cost of the Community Governance Review has to date been met using existing resources and budgets and this will largely continue. An exception referred to in paragraph 3.52 of the report is to use £15k from the Transition Grant to fund a leaflet drop to all households as part of the next stage of the consultation. There are no other financial implications at this stage of the process." There was no need to set aside an additional budget until this time.