

CABINET

28 JUNE 2017

HELD AT QUANTON MEMORIAL HALL

PRESENT: Councillor N Blake (Leader); Councillors J Blake, A Macpherson, H Mordue, C Paternoster, Sir Beville Stanier Bt and J Ward. Councillors Cooper, Hewson and Winn attended also.

APOLOGY: Councillor S Bowles

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of 11 April, 2017, be approved as a correct record.

2. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Local residents and non-Cabinet Members were given an opportunity to ask questions of Cabinet Members and Directors.

A local resident commented on the apparently disjointed approach taken by Openreach to the provision of super fast broad band in the village. It was reported that this had been provided as part of the first phase of the “connected counties” programme. Officers would explore whether or not Openreach could be persuaded to return as the village had originally been included within the first phase but the provision had been inconsistent. The County Council might be persuaded to meet the cost from the funds set aside for the first phase, although it was not possible to say whether or not this was a viable proposition.

As referred to elsewhere in these Minutes, a District Councillor who was a member of the Environment and Living Scrutiny Committee referred to the discussions at the last meeting of the Committee concerning the provision of more electric vehicle charging points, perhaps via the emerging VALP. These comments were dealt in connection with the consideration given later during the evening to the updated Sustainable Travel Plan.

Lastly, the Leader gave an update on the latest position concerning the bid to create two unitary authorities within Buckinghamshire – one based upon AVDC’s administrative boundary covering the north of the District and the other based on the combined boundaries of Chiltern, Wycombe and South Bucks District Councils, covering the south of the County. The Leader thanked the Parish Council for its support for this Council’s position and indicated that nothing further had as yet been heard from the Secretary of State. AVDC had however asked the DCLG to provide this Council with the same information apparently made available to Buckinghamshire County Council.

3. NEW HOMES BONUS (HADDENHAM GRANT)

In September, 2016, the New Homes Bonus (NHB) Advisory Grants Panel had considered an application from Haddenham Parish Council for a grant towards the provision of a cycleway linking Haddenham with Aylesbury. The Panel had supported the scheme, but had felt that the level of information was insufficient. The Panel had ring fenced funds for the project, reserving its decision until receipt of the additional information required.

That information had now been provided and the scheme had been adjusted to the provision of a community path, with a shortened route. Funding was now required to hard surface an existing section of bridleway to provide a 1km useable community path. This would be used by pedestrians, wheelchair users and cyclists. The path would also provide a safe route for residents of Stone and Dinton wishing to attend Haddenham medical centre.

The Panel had accordingly agreed to recommend a grant of £102,225 and Cabinet concurred with this recommendation. It was therefore,

RESOLVED –

That a grant of £102,225 be made to Haddenham Parish Council for a community path as outlined above.

4. A REVIEW OF THE ORIGINAL NHB CRITERIA AND THE INTRODUCTION OF A NHB MICROGRANT SCHEME FROM SEPTEMBER 2017

The Government had introduced the New Homes Bonus (NHB) in 2011. The scheme had been designed to ensure that the economic benefits of housing growth were returned to those councils and communities where that growth had taken place. Under the scheme, for every new home built and occupied in Aylesbury Vale, and for every long term empty home brought back into use, the Government would give the Council a non ring fenced NHB grant each year for six years. However, following concerns as to the affordability of the national scheme, the Government had now reduced the number of years in which payments were made to five years in 2017/18 and to four years in 2018/19.

The decision to reduce the number of years during which payments were made affected the amount that the Council received and therefore the amount that the Council was able to pass onto communities under its NHB funding scheme. The changes at a national level had presented an opportunity to review the NHB Funding Scheme.

Cabinet was reminded of the criteria for the original Scheme and the composition of the Panel, which included District and Parish Councillors. The Panel submitted recommendations to Cabinet for formal approval.

A schedule of the schemes funded via the scheme since its inception was submitted from which it was noted that the level of grants had ranged from £2,600 to £500,000. Initial observations on the operation of the scheme showed that for the most part, applications tended to be from the larger Parishes. The resource requirements for compiling a compelling business case were fairly intensive. Secondly, the impact of growth on individual communities was often difficult to determine objectively. Thirdly, there was the issue of determining whether to fund schemes which could be viewed as the responsibility of another public agency. Cabinet had thus far endorsed the view of the Panel that whilst a scheme might be the responsibility of another statutory agency, the rules permitted allocating funding. Realistically there was often little chance of the other agency being in a position to fund such a scheme.

The Community Chest scheme had recently ended after ten years. The scheme had been introduced as part of the arrangements for the housing stock transfer. There was no successor scheme and it had become apparent that there was a need for the NHB scheme to be more inclusive, i.e. available to both large and small Parishes. It had been recognised in particular that in smaller villages, it was often voluntary and community organisations that contributed towards/ provided the Parish infrastructure.

With this in mind, and having regard to the opportunity to review the operation of the NHB funding scheme in the light of Government changes, Cabinet considered a modification to the scheme to enable “microgrants” to be made towards smaller projects. The scheme would be designed to be more inclusive of smaller Parishes and voluntary/community sector organisations, who had experienced difficulty benefitting from the current scheme.

The grants would be made available for such schemes as the refurbishment of village halls, buying new equipment and helping with general running costs of facilities. The budget would be met from the 20% allocation set aside for Town/Parish Councils – expected to be in the region of £800,000 in 2017/2018.

Ten per cent of this total would be made available for the “microgrants” scheme. If in future, the total funds available under the NHB scheme increased or diminished, then the “microgrants” scheme would grow or reduce proportionately. The application requirements would be simplified proportionately to the award. Applications would need to evidence consultation at Parish level and would have to be endorsed by the relevant Town/Parish Council prior to submission. Applications could be submitted at any time, with the 15th of each month being the closing date. The scheme would start in September, 2017. An indicative time table formed part of the Cabinet report.

