

Questions on notice

Full Council meeting 20 July 2022

Question to Councillor Steve Broadbent, Cabinet Member for Transport from Councillor Robin Stuchbury in relation to an ongoing highways project outside of Buckingham School

My question relates to the project regarding footpath and emergency access directly outside of the Buckingham School fronting on to London Road. The scheme has been subject to a number of delays, and as Ward Councillor and a Corporate Parent, I would like to seek clarity on how and when the scheme is being progressed. What is the cause of the delays and when will the scheme be progressed / the works commence?

Response

The Project Initiation document for this scheme was initially completed in May 2021 but ongoing discussions about the measures that were to be introduced resulted in the scheme only receiving formal approval from the Community Board in late December 2021. The works were therefore programmed for delivery in the 2022/23 financial year.

Work on the initial design commenced in April 2022 and has now been completed. This will be followed by a formal consultation exercise in September as the changes to the loading and waiting arrangements for access to the school requires a Traffic Order amendment which can take up to three months. Following this the final design work will be completed and the works are scheduled for implementation in February 2023, as shown on the Members portal.

Officers have contacted local ward members and key stakeholders to update them on the progress of the works.

Question to Councillor John Chilver, Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources from Councillor Julia Wassell in relation to the Council Tax rebate

The £150 Council Tax Rebate is a welcome relief to those on benefits in Council tax bands A to D. Some vulnerable people have had problems claiming it or do not understand it.

Please advise us how many people in Bucks were contacted regarding this opportunity and what number have claimed the rebate? I am concerned that this rebate ends in August and people may lose out with another round of rebates anticipated, it is an ideal time to review the efficacy of the Bucks take-up campaign.

Response

I am pleased to report that 100% of those 73,847 Council tax payers who pay by direct debit in bands A to D have received their £150 council tax energy rebate automatically.

The bands A to D council tax payers who pay by cash or standing order were asked to provide their bank details to enable payment. 46,796 households were written to and 29,919 have provided their details and been paid (64%)

Those remaining 16,877 band A to D council tax 'cash payers' who have not yet provided their details by the 1 August will then be automatically sent a post office £150 voucher. The arrangements for this are being finalised and we will let those residents know the new arrangements. We will also inform partners as we are aware that some of these residents may have English as a second language; there may be guardianship arrangements in place and other particular provisions. We will ensure that no band A to D eligible household will miss out on payment and all payments should be issued by the end of August.

Question to Councillor Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services from Councillor Robin Stuchbury in relation to Neurodiversity and SEND

Background to question

These are the outstanding issues which YC2 parents have great concern about;

- Families are not receiving the right support at the right time regarding SEND. This is causing distress to all involved and exacerbating the situation.
- Due to the delay in Neurodiversity assessments (2 + years), children and Young People are not receiving sufficient and appropriate support in School. Those who can afford it are resorting and paying for private services.
- Parents / Carers are becoming exhausted with the constant fight to get the support they need, and this has been apparent throughout the very emotive discussions we have had. Without the all-important plan, the actual piece of paper, in place, then families and children are left stagnating on an increasing waiting list.
- Early Help services are trying to support the families, but they do not have the qualified staff to provide the level of counselling that is needed.

On behalf of the parents of young carers at YC2 I wish to put the below to the Cabinet Member:

- a) The current delays in initial diagnoses results in the child's situation worsening in the 2-3 year wait. We need a defined post-diagnosis process to ensure the plan works and is appropriate as well as acknowledgement that for some children this wait will result in deteriorating Mental Health due to their experiences. What is being done to improve access to support around neurodiversity, enabling children and young people to get the right support at the right time and allowing them to thrive in their education and communities (parents felt strongly that a 2-hour parenting course was not an appropriate response)?

