

1 : BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the Buckinghamshire County Council convened and held on Thursday, 22 March 2001 in the Council Chamber at County Hall, Aylesbury, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 3.35 pm when the following members of the Council were present

Mr K I Ross in the Chair;

Mr B G Allen, Mr M C Appleyard, Mrs C M Aston, Mrs P M Bacon, Mrs A R Bainbridge, Mr M E Brand, Mr R H StG Carey, Mr W J Y Chapple, Mrs M P Clayton, Mr P A Cochrane, Mrs P M Crawford, Mrs P M A Dewar, Mr T J Fowler, Mr C Graeff, Mr D C T Graves, Mr M J Greenburgh, Mrs B H Jennings, Mr C Jones, Mr S Kennell, Mr P M Lawrence, Mrs S J Lee, Mr R Lingham-Wood, Mrs C C Martens, Mr M B Oram, Mr J H McB Page, Mr R C Pushman, Mrs F D Roberts MBE, Mr D J Rowlands, Mr R S Royston, Mr J S Ryman, Mr D A C Shakespeare, Dr B R Stenner, Mr F V J Sweatman, Mr M W Taylor, Julia D Wassell, Mrs C S Willetts, Mr H G W Wilson and Mr R J Worrall

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs M A M Aston, Mrs M A Baldwin, Mr I S Bates, Mr N L Brown, Mr J W Cartwright, Mr D A B Green, Mrs S D Hodgkinson, Mr T L Jones, Mrs E M Lay, Mr A J Plumridge and Mr C F Robinson OBE.

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 22 February 2001, were confirmed subject to the following amendments:

Minute 5 “Committed to Quality: Strategic Aims and Budget Proposals – Overview”

- Top of page 3 delete “Mrs Crawford proposed a total of 26 amendments ...” and insert “Mrs Crawford give notice of the intention to move amendments ...”.
- Top of page 4 delete “the proposals made by Mrs Crawford” and add “the other proposed amendments not considered by the County Council ...”.

2 PETITIONS

There were no petitions presented on this occasion.

3 COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman reported, with sadness, the death recently of Dr Arnold Baines who had been a County Councillor for Chesham from 1966 to 1974 and from 1977 to 1981. Arnold Baines was deeply committed to Chesham and in addition to his service on the County Council he served for over 40 years on the former Urban and Town Councils, during which time he was Mayor on one occasion and twice Chairman of the former Chesham Urban District Council. He also served as a member of the District Council for 20 years. Dr Baines was an active member of the Area Museum Council, representing Buckinghamshire, and had represented the Bucks Archaeological Society on both the County Council’s Library and Museum and Lifelong Learning Sub-Committees. Members stood in silence as a mark of respect.

The Chairman had held a reception recently for volunteers which had given him the opportunity to thank them for the contribution they make.

The Chairman congratulated the Deputy Leader of the Council for his presentation of the County Council’s position on the Foot and Mouth Crisis on BBC TV’s Newsnight.

The Chairman also congratulated Wycombe Wanderers Football Club on their achievement in reaching the semi-finals of the FA Cup and the Council joined him in wishing them every success in their forthcoming semi-final match against Liverpool.

The Chairman reminded members that the next meeting of the County Council would be held on Thursday, 26 April.

4 QUESTIONS

The following questions were put and answered.

By Mr M J Greenburgh to Mrs M A M Aston, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

For the academic year ended 31st August 2000:

How many Looked After Children in Bucks Care were aged 16?

How many took GCSE exams (specifying whether the children were in residential or foster care)?

How many achieved 5 GCSE's graded 1-5 (specifying whether in residential or foster care)?

What is the target for improvement?

What resources have been allocated to achieving this target?

Reply by Mrs M A M Aston

For the academic year ended 31 August 2000:-

1 36 young people were in Buckinghamshire's care and were aged 16+.

2 16 (13 of whom were in foster care and 3 in residential care) took GCSEs.

5 young people (4 of whom were in foster care and 1 in residential care took a range of other public examinations.

3 16 young people gained at least 1 A-G grade at GCSE (ie 44%)
10 young people achieved at least 5 A*-G grades at GCSE
2 young people achieved at least 5 A*-C grades at GCSE.*

4 Local authorities have been given a target by government of 50% of children in public care to get 1 A-G grade GCSE or a GNVQ equivalent by Summer 2001. Bucks "Quality Protects" Management Action Plan had formerly set a target of 60% of children getting that level by that date. It is noted in this year's Management Action Plan however, that this is likely to be over-ambitious given the nature of the cohort.*

Our aim is to bring the results of children in public care closer in line with those of other Buckinghamshire children.

