

Wiltshire Council

Full Council

18 July 2023

Item 13 – Members’ Questions

From Cllr Richard Budden – Tisbury

To Cllr Nick Botterill, Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning

Preamble

Capital budgets available to Area Boards this year are virtually the same as they were five years ago - despite the impact of inflation, over that time, of over 30%, and increases to Council Tax plus the Social Levy of over 20%.

Following a virtual standstill in improvements to the local highways network over more than three years during the pandemic, changes were made two years ago to the remit and titles of Area Board sub-committees for local highways enhancements. Redistribution of responsibilities and of funds within the Area Board capital budgets gave the appearance of an increase to the sum available for highways projects. Since then, although funding for Highways and Transport was increased by 8% this year, budgets for what are now called the LHFIGs have not increased, and are insufficient to cope with the post-pandemic backlog of projects coming forward for approval.

As a consequence Parish Councils – many of which, in rural areas have very modest means and budgets - are being asked to bear a higher proportion of the costs of road safety projects, with the prospect that in future years their precepts will need to rise to bear these increased costs.

Question (23-19)

Is it not the case that this Council, by failing to increase funds available for road safety improvements in line with inflation (indeed even in line with increases to Highways maintenance) is, de facto, passing responsibility for the cost of road safety, that is its statutory responsibility, down to Parish Councils?

Response:

LHFIGs were introduced in April 2022 to replace CATGs. This change was accompanied by a doubling of the annual budget available from £250,000 to £500,000. The funding for Substantive Schemes, which is available to LHFIGs through an annual bidding process, was also increased from £150,000 to £250,000.

Area Boards have full oversight of LHFIGs, including agreeing the prioritisation of tasks and delivery of schemes in line with local objectives.

The way in which the Highways Capital grant is spent each year is fully detailed in the annual Highways Capital Programme report that is available on the Council's website pages. The Social Levy cannot be spent on highway and transport schemes.

Road safety is a priority for the Council. There are a number of different work programmes in place to address this, and the Council is fully compliant in meeting the statutory duties under s.39 of the Road Traffic Act 1988.