Response

Across the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care System (BOB ICS), in line with the national picture there has been an increase in demand for neurodevelopmental diagnostic assessments for children and young people. This has led to increased wait times with the average across the three counties within BOB being between 18 – 24 months. These delays were identified as a significant area of weakness during the local area SEND inspection which took place in March 2022. Since that point, the local area has been developing an action plan that outlines a clear intention to improve the countywide needs-based offer for children and young people to ensure that support can be accessed regardless of the wait for diagnostic assessment. The action plan will be submitted to OFSTED and DFE on the 8 August and broadly includes (but not limited to) the following:

- Increasing access to training in relation to neuro – diverse presentations for professionals
- Developing a countywide strategy for autism
- Making self – help advice and guidance more widely available and consistent
- Continuing to embed ordinarily available provision within mainstream school settings to ensure that support can be provided at the earliest stage
- Mapping and evaluating current early intervention provisions to identify any gaps

- b) How are education providers being supported to ensure support plans are put in place, regularly reviewed and that the children, following diagnosis are added to the SEN Register as soon as possible (the primary goal is plan-activate-review)?

Response

Whether or not a child has received a formal medical diagnosis, it is imperative that children and young people with special educational needs (i.e. requiring support that is additional to, or different from, that which would be typically provided to pupils) have such needs identified early and responded to rapidly. The focus on those working for our Integrated Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (ISEND) Service and related agencies is to improve the knowledge, skills and confidence of our frontline school staff, including Teaching Assistants, Class Teachers and SENDCos.

In order to achieve this goal, the SEN Support Impact Group (part of the Council's SEND Improvement work) has been leading on a number of initiatives for embedding best practice in schools. This has included a programme of free training sessions to schools covering a range of SEN-related topics, all of which link back to our published Ordinarily Available Provision documentation, which includes details of best practice across all settings. In addition, this academic year has seen the launch of whole-school SEND auditing, which for the first time has enabled peer reviews of practice amongst primary and secondary schools, highlighting areas of good practice to share, and also where specific improvements need to be targeted. This peer review programme will continue, and be expanded, in the next academic year following the initial success. Finally, the SEN Support Impact Group has also been finalising a SEN Support Toolkit, which has approval to go online from September 2022. This comprehensive, accessible and up to date resource aimed at school staff will allow easy access to advice, guidance and resources that cover all the different areas of special educational needs, from autism to physical and sensory issues, language needs to mental health difficulties, with the primary aim of supporting schools to deliver best practice in SEN Support - precisely as suggested in the question.

Question to Councillor Peter Strachan, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration from Councillor Robin Stuchbury in relation to the emerging Local Plan

I understand that the emerging Local Plan will be one of the most important decisions for the newly established local authority to take. In response to a written question from Councillor Karen Bates at the previous Council meeting on 27 April in relation to the emerging local plan, it was noted that related issues and the impact of legislative changes to Buckinghamshire would be subject to scrutiny at the Growth, Infrastructure and Housing (GIH) Select Committee. It was further noted that Government announcements were expected about changes to the planning system in 'Spring 2022' and more details may be shared in the Queen's speech on 10 May. Please can an update be given on how Buckinghamshire has been affected by announcements and what involvement Members have had in these discussions? Please could I also ask that the below points be addressed:

- The response level to the engagement exercise calling for Brownfield sites
- How the Member's Working Group has been operating and what opportunity there is for opposition party involvement to offer a broader discussion in light of the plan possibly running from 2022-2040
- How geographical differences are handled by the working group given the size of Buckinghamshire and historic working practices of legacy areas
- How the 55,000 homes quoted in the response provided to the previous Council question from Councillor Bates has been calculated (whether this includes previous development plans)

- When the next all Members briefing on the local plan will be taking place and how frequent these will be in the future as these are important for Members who do not sit on the working group or GIH Select Committee to receive updates and have an opportunity to input on plans.

Response

Thank you for your question.

In terms of the Government's legislative reforms, it published the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill on 11 May 2022. This has received its First and Second Readings in the House of Commons and is currently at the Committee stage of its scrutiny. The Member Working Group received a presentation on the main provisions in the Bill, which will affect all councils in England.

In terms of your detailed points, I address them individually as follows:

[The response level to the engagement exercise calling for Brownfield sites](#)

Discounting duplicated site promotions, as at the end of May 2022, a total of 299 brownfield sites had been submitted and sites can be viewed on the Council's planning policy web pages. These sites will be technically assessed in the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment along with sites that are submitted as part of the current "wider call for sites".