5 Buckinghamshire schools are committed to improving standards and the County Council, particularly through the Advisory Service, helps with and monitors this. Advisors encourage schools to have particular regard to raising the achievement of vulnerable groups such as children in public care.

The team responsible for the Education of Children in the Public Care (ECPC) helps to raise the achievement levels of the children in Buckinghamshire's care. ECPC has ensured each school in the county has designated a teacher to act as an advocate and a resource for children in public care, and that these staff are well briefed and supported by the Team. Personal Education Plans are to be introduced for every child in public care on a rolling programme from March – November 2001 which will indicate to the child the importance of their education to the key professionals involved with their care and education. Training and support for social workers and carers on educational processes will also help children's progress, and specific study support opportunities for Year 11 pupils is being considered as a future development area.

By Mr M E Brand to Mr M W Taylor, Cabinet Member for Resources

Bearing in mind the huge amount of staff time wasted waiting for lifts in the central tower block and the fact that the lifts are so old that replacement parts have to specially made could he bring forward proposals to Cabinet as a matter of urgency to replace this equipment?

Reply by Mr M W Taylor

An improvement to the lift service in the Tower Block would be of great potential benefit to both service delivery and staff morale. This issue was considered at my last PAG meeting.

Despite significant refurbishment of the mechanics of the system in 1999, the lifts continue to prove inadequate and their upgrading has been part of our thinking for future investment. Staff are currently evaluating the possibilities and advantages of a number of configurations. None of the prospects are cheap, however.

The proposal that currently appears most favourable is the replacement of the single lift at one end of the building with two new lifts. One large lift is needed for bulky items but doubling-up on the lifts at one end would be of great assistance in reducing waiting times.

Indicative costs of over £500,000 for doubling-up lifts at one end of the NCO have been projected. The cost of replacing the remaining large lift to enhance its reliability would be additional to these projections

In order to firm up on this approximate estimate, staff are now pursuing pre-feasibility studies in more detail involving advice from lift installation specialists, further structural scrutiny and a financial / service benefit assessment.

I have asked for a further report as soon as possible on this matter - I hope during early Summer 2001. Funding and timing issues will need to be considered in the context of the Council's other priorities.

By Mr M J Greenburgh to Mr R S Royston, Cabinet Member for Planning And Transportation

Does Mr Royston have any greater ability than Mr Chapple to make the bollards rise in Market Square Aylesbury?

Reply by Mr R S Royston

It is unfortunate that it has taken so long to bring the bollards in Aylesbury Market Square into full time operation. However, this reflects experience with this type of equipment nationwide.

Whilst the bollards' function is very basic, the electronic operating systems are complex and sensitive and take time to adjust. This adjustment phase has been ongoing since Christmas and necessarily involves the manufacturers of the equipment.

We have now reached the point when we believe the bollards can be brought into full time operation. However, during the first weeks of operation, experience suggests that the system will need to be given continuous observation by both BCC staff and the AVDC officers manning the CCTV control room. The key BCC staff member is currently on leave. It is proposed to bring the entire system into operation, following his return from leave, during the week beginning 2 April 2001.

Mr Greenburgh asked as a supplementary question whether Mr Royston would agree that, when Aylesbury Town Council is inaugurated, public sentiment might be that the bollards should stay up?

Mr Royston said he was neither able to agree or disagree.

By Mr M E Brand to Mr M C Appleyard, Cabinet Member for Schools

Will he undertake to circulate to all members the LEA's latest Section 52 return as soon as it is available?

Reply by Mr M C Appleyard

Yes I will and I expect to be able to do this by about 6 April.

All LEAs are required to send their Section 52 financial statements for financial year 2001/2002 to the DfEE by the 31 March 2001 in electronic form.

We will then have the document printed at the very beginning of April because not only should it then go to all Members, but it will be sent to all schools.

As with so many of these things, the timetable is very tight because the national Regulations which govern the format and publication of this complex document were only laid before Parliament on the 12 March.

By Mr M E Brand to Mr M W Taylor, Cabinet Member for Resources

Could he explain the reasons for his decision to cut the Council's £20,000 per year contribution to the 'one stop' information centre at Chiltern District Council bearing in mind that no consultation was undertaken, and local members were not informed and also advise Council when this decision came to Cabinet and the papers published?

