



# Buckinghamshire Council

## Communities & Localism Select Committee

### Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES & LOCALISM SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 13 JULY 2021 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 1.06 PM

#### MEMBERS PRESENT

M Harker OBE (Chairman), A Waite (Vice-Chairman), S Barrett, P Drayton, M Hussain JP, G Smith, M Stannard, L Smith BEM, J Baum, P Cooper and F Mahon

#### OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Bowles, C Harriss, A Hussain and N Naylor

#### Agenda Item

##### 1 CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chairman welcomed all those in attendance and those members of the public watching the webcast. Committee Members and Officers in attendance introduced themselves.

##### 2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Resolved:

That Councillor A Waite be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Communities and Localism Select Committee for the ensuing year.

##### 3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies had been received from Councillors S Barrett, P Bass, G Hollis and I Hussain.

##### 4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor P Cooper declared an interest in item 6, Priorities for the Year Ahead, due to his role as Chairman of the Queen's Park Arts Centre on which he planned to ask a question to the Cabinet Member.

##### 5 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meetings held on 18 March 2021 and 26 May 2021 were confirmed as an accurate record.

##### 6 PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD 2021/22

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Steve Bowles, Cabinet Member for Communities, Councillor

Clive Harriss, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure and Councillor Nick Naylor, Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness & Regulatory (Regulatory Services functions relevant to this committee) to the meeting to present their priorities and areas of focus for the year ahead. The presentation slides can be seen attached to the agenda pack. Each Cabinet Member presented their priorities in turn with questions raised by the Committee at relevant points.

### **Councillor Steve Bowles, Cabinet Member for Communities**

Councillor Bowles highlighted the below five priorities

- 1. Develop the Localism model, at its heart of which is 16 Community Boards that connect the council to partners and its communities to provide tailored local support and solutions to issues.*

Councillor Bowles spoke positively of the Community Boards and the difference they have made to local communities. There had been good collaboration across boards and a number of projects funded that had really benefitted local communities. There was now a priority to focus on climate change and economic recovery and significant funding was available for each board to make an impact locally with boards able to tailor action plans to their respective area and significantly benefit communities. Councillor Bowles highlighted the importance of the views of young people and invited the committee's support and input in relation to encouraging community board involvement from younger residents.

- 2. Deliver at pace the local Devolution programme.*

Councillor Bowles explained that devolution required close working across the Council, Town and Parish Councils and advised of the significant impact covid had on the service area's devolution rollout as staff had to prioritise supporting vulnerable residents. The committee was advised that a devolution manager had recently been appointed and there was a focus to progress this at pace and support the council's partners. The first member devolution board had been arranged and was planned to take place on 14 July 2021.

- 3. Work with the Police & Crime Commissioner to help prevent crime and reduce the fear of crime. Support tackling offences like speeding, illegal parking and rural crime.*

The Committee was advised that the Council would work closely with partners, including the Thames Valley Police to ensure good outputs related to the priorities highlighted in the Safer Bucks Plan to reduce levels of crime. Councillor Bowles spoke of the flexibility shown by staff, including those who had taken up street warden roles through the pandemic, a role which had received much positive feedback.

- 4. Work with local community groups, voluntary groups and town & parish councils to support local communities and build effective relationships.*

The importance of working with community and voluntary groups and town and parish councils was spoken of with a number of engagement forums and support mechanisms set up. The VCSE strategic framework was progressing and the target was to launch the Town and Parish Charter in August/September this year.

- 5. Collaboratively deliver a community 'helping hand' offer for vulnerable residents.*

The Helping Hand offer which was introduced as part of the council's pandemic response had been received positively and was said to have been a success. By delivering this practical help

and support early there was a reduced demand on statutory services. The committee was advised that there was a small officer team in place for a further year to continue offering support to vulnerable residents.

Councillor Bowles and the Committee paid tribute to the work of local community groups, town and parish councils, officers and members who all pulled together and delivered an excellent service to residents.

