

1 : BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the Buckinghamshire County Council convened and held on Thursday, 27 September 2001 in the Council Chamber at County Hall, Aylesbury, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 3.40 pm.

PRESENT

Mr R Lingham-Wood in the Chair;

Mr B G Allen, Mr M C Appleyard, Mrs C M Aston, Mrs M A M Aston,
Mrs P M Bacon, Mr I S Bates, Mr R H StG Carey, Mr W J Y Chapple,
Mrs L M Clarke, Mrs M P Clayton, Mrs P M Crawford, Mrs A C Davies,
Mrs P M A Dewar, Mr F Downes, Mr T J Fowler, Mr D C T Graves,
Mr D A B Green, Miss L K Hazell, Mrs B H Jennings, Mr C Jones, Mr S Kennell,
Mr P M Lawrence, Mr W G Lidgate, Mrs P R Lindsley, Mr K Liverseidge,
Mrs C C Martens, Mr D G Meacock, Mr M B Oram, Mr R C Pushman, Mrs F D
Roberts MBE, Mr P J Roberts, Mr C F Robinson OBE, Mr P Rogerson,
Mr D J Rowlands, Mr R S Royston, Mr D A C Shakespeare OBE, Dr B R Stenner,
Mr F V J Sweatman, Mr M W Taylor, Julia Wassell, Kathie Webber,
Mrs P R Wilkinson, Mrs C S Willetts and Mr H G W Wilson.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Ms M A Baldwin, Mr J Cartwright, Mr M R Colston, Mrs V Letheren, Mrs E M Lay,
Mr S Kennell, Mr J S Ryman, Mrs G A Jones and Mr R K Woollard and Sir Nigel
Mobbs.

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 19 July 2001 were confirmed.

2 PETITIONS

Mr I S Bates presented a petition on behalf of residents of Fair Ridge, The Spinney and Foxleigh Roads, High Wycombe regarding parking restrictions. The petition was referred for consideration to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation.

3 COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman of Council informed Members of the sad death of two distinguished Deputy Lieutenants of the County who had died recently. Sir Ralph Verney who had died on Friday 17 August aged 86 and Mr F M (Monty) Woollard who died on Saturday 18 August aged 97. Members stood in memory of Sir Ralph Verney and Mr Woollard and also for all those who had lost their lives in America. Members stood in silence as a mark of respect.

The Chairman gave a report on his recent engagements and informed Members of an invitation received from the American Fire Service to Members to attend a special service in memory of the Fire Fighters who had lost their lives in America.

In conclusion the Chairman expressed best wishes from the Council to Mr John Cartwright who had not been well recently.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were received:-

Mr P Rogerson – as his wife is an employee of the County Council.
Mr I S Bates – as his wife is an employee of the County Council.
Mrs A C Davies – as Chairman of the Vale of Aylesbury Primary Care Trust.
Mrs M A M Aston – as a member of the Abbeyfield Society.
Julia Wassell – as Chairman of Highcrest Community School.

5 CABINET MEMBER REPORTS

The reports from the Leader and Deputy Leader and from the Cabinet Members were submitted, received and noted.

6 POLICY FRAMEWORK

There were no items on this occasion.

7 REPORTS OF CABINET – RESPONSES TO SELECT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet presented a report which contained responses and decisions to Select Committee recommendations arising from the reports from the Lifelong Learning, Personal Care, Partnership and Environment Select Committees which had been submitted to the Council on 26 April 2001. The Chairman of the Personal Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested that the Committee be given the opportunity to discuss the Cabinet's decision. The Chairman agreed that the Personal Care Select Committee report should be deferred until the next meeting of the Council. The Council discussed the recommendation from the Cabinet on the Environment Select Committee's proposals on the remit of Local Committees and agreed that whilst the proposals could offer the opportunity for widening the brief of Local Committees to include other services there should be a further period of consolidation of the existing arrangements before changing their remit.