Reply by Mr M W Taylor

At its meeting on 28 September 2000, Policy and Resources Committee set the budget guideline for the Corporate Services 2001/2002 Budget at £2000 below the cash budget for 2000/2001, necessitating savings of £871,000 against its spending pressures budget.

The Corporate Services Policy, Performance and Finance Panel considered options to achieve the reduction at its meeting on 2 November 2000. Among other reductions, Members indicated that the budget for the Council's contribution to One Stop Shops should cease and other ways of communicating with the public be explored including increased use of the internet, libraries and other Council establishments.

The proposed reduction in the One Stop Shop budget was set out in Annex 4 to Item 5ii of the reports to Cabinet on 18 December 2000 and incorporated in the Corporate Services budget allocations considered by Cabinet on 5 February 2001.

Chiltern District Council were formally told of the proposal in early February. Subsequent discussions on the budgets for the One Stop Shop and the joint reception at the Amersham Council Offices have enabled the saving to be realised

without any reduction in service.

As a supplementary question, Mr Brand asked whether Chiltern District Council had been told of the proposal or of the decision.

Mr Taylor said that on 9 January the District Council had been advised of the decision.

By Mr M E Brand to Mr M C Appleyard, Cabinet Member for Schools

Will he give his personal assurance as cabinet member for schools that in the event that insufficient schools buy back the services of the Primary Care Specialist Support Team from September 2001 he or his successor will bring proposals to Cabinet to retain all the staff at least until April 2002 using funds within the schools budget or the recruit and retain budget held corporately by this Council?

Reply by Mr M C Appleyard

I welcome Mr Brand's sympathy with the members of staff of the Learning Support Team and I recognise his sympathy for the delivery of special educational needs in Buckinghamshire.

May I remind Mr Brand that he had a full answer at the last Council meeting and I do not propose to do more than reiterate what I said last time.

I have to say that there have been two meetings for schools this week at which we have discussed and offered buy back "packages". We are offering schools the ability to buy back Learning Support Team time either individually or as groups of schools. Schools' interest in this "buy back" proposal is considerable and I have every confidence that the level of "buy back" will be significant. I cannot guarantee that it will be 100% and we will not know until into next term just what level there will be.

*However, we can't have it both ways: we can't have further delegation of budget and responsibility to schools **which schools want**, and keep the financial responsibility for schools' decisions in the LEA.*

The staff have been spoken to on a number of occasions and have been assured that if “buy back” did not require the current staff numbers then we will be giving full support to each individual to secure an alternative post. We have a number of vacancies and so I cannot imagine that any person will be without a job if they want it.

I do hope that my comments will be accurately reported since I find it unfortunate that Mr Brand wishes to make a political point two Councils running on such a sensitive issue. I do hope that he will forgo the opportunity at the next Council.

As a supplementary question, Mr Brand asked again for an assurance that Mr Appleyard would bring forward proposals.

Mr Appleyard said he could only repeat that when he had the full information on buy back he would consider the position and decide the way forward.

By Mr M E Brand to Mr R S Royston, Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation

Could he confirm that as a result of recent changes to Highway regulations there is no reason why, subject to funding being available, 30 MPH Roundels and appropriate signs can be introduced as traffic calming measures where this speed limit is in force?

Reply by Mr R S Royston

The regulations concerning the use of carriageway ‘roundel’ markings for 30 mph, or other speed limits, is somewhat confusing.

New Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions have been prepared by the DETR, but not yet brought into force. Their enactment has been said to be ‘imminent’ for some time, but it is still not known when this will come about.

When the new Regulations are enacted, it will be possible for Buckinghamshire County Council as Highway Authority to place 30 mph roundels on the

carriageway in the same way that 30 mph repeater signs are used now.

This means that where the 30 mph speed limit is designated by the provision of street lighting roundels may only be used at each end of the restricted area.

If however a 30 mph (or higher) speed limit is designated via a traffic order (not just street lighting) then the law requires repeater signs which could also be accompanied by roundels.

Currently, it is possible to adopt Roundel markings, as described, subject to receiving formal site authorisation from DETR but it is a time consuming process and given the promise of imminent regulations, is not one we have chosen to spend limited resources on.

Getting to the heart of Mr Brand’s question, it is not, and will not, generally be permitted, under the new Regulations, to use 30 mph roundels in 30 mph speed limited areas.

By Mr M E Brand to Mr D A C Shakespeare, Leader of the Council

When the Chief Officer of the Council took up his post he spent half a day at the switchboard answering calls. Does the Leader of the Council have any plans to do the same?

