

Questions for County Council Meeting 21st February 2019

Questions to the Cabinet Member for CHILDREN'S SERVICES from Julia Wassell:

Q1 I understand that numbers of social workers and social work managers are being strongly encouraged to leave Bucks County Council. Members of the Council are regularly informed about vacancy levels, so it is worrying to hear of actions which will lead to more vacancies, lack of continuity for vulnerable children and a possible negative perception of BCC as an employer.

There are surely systems in place for appraisal and effective performance management?

Please give us a clear picture of what is happening and the number of vacancies currently.

Thank you for your question. You will appreciate that it is not appropriate to discuss the circumstances of individual members of staff. It is the case, however, that social work staff and managers are strongly encouraged to do everything they can to improve outcomes for the children and young people we serve. This includes making best use of the Council's performance management processes. A key priority for Children's Services is to have Social Workers who know what good practice looks like. At present, out of 323 qualified social work posts there are 28 vacancies (8.6%).

Questions to the Cabinet Member for RESOURCES and HEALTH AND WELLBEING from Julia Wassell:

Q1 Seeleys House Consultation

When I attended a Cabinet meeting I was assured that explanation would be given about the anticipated savings and capital receipt. The area I was particularly interested in was the investment made by voluntary agencies into Seeleys House. Please will you provide me with more information about this?

We are aware South Bucks Association for the Disabled has made generous financial contribution from the 1980's to the improvement of Seeley's House for the considerable benefit of the people who use the service. Their assistance has been invaluable in maintaining the quality of the support that has been delivered from Seeleys to vulnerable clients. The status of these payments, in terms of any ongoing legal liabilities, is currently being checked by our legal advisors and until that advice is available we are unable to ascertain whether there exists any binding agreements. We will of course report back as soon as we are in a position to do so.

Questions to the Cabinet Member for PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT from Cllr Steven Lambert:

Q1 What action is the County taking, jointly with the Districts, to improve air quality particularly in designated AQMAs (air quality management areas).

Buckinghamshire County Council is working with the District Councils on a joint Low Emission Strategy for Buckinghamshire. This Strategy will look at both domestic and transport related emissions as these are the main contributors in our area. The Strategy will set out a series of principles to improve air quality and ensure no further AQMAs are required. This will make relevance to other policies, such as our Local Transport Plan 4 <<https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/council-and-democracy/our-plans/local-transport-plan-4/>> and Getting to School Strategy <<https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/transport-and-roads/transport-plans-and-policies/getting-to-school-strategy-smots/>> that aim to reduce the amounts of cars on our roads. All of our existing transport policies and strategies can be found here: <https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/transport-and-roads/transport-plans-and-policies/>

We aim to have the Low Emission strategy finalised by March 2020. This will be underpinned by the Air Quality Action Plans produced by the District Councils which are explained further below.

Q2 There are three such areas in Aylesbury Vale alone, how many are there in the other three districts?

There are 9 AQMAs in Buckinghamshire; 3 in Aylesbury Vale (all in Aylesbury), 3 in Wycombe (1 in Wycombe, 1 in Marlow, and 1 on the M40) and 3 in Chiltern and South Bucks (1 in Chesham, 1 covering Iver Parish, and 1 comprising the M4, M25 and M40). The boundaries of the AQMAs can be found on DEFRA's website, <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/aqma/maps>.

Q3 What plans for improvement are in place for these areas, and what progress is being made?

The District Councils must put Air Quality Action Plans in place for each AQMA. These set out actions on how the districts will achieve a reduction in emissions and an annual report is produced each year to assess the progress made in each AQMA. These reports are in place for the lifetime of the AQMA and once emissions are below the threshold (as set by DEFRA) the AQMA can then be revoked. Details about these plans and the Annual Reports can be found on the District Council Websites:

<https://www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/section/air-quality>

<https://www.wycombe.gov.uk/pages/Environment/Air-pollution/Air-quality-management.aspx>

<http://www.southbucks.gov.uk/article/8321/Air-Quality-Review-and-Assessment>

Q4 What action is being taken on a County wide basis to prevent further notifications from road traffic, industry, and airports?

As discussed in Question 1, we are working jointly with the Districts on a Low Emission Strategy for the whole of Buckinghamshire along with our existing transport policies and strategies.

Questions to the Cabinet Member for HEALTH AND WELLBEING from Cllr Isobel Darby:

Q1 I have grave concerns that the current consultation into the Short Breaks Service which could involve moving the provision from Seeleys House in my division to the Aylesbury Opportunities Centre is being carried out in isolation and that not all the users of overnight and day care who may eventually be affected will have their voices heard in this consultation.

Seeleys House provides both residential and day care and is a facility valued by many of our most vulnerable residents and their carers. These carers do an amazing job and actually save this authority huge sums of money by providing the majority of care for their loved ones and only requiring the minimum from the state.

It is evident from previous consultations regarding the abortive move to Orchard House last year and the cabinet minutes from 7th January that, although moving the short breaks service will not in itself affect the day care provision, there are more changes possible which could adversely affect the users of Seeleys House.

The users of both Seeleys House and the AOC are few in number and their carers have little time to spend coming to meetings and responding to consultations as much of their lives are dedicated to providing outstanding care to their loved ones. They come from all over the County and many members will have perhaps one or two living in their divisions and be unaware. Consequently no one will be inundated with emails about changes which could have serious implications on the most vulnerable in our society.

It is therefore important that this decision is not taken without full consideration of all the facts and I ask the cabinet member to give her assurance that the affects on the service as a whole will be seriously considered before taking any decision on the short breaks service. This is in order to avoid the unintended consequences most importantly to the quality of life of those vulnerable residents and their families but also to all our residents if overall costs to the authority rise as a result of this. I would also ask that members who have residents who may be affected should be fully consulted.

I would like to thank the Member for her question and undoubted concern for the residents of her Division and more widely across Buckinghamshire. I do appreciate the value that service users and their families place on respite and the current service they receive from Seeleys House. However, the facilities at Seeleys are not fit for the delivery of short breaks provision; the building needs continuing investment and the site is not very accessible for everyone who needs support. Further, the

present location of the service presents difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. Currently the regulator, the Care Quality Commission, rates the current provision as "Requires Improvement". We now have the opportunity to commission a best practice joint health and social care provision for the county and I want to make sure that this is done on a sustainable basis.

It is of vital importance that decisions made by the Council take into account the needs of all those involved in the delivery and receipt of services and I would like to assure all Members that I will be taking all facts into consideration when making a decision on the proposed move.

I would like to reiterate that the current consultation is on the respite service and that there are no plans or proposals to change day services at Seeleys in this programme of work. We are making every effort to make it as easy as possible for people to have their voices heard, although I do recognise the challenges on everyone's time. We have consciously revisited and used the engagement and co-production we did with service users and carers on the Orchard House development as the contribution people made at that time is still relevant. However, I would also welcome views from other Members and any help they can provide in assisting residents to respond to the current consultation.

At the end of the consultation, a report will be made to me. At that point, I will consider all the evidence available to ensure the decision I make will be the best possible decision for all concerned.