RESOLVED: That the existing constitution/terms of reference for Local Committees be retained with a review of arrangements in twelve months time.

8 REPORTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

There were no reports from Overview and Scrutiny Committees on this occasion.

9 OTHER REPORTS – STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Council received the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2001.

RESOLVED: That the Statement of Accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2001 be approved.

10 NOTICES OF MOTION

No new Notices of Motion had been received for this meeting.

With regard to Mrs Crawford's Notice of Motion it was agreed that the report back to Council through the Cabinet should be made in November.

11 QUESTIONS

The following questions were put and answered:-

By Mrs P M Crawford to Mr D A C Shakespeare, Leader of the Council

The budget monitoring report that went to the Cabinet on September 10th showed that after only 4 months the forecast for the year showed an overall overspend of £2.406million, mainly due to £1.4m on S.E.N. and £1.137m on certain Social Services budgets. Can Mr Shakespeare tell us whether this was due to

- a Poor forecasting, or
- b Inadequate financial control, or
- c Deliberate underfunding against known spending pressures. (Last year's outturn has an overspend of £1.6m on these same services)

Reply By Mr D A C Shakespeare

Poor Forecasting?

The Social Services and SEN budgets which are currently forecasting an overspend this year are essentially demand led. They are difficult to forecast and each year we attempt to make a realistic estimate of changes (usually increases) in the number of clients and pupils that meet our service criteria.

What we are finding is that client and pupil needs are becoming more complex, or increasingly dependent on our services. This in itself is increasing costs, even if the overall numbers are accurately forecast.

The second factor is that many of these clients and pupils are placed in non-Council establishments and the fees that they are charging are increasing by significant amounts above inflation. There is also a limited supply of places available and thus, in the short term, little or no alternative to paying the increase in fees demanded.

Inadequate Financial Control?

As the report to the Cabinet on 10 September indicated, there is some uncertainty over the forecasts for older people services. This relates particularly to changing care packages and urgent work is being undertaken to improve the reliability of the information.

Deliberate Underfunding?

Social Services budgets for 2001/02 were increased in total by 7.2% and SEN budgets by 8.5%, both above the overall increase for all services and our SSA increase and at a time when inflation is just above 2%. I am sure that these services could use increased funding, but then so could all of our services. The budget approved by this Council in February was, of necessity, a balance between overall spending and council tax and a balance between all of our services.

Conclusion

Our monitoring has identified a problem proving that the early warning system in place is working and I can reassure the Council that your Cabinet will take the necessary actions to bring spending back in line with the budget set by Council.

As a supplementary question Mrs Crawford asked for an assurance that the SEN service would not be cut due to any increase in demand.

Mr Shakespeare responded that there were a number of pressures on the budget and no assurance could be given that there would be no cut in the service.

By Mr T J Fowler and Mrs C C Martens to Mrs P M A Dewar, Cabinet Member for Community Services

Can you please inform the Council of the latest position concerning the proposed new Wycombe Library in the light of the reported failure of the Western Sector Development? Will you now provide details of the alternative plan that you referred to at the July meeting?

Reply by Mrs P M A Dewar

The latest position concerning the proposed new Wycombe Library

Officers are still working on options for a new Library in a variety of scenarios. These include:

- *Working with Wycombe District Council to develop a new library within any subsequent Western Sector development.*
- *Seeking an alternative site for a stand alone development.*
- *Officers have additionally provided me with alternative plans and costs for redeveloping the existing library site, and other suitable library buildings within the area.*

However the latter options do not provide Wycombe with a library facility anything like the size of the proposed MAB development, and I am encouraging officers to pursue a new build option, but in this we are dependent upon the appropriate partnerships being in place. Given the very recent fall of the MAB scheme firm partnerships are in the process of being discussed at Chief Officer level.

As a supplementary question Mr Fowler asked if any work had been done estimating the additional costs.

In reply, Mrs Dewar said that it was dependent on the alternatives and the negotiating conditions. Officers were looking at the present site at costings and options for improvement and were hoping that another alternative site would become available.