Reply from Mr D A C Shakespeare

No.

As a supplementary question, Mr Brand asked “why not”.

In reply Mr Shakespeare said that he believed that Members should focus on directing the policy and strategy of the Council rather than the mechanics of the day to day operation. The Chief Officer of the Council on the other hand is responsible for the good running of that machinery and he congratulated him on his innovative approach to his new role.

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

6 NOTICE OF MOTION FOR DECISION – MR M J GREENBURGH

The Council considered the Notice of Motion from Mr M J Greenburgh, about Thames Valley Police Authority Consultative Committees, which had been referred by the Council at its meeting on 23 November 2000.

RESOLVED: This Council requests the Thames Valley Police Authority to ensure that all members of Buckinghamshire County Council are informed of the date, time and venue for meetings of the Thames Valley Police Authority Consultative Committees and that the members of Buckinghamshire County Council be given the right to speak on behalf of their constituents at those meetings.

7 COUNCIL PLAN 2001-2004 – STRATEGIC AIMS AND SUPPORTING POLICIES

The Deputy Leader of the Council presented the report of the Cabinet on the Council's Strategic Aims and Supporting Policies.

The following recommendations were moved en bloc and agreed.

RESOLVED: That with regard to the Council's Strategic Aims and Supporting Policies for 2001-2004 be agreed:

1 the following amendment be agreed:-

Amendment 15

(6f) Proactively establish partnership arrangements with Health, Primary Care Groups and Primary Care Trusts, the Voluntary Sector, and other key partners, to provide

seamless “one stop” services for: Learning and Physical Disability, Mental Health and Older People Clients.

2 that the following modifying amendments to the Strategic Aims be proposed as follows:-

Amendment 3

(1g) “Identify and *bid for* new sources of funding and service improvements *where appropriate*”.

Amendment 7

(2c) “Encourage individuals and groups in Buckinghamshire to contribute ideas and comment on policy proposals and standards of service *and be prepared to modify accordingly*”.

Amendment 16

(7b) “*Encourage all aspects of learning activities within the community for all ages*”.

Amendment 17

(7f) “Work with *other* authorities to reduce the amount of waste we all produce and develop a waste disposal strategy, *which includes reducing landfill waste by encouraging less packaging and less usage of non bio-degradable products*”.

Amendment 18

(8e) “Provide and develop services for children and families which are shaped around individual needs *including easy access and appropriate early intervention*”.

Amendment 21

(9b) “Recognise *the value of our teachers and invest in their development* to improve the quality of teaching *which will improve literacy and numeracy at all ages, thus increasing attainments at GCSE and enhancing pupils’ personal development*”.

Amendment 23

(9e) “Work in *partnership* to provide school places where they are needed by encouraging infant and junior schools to combine where appropriate while protecting small *village* schools and addressing changing numbers within secondary schools”.

Amendment 24

(9f) “*Support the Early Years and Childcare Partnership to improve educational opportunity for all children by reaching targets of full provision for all three year olds whose parents want it by the target date of 2003/04 and increase childcare placement; also by delivering the special educational needs policy with a focus on early identification and appropriate funding*”.

3 that the following amendments be referred for consideration to the relevant Cabinet Member's Work Programme:-

Amendment 8

(3b) “*Continue to oppose housing figures over the number already allocated*”.

Amendment 8

(3c) “**Seek to maintain the green belt and green spaces in towns whilst protecting the AONB in the countryside**”.

Amendment 8

(3d) “**Support the use of brownfield sites for housing whilst remembering the need for local employment**”.

Amendment 10

(3f) “**Invest in and work with District Councils and Housing Associations to enable affordable suitable homes to be built, particularly for those on low incomes, in return for nomination rights**”.

The Council then considered recommendation 4 containing amendments that were recommended for rejection. With regard to Amendment 4 it was proposed by Mr Brand, seconded by Mr Oram, that the amendment be not rejected. On a vote being taken Mr Brand’s proposal was lost.

Amendment 5 was rejected by 24 votes to 3. Amendment 6 was rejected by 24 votes to 6. Amendment 7 was rejected by 24 votes to 6. Amendment 11 was rejected by 24 votes to 5. Amendment 12 was rejected by 24 votes to 9. Amendment 13 was rejected by 23 votes to 7. Amendment 14 was rejected by 23 votes to 5.

With regard to Amendment 16 Mrs Willetts proposed that the amendment be not rejected and this was seconded by Mrs Roberts. On a vote being taken, Mrs Willetts’ proposal was lost.