Applications would be assessed by the Council’s Grants Officer, using a scoring system to be developed in conjunction with the NHB Advisory Grants Panel. Panel funding recommendations would be submitted for approval by the relevant Cabinet Member in consultation with a nominated Aylesbury Vale Association of Local Councils (AVALC) Panel representative. Applicants would be notified of the decision within four weeks of each closing date.

Grants would need to be claimed within three weeks of the award and would be paid by bank transfer. The successful applicants would complete a monitoring form when the project had been completed, which would be forwarded to the Advisory Grants Panel, as a means of evidencing the benefit that the particular project to the local community.

It would be a condition of each grant award that the contribution made by the NHB “microgrants” funding scheme should be clearly identified to the local community in all publicity about the project and by displaying a plaque where appropriate highlighting the contribution by AVDC and AVALC. Only one “microgrants” application per year would be permitted and any organisation would only receive up to three “microgrants” throughout the life of the fund. The success of the scheme and the availability of funds would be reviewed at the end of the first year’s operation. AVALC had been consulted and were supportive of the proposals.

Cabinet supported the proposals but felt that the criteria should be amended to read “schemes up to £10,000 and that reference to the need to demonstrate a clear link to growth should be removed as this could preclude some applications, although this should remain a scoring criterion with higher growth attracting more points. Accordingly, it was,

RESOLVED –

- (1) That no change be made to the criteria of the original scheme.
- (2) That approval be given to the expansion of the scheme in accordance with the criteria referred to above, to include a “microgrants” scheme and that the operation of the scheme be reviewed in twelve months time.

5. SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL PLAN

Cabinet received a report, considered also by the Environment and Living Scrutiny Committee on 13 June, 2017, and summarised in the Minutes of that meeting, concerning the updated Sustainable Travel Plan.

The Plan was in two parts – a travel plan and an action plan. The former set out activities, measures and targets and the action plan set out the methods by which these aims would be achieved. The Scrutiny Committee had been supportive of both documents, but had commented that it would be useful if the planning policy documents associated with the emerging Vale of Aylesbury Plan (VALP) made provision for the inclusion of electric vehicle (EV) charging points in new developments, given the likely increase in the number of electric vehicles on the road over the next few years. The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee and another member of that Committee elaborated upon the Committee's deliberations.

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Growth confirmed that the VALP made provision for the inclusion of electric vehicle charging points in new developments. It was confirmed also that officers, working in partnership with other agencies, would pursue the gathering of empirical evidence of the demand for on-street EV charging points, thus enabling full advantage to be taken of Government incentives. It was further indicated that the feasibility of avoiding wherever possible the removal of EV charging points from new developments during discussions around the facilities to be included within S106 agreements would be explored.

Accordingly. It was,

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the updated Sustainable Travel Plan be approved for publication and the Officers continue to pursue the provision of more EV charging points in accordance with the discussions outlined above.
- (2) That the Scrutiny Committee be thanked for its helpful input to this particular subject.

6. EMISSIONS REDUCTIONS / PROGRESS REPORT

Cabinet considered a report also submitted to the Environment and Living Scrutiny Committee on 13 June, 2017, and summarised in the Minutes of that meeting, giving an update on the achievements of the Council towards reducing Carbon Dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions against agreed climate change reduction targets.

The Council had committed to tackling climate change in 2008 following the publication of its first Carbon Management Plan. This had proposed a 22% reduction in Carbon Dioxide emissions by 2013. This had been achieved one year earlier and the Council had then set itself an ambitious target of reaching a 34% reduction by 2020. The most recently independently audited figures demonstrated that the Council had exceeded this target a full four years earlier. As at April, 2016, the figure was 36.6%.

The Scrutiny Committee had been supportive of both the work already undertaken and that planned to reduce the Council's carbon footprint.

RESOLVED –

That the position be noted and officers be asked to continue to work towards seeking reductions in the Council's carbon footprint in order to address climate change and achieve financial savings to help sustain its operations.

7. HECA REPORT

Cabinet received a report, also submitted to the Environment and Living Scrutiny Committee on 13 June, 2017, providing an update on the production and submission of its Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) report.

The production and publication of this report was a mandatory requirement for all district councils across the UK and had to be carried out every other year. The Scrutiny Committee had been supportive of the work undertaken.

RESOLVED –

That the production of the updated HECA report be approved for publication.

8. LOCAL CLIMATE IMPACTS

Cabinet received a further report, also submitted to the Environment and Living Scrutiny Committee on 13 June, 2017, and summarised in the Minutes of that meeting on the production of the Council's second Local Climate Impacts Profile (LCLIP).

The LCLIP was a document first produced in 2008. AVDC had been the first District Council in the country to produce such a document. The latest document covered the period 2008 to 2016. The Scrutiny Committee had been supportive of the work being done to increase the resilience to changes and risks posed by climate change.

RESOLVED –

That the LCLIP update report be noted and approved for publication.

9. CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Corporate Risk Register provided evidence of a "risk aware and risk managed organisation". It recorded and considered significant risks that might affect the successful delivery of its statutory duties. The Register reflected the risks that were on the current radar for Transition Board. The Audit Committee had a role to monitor the effectiveness of risk management and internal control across the Council and regularly reviewed the Corporate Risk Register. The Register was also reported to Cabinet to help inform the budget setting and monitoring process.

There were elements of the Register which were commercially sensitive and in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of these particular items.

Members commented in particular about the risks associated with business transformation but were assured that this would continue to be the subject of careful monitoring. It was anticipated that the risks would reduce proportionately as the transformation programme became embedded within the Authority.

RESOLVED –

That The Corporate Risk Register be noted and reported regularly to Cabinet for review.