By Mr W G Lidgate to Mr R S Royston, Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation

Over recent months there appears to have been a considerable amount of new white lining done throughout the county both upgrading of original markings to more complex ones and an introduction where none previously existed. Whilst this is all probably very desirable and necessary can I please be assured that specific budget provision has been made for the upkeep of these improvements and what estimates of costs were used in that provision?

Reply by Mr R S Royston

*The vast majority of schemes that involve the application of new road markings are promoted to address road safety or traffic management problems. This work is funded through the Local Safety and Area Strategy Schemes Programme (LSAS), through the Local Transport Plan, and is therefore **capital** expenditure. The Local Transport Plan does not allow capital allocations to be used for routine highway maintenance.*

*Re-painting of existing road markings is classified as 'routine highway maintenance' and is therefore **revenue** expenditure.*

It is the responsibility of the Area Managers to divide the routine maintenance budget into different work categories at the start of each financial year (eg grass cutting, gully cleaning, pothole repairs etc). A specific allocation is made for repainting road markings.

Routine highway maintenance budgets are, however, limited with many competing demands. Therefore funding has to be carefully prioritised.

Demographic growth, new works etc increase the pressure upon the routine maintenance budget year on year. However, revenue spending pressures across all County Council services has meant that it has not been possible to increase routine maintenance budgets to reflect this growth. Therefore pressures will remain within the routine maintenance budget for the foreseeable future.

Clearly, implementation of schemes to address road safety or traffic management issues will remain a priority. It will be for the Area Managers to ensure the appropriate priority is afforded to maintaining road markings resulting from these schemes – taking account of all the competing demands upon the routine maintenance budget.

It is also important for Local Members to help our staff with identifying local priorities for routine maintenance work and I would encourage regular liaison with the Area Offices through the Local Area Co-ordinators.

By Mr M R Colston to Mr M W Taylor, Cabinet Member for Resources

Have any steps been taken by BCC to explore the development of partnership arrangements with any University computer department or other non commercial organisation so that the council can obtain an independent overview of its current and future ICT needs?

Reply by Mr M W Taylor

A critical element of our e-government agenda is to work in partnership with other organisations both in the public and private sectors. Currently we are proactively working with the Buckinghamshire District Councils and will undoubtedly be extending collaboration to include the NHS, Police, Fire Service and the voluntary sector. Historically we have always obtained advice from private sector organisations such as the Gartner Group of independent analysts, professional societies, mainstream and specialist ICT suppliers and ICT managers from other local authorities. This council has made no use of a University computer department and I am not aware of any other council having that type of relationship. However, I will follow this suggestion up and try and identify any opportunity and associated conditions for partnership working in this field.

For the Council's information, we do have in place a clearly documented and consistently applied procedure for ICT investment to ensure that corporate strategies and standards are not compromised and that everybody who should be involved is included in the decision-making. Once a decision is made to go ahead with an investment, the method of procurement is agreed and ranges from obtaining quotations from two or three pre-selected suppliers to inviting tenders b

by national advertisement and for major contracts by following the public procurement rules for Open, Restricted or Negotiated procedures.

By Dr B R Stenner to Mrs M P Clayton, Cabinet Member for Schools

- i What percentage of eligible pupils passed the 11+ examination
 - a in the LEA as a whole;
 - b in the Wycombe areain the academic year 2000/2001?
- ii What percentage of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds passed the 11+ examination
 - a in the LEA as a whole;
 - b in the Wycombe areain the academic year 2000/2001?
- iii Is the data asked for in (ii) available for pupils from
 - a Asian backgrounds
 - b Afro-Caribbean backgrounds?
- iv Is it possible to have similar data covering the last five years?

