

Written Questions to Council – 17th September 2015

Question to the Cabinet Member for Transportation (from Julia Wassell):

Can the Cabinet Member kindly update me on the Highways Agency work regarding the M40 motorway? The previous Cabinet Member was keeping me in touch with these issues. I am specifically concerned about the number of accidents occurring between Beaconsfield and Handy Cross. The East Wycombe exit at Junction 3 where a bend causes vehicles to brake suddenly if there is a tail back is also hazardous. Finally, can you let me know if the Highways Agency has any live plans to develop a Junction 3a in East Wycombe.

Firstly, I would take this opportunity to remind all members that since the [1st April](#) the Highways Agency has moved from being an Executive Agency of the Department for Transport, to a wholly government-owned company, with this company now being called Highways England. With respect to the study that is going on covering junction 3, this piece of work is being commissioned by Highways England and is looking at the section of the M40 from junction 2 to junction 4. After a stakeholder meeting in June, Highways England are building a future year traffic model to test and assess impacts and are now carrying out an options analysis and have asked for use of the Buckinghamshire Transport model to ensure that the study is based on locally-agreed data.

I am very happy to keep members informed on this work, and I understand that the next meeting is scheduled for mid-October, so I will ask officers to provide an update that can be circulated to members after that meeting.

I am not aware of the specific numbers of accidents along this stretch of the motorway, but I can of course seek this data from Highways England and pass this on.

Finally, regarding the plans, or otherwise, for any junction 3a, this does not currently feature in any live plans, albeit the option for an additional junction was subject to some preliminary testing in partnership with Wycombe District Council as they sought to explore a range of options for delivering their Local Plan.

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Question to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services (from Julia Wassell):

Could the Cabinet Member kindly update us about the progress of recruitment of Social Workers for Children. Does every child subject to a Child Protection Plan have an allocated Social Worker? Thank you for updating us on a distressing case of child sexual exploitation (CSE). Are you able to inform us of how widespread you believe the CSE problem to be, in Buckinghamshire?

Recruitment of social workers:

Since 1/1/15 Children's Social Care Services have offered 60 permanent jobs including senior management posts to qualified applicants. There are 118 permanent social workers in posts and 60 agency social work in post currently with our reliance on agency staff further reducing when our newly recruited staff take up post over the next 2 months.

In September 12 grow-your-own social workers move into permanent posts (although they can only start practicing as social workers from November when they formally receive their qualifications) and 7 Romanian social workers moved into permanent posts. In terms of KPIs we have greatly improved the speed of recruitment.

There is a huge amount of work to encourage applicants to apply to Buckinghamshire as a good employer and a great place to live.

We have also developed a new recruitment micro site. We have also developed a robust interview and assessment model for social workers and consultant social workers to ensure we recruit the right people.

We continue to encourage the conversion of some of the agency workers to permanent workers, where we have had some success.

Child Protection case allocation

I can confirm that all children subject to a Child Protection Plan are allocated to a qualified Social Worker. We have made this a priority and will continue to do so.

Child Sexual Exploitation.

Child Sexual Exploitation is a national problem and like all other authorities we are doing all we can with our partner agencies to detect and confront this important issue. We continue to work closely with Barnardos, the Police, schools, Health and all agencies working with children in Bucks including the 3rd sector and Youth Offending Service to ensure we gather and share information and intelligence on all concerns for children and we have a number of events over the autumn to raise general awareness in the population across Buckinghamshire and especially to parents. We, through our Comms team have also placed articles in the local press raising awareness and we will continue with this strategy. This will be complimented by the continued roll out of Chelsea's Choice through our schools to continue to raise awareness and encourage those who are being exploited or anyone who has concerns about any other young person to contact BCC, the Police or Barnardos.

We are doing all that we can to safeguard the young people of Buckinghamshire through these steps but we are by no means complacent. It is essential that the professionals working with young people, we, the Counsellors and the public raise any concerns we have about the safeguarding and welfare of young people with the right authorities and organisations.

In relation to our local response to Child Sexual Exploitation, the Service has spent months developing services to support children at risk of sexual exploitation and I am pleased to report that we went live with phase 1 of the Swan Unit on 1st July, collocating specialist workers from Thames Valley Police and Children's Social. The focus of the unit is to undertake an assessment of newly referred children at risk of CSE, to act as a consultant to professionals and to collate information to understand further the local profile of CSE.