Amendments 17 to 26 were then considered en bloc and the proposed rejection was agreed by 23 votes to 9.

With regards to Amendment 27, Mrs Crawford proposed that it be not rejected and this was seconded by Mr Kennell. On being put to the vote, Mrs Crawford's proposal was lost.

RESOLVED: That the following amendments be rejected:-

Amendment 4

(1h) delete 1h and replace with “Consult residents annually on a range of Council Tax and service options and take their views into consideration by setting a tax which balances local service needs and the local ability to pay in the light of projected income and Government grants”.

Amendment 5

(11c) move 11c to become Aim 1(i).

Amendment 6

(2a) add to the end of 2a “by delegating services and devolving budgets to Local Area Committees consistent with efficient and effective service delivery”.

Amendment 7

(3c) delete c and replace with e “Support communities in rural areas”.

Amendment 11

(4a) delete “and making the most of modern technology” and replace with “establishing a credible information technology strategy, and earmarking sufficient funds to implement it”.

Amendment 12

(4b) delete b and replace with “use a range of professionally tested consultation practices including the Bucks 1000, local forums and residents panels to ensure that communication is a two way process and then take account of what they say”.

Amendment 13

(4e) add e “ allow Local Members to address Cabinet and Committees on constituency issues as a right rather than at the Chairman's discretion, even if time limited”.

Amendment 14

(5) delete all of Aim 5.

Amendment 16

(7c) delete b and c and replace with “Protect our heritage and ensure access by all sectors of the community to learning opportunities by supporting and investing in our libraries, museums, performing and visual arts”.

Amendment 17

(7f) delete f and replace with “Remove the height restrictions and small business charge at waste dumps”.

Amendment 17

(7h) add new h “Work with District Councils to reduce waste streams”.

Amendment 19

- (8c) add to c “and develop, fund and monitor the action plan necessary to successfully deliver the SEN Strategy and Vision”.

Amendment 20

- (9) delete “within the County’s successful selective system”.

Amendment 22

- (9c) delete c and replace with “implement the ‘Five Heads’ Needs-Led Funding’ report in full (updated for inflation) thus providing more non contact time for teachers”.

Amendment 25

- (10g) add “implement 20mph speed limits at identified sites such as outside school and impose a maximum of a 40mph speed limit where there is a locally identified need”.

Amendment 26

- (10h) add “seek to devolve the responsibilities of all parking strategies and implementation to District Councils to be developed in partnership with the local community”.

Amendment 27

- (11) delete wording of aim and replace with “to recognise that the staff who deliver services are the Council’s most important asset and to treat them as such. We will:-

- a take positive action to eliminate the ‘lack of trust’
- b remove the blame culture where it exists
- c plan strategically and deliver efficiently to eradicate crisis management
- d improve two way communication with staff by listening
- e do everything possible to retrain and retain staff by improving skills and competencies and encouraging full accreditation by Investors in People
- f strive to pay competitively including the use of market supplements

8 LOCAL PERFORMANCE PLAN

The Council considered the report of the Cabinet on the Local Performance Plan.

RESOLVED: That the County Council agrees the Local Performance Plan 2001-02, its summary and the accompanying newspaper.

9 POLICY FRAMEWORK: STATUTORY PLANS

The report of the Cabinet on Statutory Plans was considered.

RESOLVED: 1 That the County Council agrees the Quality Protects Management Action Plan 2001-2002;

2 That the County Council agrees the Youth Justice Service Plan 2001-2002;

3 That the County Council adopts the Early Years Development and Child Care Partnership Strategic Plan 2001-04 and Implementation Plan 2001-02.

10 APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The report of Chief Officer of Council was withdrawn.

11 NOTICES OF MOTION – NEW

The Council considered the following Notice of Motion from Mrs P M Crawford:-

“This winter’s exceptional rainfall has shown up shortcomings in some of our drainage systems. In view of the forecast of future increased rainfall and further to the public meeting in Chesham on 28 February and in response to the problems experienced by many residents this Council resolves:

- 1 i To replace or enlarge the drains in Vale Road, Chesham;
- ii To install adequate drainage in the Vale, Chesham so that flooding on this scale does not occur in the future;

and

- 2 The Cabinet member be asked to indicate a timescale for the works to be carried out.”

After discussion of the issues, the Council agreed to support the Notice of Motion.

RESOLVED: That the Notice of Motion in the name of Mrs P M Crawford be supported.

CHAIRMAN

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