Questions were invited from members and key points raised included:

- A member asked whether community voluntary groups would likely continue beyond the pandemic and whether the Council could help build on the positive local engagement evidenced throughout the pandemic. Councillor Bowles advised that he believed community support groups would continue post covid and possessed the local knowledge to identify those vulnerable and support them. The Helping Hand initiative would continue a further year to offer support where it was identified as being required and the refreshed community boards had measures in place to deal with further covid restrictions and offer support.
- In response to a concern raised around supporting vulnerable residents who may not be forthcoming in asking for help, the Cabinet Member advised that the Council does receive a register from the NHS which identifies those vulnerable, the Helping Hand service worked closely with community boards, and there was close working with partners on the ground such as police and the fire service to help understand the respective landscapes of communities.
- Concern was raised that red tape could restrict small groups from accessing funding. In the former Chiltern district area of the county, seven groups had historically received £2k funding and continued to do so, however the paperwork involved was reported to have increased. The Cabinet Member advised that his intention would be for there to be a streamlined process and that no one should feel there is a barrier to funding. Members were also advised that 10% of community board budgets was set aside for small grants such as these.
- The Committee spoke of the importance of raising the profile of Community Boards and ensuring as many people were aware of the boards as possible. Councillor Bowles advised that the option of a Community Board newsletter was being explored, this would be circulated to Town and Parish Council's, the boards were promoted on social media and he had hopes that Buckinghamshire Councillors would be promoting the boards when they had the opportunity to.
- Councillor Bowles advised that there were thorough checks and balances in place to ensure only appropriate projects that positively impacted local communities received funding. Councillor Bowles highlighted that the focus areas of economic recovery and climate change covered a broad range of projects and he expected to see a wide variety of good initiatives coming forward this year. Monitoring of funding was reported to be undertaken monthly by the Cabinet Member.
- A member raised the community payback scheme and how this could be used effectively to integrate offenders back in to their communities. Councillor Bowles advised that he was aware of parish council's using the scheme to maintain footpaths and undertake work that benefits the community and he would discuss the use of the scheme and available options further with the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- The end of the furlough scheme was highlighted as a potential issue for local residents and Councillor Bowles advised that if the situation locally was to be particularly difficult it was hoped that the Government would provide further grants and the Council would do all it could to support its local communities.

## **Councillor Clive Harriss, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure**

Councillor Harriss highlighted the below key areas of focus

1. Improvements to our parks and play areas
2. Capital programme including the Chilterns Lifestyle Centre, developing new visitor facilities for Black Park Country Park and a new Country Park at Stoke Poges
3. Promoting healthy lifestyles through partnership activities with Public Health, Leap, Active in the Community and others
4. Development of a Leisure Facilities Strategy for Buckinghamshire
5. Delivering against the Buckinghamshire Cultural Strategy action plan
6. Coordinating cultural events such as WhizzFizzFest, Paralympic Heritage Flame Lighting and Buckinghamshire History Festival
7. Rolling out new technology in libraries to enable more customers to self-serve
8. Investigation of the feasibility and viability of a Bucks Card for residents

Councillor Harriss spoke of the major impact covid had on this portfolio restricting residents access to leisure and cultural services and significantly affecting financial receipts. The service area had been working on improving the quality of services offered to attract as many residents as possible to improve their physical and mental health.

