



# Buckinghamshire County Council

## Report

## Cabinet

### AGENDA ITEM 3 [Cab 1/00]

<b>Date</b>	4 December 2000
<b>Title</b>	The Way Ahead
<b>Author</b>	Leader of the Council
<b>Electoral Divisions Affected</b>	All
<b>Summary</b>	The report launches the new Cabinet and sets out some of the priorities for the coming months from the perspective of the Leader of the Council.
<b>Recommendation</b>	To note and comment on the report.

This morning's Cabinet meeting marks an important step forward in the evolutionary history of Buckinghamshire County Council. In saying this, I wish to minimise neither the importance of a past of which we can be proud nor the significance of the step we are now in the process of taking.

It is important to recognise that Buckinghamshire has become the leading County authority that it is, with a well-justified reputation for good judgement and sound management, on the back of the democratic framework which has served us well for over a hundred years. Even though the current changes are not necessarily those we would have chosen for ourselves, they do present an enormous opportunity for us to move the Council forward still further. The results will be as good as we make them, and that is an opportunity and a responsibility shared between the Cabinet Members and the Chief Officer's Team. There is no doubt that the context in which we are operating as a local authority is changing very significantly, and we need to recognise that and respond to it, so that we become leaders and not followers of the direction of change.

I would therefore firstly like to say something about how I hope the Cabinet will work, as a team, to handle these issues, and then to give a personal view of what some of the key issues for the Cabinet will be during this pilot period.

When I just referred to the Cabinet as a team, it was not a word I used lightly. I believe that if we are to be really effective in our role, and if we are to deserve the respect of the people of Buckinghamshire, then in both our individual decisions and in those which we address

collectively on behalf of the Council, we think and act as one. Although for good reasons of clarity of management, and of ensuring that what we decide gets done, we have chosen to organise ourselves around portfolios with specialist interests, we must never lose sight of the fact that these are essentially matters of internal administrative convenience, and not necessarily related to how we are perceived by the public of Buckinghamshire. To them it is the Council that is responsible for looking after their roads, for educating their children, for looking after the frail and vulnerable and for spending their Council Tax wisely. In doing so they clearly expect us to work together, and that is very much a style I hope to see within these meetings. The Cabinet is not the place for the fighting of corners, nor the pursuit of individual idiosyncrasies. Rather it is the place where together we can consider and evaluate our overall priorities and take collective decisions about these.

I hope that this principle will also inform the style of our discussions in the Cabinet, adopting a 'round table' approach to discussion, making the maximum use of new technology, and using the information we have put before us in the form of papers and other material as the basis for searching and challenging discussion.

I am particularly looking forward to our opportunity to consider in detail the main elements of the policy framework. In the past I have sometimes felt that the Council as a whole has had insufficient opportunity to understand in depth some of the main policy drivers for the Council. It will be an important responsibility of the Cabinet to help the Council to get beneath the skin of some of these major policies, so that we can be confident that they truly reflect the needs of the community of Buckinghamshire.

I take very seriously the role of the Council as community leader on these and other major issues and I and my Deputy Leader will be making every effort both to ensure that the views of our citizens are properly taken into account as our policies are shaped and agreed, and that the interests of our community are properly represented to those at regional and national level who make so many of the decisions that affect our lives.

I would now like to turn to my view of the content of our meetings, and the big issues that face us over the coming months. Back in July, I set out some key Policy Steers for the Council to bear in mind in setting its budget, and the principles that underpin them. In particular, I continue to think that it is vital that the Council lives within its means next year and over the medium term, and that as an inescapable part of this we continue to seek efficiency gains. This is consistent with the Best Value principle of continuous improvement, and is in any case an assumption that the Government builds into its grant calculations. I also do not think our Council Tax payers will thank us if Council Tax rises above the average increase for other similar authorities.

The former Strategy Panel has already asked Cabinet Members to bring forward to the Cabinet meeting on 18 December their proposals for strategic aims, and policy steers for each portfolio area. I look forward to receiving these, and do not wish to pre-empt them. However, it may be helpful if I outline just a few of the issues I expect to feature in each of the main portfolio areas.

The many developments we have seen in relation to education in recent years mean that it is essential that we think very hard about the future role of the Council as Local Education Authority. I know that the Cabinet Member for Schools, as part of the review team looking at School Support, has been reflecting carefully on these issues, and I hope he will be able to bring forward some proposals for consideration in due course. Equally, the Cabinet Member for Community Services will be reflecting on the parallel implications in terms of the development of the Learning and Skills Council and the Connexions Service. I look forward to hearing reports from the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People about the increasing integration of all our services for children with special needs, so that we really do

put the individual child at the centre of our policies and practices. In Care Services for Adults, apart from the imperative to keep spending within the limits of affordability, there are very significant developments affecting our relationship with the Health Authority which we will need to monitor carefully. The quality of roads and footpaths is seen by the public as a vital area of the Council's responsibility and the Local Transport Plan provides us with opportunities for significant progress in these areas. Within the resources arena, we will need to give particularly careful consideration to the options that arise from the Best Value Root and Branch Review of Corporate Support.

I will, of course, be bringing forward in February the new Council Plan and Best Value Performance Plan which I intend will integrate the policy proposals of Cabinet Members, and their plans for service improvement, into a comprehensive Council level package. The Deputy Leader will be bringing forward his proposals for improving our communication with the public about all these issues.

The above is just an outline of the huge task that we now face. I am very confident that the team of Cabinet Members I have appointed, together with the General Managers and others in the Chief Officer's Team, are more than able to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

For further information please contact: NICK FANE on 01296 383103

### **Representations**

Any representations regarding this report should be made to Head of Cabinet Support by 9.00 am 4 December 2000. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 382966), Fax (to 01296 383441), or e-mail to [cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk)

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