Reply by Mrs M P Clayton

Question 5(i)

In answer to Dr Stenner's question the percentage of pupils who pass is the result of a long process which includes the review and independent appeals process. The total overall number who qualified in the LEA as a whole for 2000/2001 was 1456 or 27.9%. In the Wycombe area this figure was 535 or 28.9%. I would be happy to meet with Dr Stenner to discuss the process and procedure as a whole if he wishes.

Question 5(ii), (iii) and (iv)

I am sorry that currently we do not have information available for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds although we understand that a national system is to be introduced in the near future for the recording of pupil progress, which will acknowledge ethnic origin – as well as other factors. I accept that this is an important issue and will be happy to talk further to Dr Stenner about it.

As a supplementary question Dr Stenner said he was surprised that the Council did not have this information and asked why there was no tick box for European as a distinct nationality he requested that this be added to the forms for the current year.

In reply, Mrs Clayton said that she could not give this assurance as the system belonged to the Department for Education and Skills and it was therefore not within the Council's remit. Mrs Clayton said that she would speak to Dr Stenner about the matter after the meeting.

By Dr B R Stenner to Mr R S Royston, Cabinet Member for Planning and Transportation

- i How much has been raised by developed contributions to the Wycombe Transport Strategy since 1996?
- ii How much of this amount has been spent?
- iii On what projects has the expenditure been used?
- iv Are there any major projects in the pipeline on which developed contributions will be used?

Reply by Mr R S Royston

For the past five years there has been a policy, agreed between the County Council and Wycombe District Council, that all significant developments in the High Wycombe urban area make a contribution towards the costs of implementing the area's transport strategy in proportion to the extra demand for travel that each development brings to the area.

Both Councils, through the Wycombe Transport Strategy Panel, have agreed the basis on which the contributions are to be spent alongside funds made available through the Local Transport Plan, from the District Council and from other sources. Essentially the developer contributions are being used to cover expected peaks in expenditure, which can be created by major capital projects, or to help fund items (such as those with revenue costs) which could not normally be paid for by the County Council or District Council using more conventional sources of funds.

The developer contributions are collected and held by the District Council in an interest bearing account. Funds can only be released upon the agreement of both Councils for expenditure on schemes forming part of the jointly agreed programme. Between 23 September 1996 and 31 March 2001 the capital received (and the accrued interest) total £1,055,196. Between 1 April 2001 and 31 July 2001 a further £89,180 was collected.

£1,555 of the Developer Contribution fund has been spent on a pilot lunchtime bus shuttle service between Cressex and the town centre. A commitment has also been given to make available up to £12,000 to support certain off peak bus services during 2001/02.

The spending plans for the transport strategy anticipate that significant sums from the Developer Contribution fund will be used to meet the peak in spending on the proposed Busway and related projects. Indicative sums in the current programme show £268,000 to be spent in 2002/03, £850,000 in 2003/04 and £145,000 in 2004/05.

Under the terms of their respective legal agreements, a small element of the funds already received are required to be spent in the near future. These were highlighted in a report to the Wycombe Transport Strategy Panel on 9 March 2001.

By Mr T J Fowler and Mrs C C Martens to Mrs M P Clayton, Cabinet Member for Schools

You will recall the concern expressed by members about the Wycombe area children who passed the twelve plus test and were allocated places in Aylesbury and Buckingham schools. Can you please tell the Council whether all of these children received alternative offers of places in Wycombe Schools before the beginning of the Autumn term?

Reply by Mrs M P Clayton

There are currently five children resident in the Wycombe area qualified for grammar school places; to whom we have not been able to offer places in their preferred schools, and who are therefore attending an Aylesbury grammar school.

We are obliged to apply the admissions policy objectively, and to the letter of the published policy. There are very few surplus places in secondary schools at present, and it is impossible to meet all parental first preferences, especially at schools for which there is heavy demand

As a supplementary question Mr Fowler asked what criteria had been used to decide which pupils were allocated Aylesbury Schools.

In response, Mrs Clayton said that these children were on the waiting list for Wycombe Schools and that she would inform Mr Fowler of the allocation criteria following the meeting.

CHAIRMAN