[How the Member's Working Group has been operating and what opportunity there is for opposition party involvement to offer a broader discussion in light of the plan possibly running from 2022-2040](#)

The Group is currently meeting quarterly for briefings on a range of matters relating to the preparation of the Local Plan, but at this stage the opportunity for a significant steer on the Plan is limited.

[How geographical differences are handled by the working group given the size of Buckinghamshire and historic working practices of legacy areas](#)

The membership of the Group provides good geographical coverage of Buckinghamshire. Because the opportunity for the Group to provide a significant steer on the Plan is limited, any geographical differences have not been an issue.

How the 55,000 homes quoted in the response provided to the previous Council question from Councillor Bates has been calculated (whether this includes previous development plans)

Until the Government announces any changes, the Council must use the 'standard method' as a 'policy-off' starting point for assessing the housing needs of the area. This provides an annual figure which is then multiplied by the number of years that the Plan is to cover. As calculated this month (the figure changes each year to reflect updates to the affordability ratio), the standard method figure has reduced from over 3,000 homes being needed each year to 2,888 homes. Presuming that a plan period might run from 2022-2040, this creates a possible requirement to plan for of about 52,000 homes. Around 28,000 homes already have planning permission or are allocated through the Wycombe District and Aylesbury Vale Local Plans

Prior to recent events in Westminster, the Government was expected to publish a 'Planning Prospectus' in July which would set out its thinking on revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework and the standard method for assessing local housing need.

When the next all Members briefing on the local plan will be taking place and how frequent these will be in the future as these are important for Members who do not sit on the working group or GIH Select Committee to receive updates and have an opportunity to input on plans.

Evidence to support the Local Plan is currently being assembled. It would seem appropriate to brief all members as part of the subsequent plan-shaping and options formulation stages when there will be meaningful content to share and discuss with them.

Question 1 to Councillor Gareth Williams, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment, from Councillor Julia Wassell in relation to litter bins

A number of litter bins have gradually been removed in my ward with no consultation or information to councillors. This also occurred in my former ward. The locations include; Hatters Lane, Wingate Avenue, Totteridge Lane, London Road adjacent to JC Decaux land, London Road adjacent to Cartwright Court. This list is not exhaustive. We, in fact, need more litter bins, but are told these will cost £450 with no Community Leaders Fund to use.

This situation appears to be yet another example of how my ward is disadvantaged by not having a parish council and use of Community Board monies would not rectify this deficit either.

Please advise me how I can prevent bins from being removed, get them replaced free of charge and have some additional bins also free of charge?

Response

The Council will not routinely remove litter bins without consultation or review, oftentimes litter bins become damaged / knocked over by third parties. Litter bin costs on Parish Council land are £69 per year for the South. Litter bins can be ordered from <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling/street-cleaning/request-a-public-litter-bin/>. Please be aware that a litter assessment will be undertaken before bins are installed and requesting a litter bin does not guarantee installation.

Question 2 to Councillor Gareth Williams, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment, from Councillor Andrea Baughan in relation to High Wycombe Green Bin payments

I was glad to see the "Green Bin" Payment of £50 for High Wycombe Residents has been delayed until 26th September. However, due to the difficult situation with collections that has occurred over the last few months that has caused extreme stress and concern to residents; would you consider cancelling it altogether, delaying this until 1 April 2023; or even reduce the cost for all people who pay the charge across the County?

Response

We have already taken the decision to postpone the Garden waste charging in Wycombe to September 2022, so that we do not introduce new changes to the service whilst there is service disruption being experienced by our residents. Aligning charges and collection arrangements for the garden waste services will ensure parity across all areas and Buckinghamshire residents will be treated equally and receive the same standard of service where possible, so we will be continuing with the 'Opt-In' garden waste charging proposals in the Wycombe area. So far there have been 5500 subscribers signed up ready for the commencement in September and when we start the communication campaign at the end of July, we will be setting out how residents can utilise alternative methods to deal with their garden waste if they don't want to subscribe. This will include using the household recycling centres for free and home composting.