Questions were invited from members and key points raised included:

- In response to a query on the children's playground flooding on the land adjacent to the Chilterns Lifestyle Centre, Councillor Harriss advised that he was aware of the issue and would investigate it further before reporting back.
- The thinking around a 'Bucks card' was explained to the committee. There was potential for such a card to be used for a number of services, including residents showing it when at household waste sites to prove residency, or to access discounts locally. Options would be explored for how the card could work, including potential digital options. Councillor Harriss hoped that within four months the feasibility work would be completed.
- Councillor Harriss acknowledged that there remained concerns among some residents around returning to indoor settings such as leisure centres and spoke of the high level of cleanliness and professional management of centres to encourage more residents back. There was a hope that as more residents became double jabbed, confidence would grow and leisure and culture take up would increase further in line with increasing capacity in line with the government roadmap.
- A member spoke of the need for greater diversity in sport offerings particularly to keep girls involved in competitive support as they entered their teens. The option of having a safe running track which was something in place in other local authority areas was put forward. Councillor Harriss advised that he would pass the running track suggestion on to the planning service to consider when dealing with section 106 contributions. In terms of sport diversity, Councillor Harriss advised that across Bucks there was desire for different activities and the Council had to be careful to strike a balance to ensure the right offering was in place to meet local needs. It was said that the former Aylesbury Vale area had a large number of parks and playgrounds funded through section 106 developer contributions, but where there had been community infrastructure levy, as opposed to S106, in the former Wycombe district area, funding was used on a wider range of infrastructure needs. The Chairman added that increased facilities and offerings to residents with disabilities or from different ethnic backgrounds should also be explored.
- In response to a query on ensuring residents were not priced out of using leisure facilities, Councillor Harriss advised that the operators who ran the facilities calculated the fees and understood the need to set these at a level to get residents to use them.

There may be disparities in cost with other leisure centres, however Councillor Harriss explained that the level of offering should be considered when comparing costs as a basic offering would cost less than a high quality centre.

- A question was asked on partnerships and whether plans were in place to continue service level agreements when they expired on centres such as the Queen's Park Arts Centre in Aylesbury. Councillor Harriss advised that funding would always be reviewed and where there were legacy agreements these would be maintained where possible. On individual cases members could raise these to the Cabinet Member for a response.
- The Committee highlighted tourism as an excellent way to encourage economic regeneration and spoke of the rich depth of culture in Bucks. There had been a Midsomer Misbourne project planned prior to the first lockdown which Councillor Harriss confirmed he would be pleased to launch and further work was ongoing to make attractions as accessible as possible to maximise attendance. There was work ongoing to create leaflets for walkers and cyclists on routes and if any member had projects happening in their areas they were invited to make the cabinet member aware.
- A member asked about increasing the level of park facilities for teenagers. The Committee heard that the Leisure Facilities Strategy, currently being worked on, was assessing leisure facilities in Bucks and ways of improving facilities to ensure all ranges of groups had options would be explored. Councillor Harriss advised that the Committee would be able to review this strategy at the appropriate time. In terms of highlighting park needs and accessing contributions, Town and Parish Councils would generally take this responsibility and access section 106 contributions to then undertake work.
- Members were advised that repairs to the Chalfont Leisure Centre swimming pool had progressed, with some additional work to remove asbestos, and it was due to re-open in October.
- Councillor Harriss advised that he was working with colleagues' cross county in Oxfordshire to progress the cycleway between Thame and Haddenham and spoke of aspirations to fully integrate and modernise the cycleway in Bucks. The Sustrans report which looked at the viability of the route was commercially sensitive and outdated so this was unable to be shared.

### **Councillor Nick Naylor, Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory**

Councillor Naylor highlighted the below key areas of focus, the majority of which related to the housing and homelessness aspects of the portfolio.

1. Identify surplus public sector land and actively develop this for housing that is affordable
2. Require new private developments to include affordable housing for local people and key workers
3. Maintain virtual elimination of rough sleeping across Buckinghamshire through an integrated public health and wellbeing approach
4. Work with private residential residents to address issues such as debt or personal concerns which risk them becoming homeless
5. Introduce a new countywide 'Homelessness Action Team' to lead our work
6. Development and implementation of key licensing policies

The Committee placed on record its thanks to the registrars and coroners who had worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic.

Questions were invited from members and key points raised included:

- Government funding to house rough sleepers was reaching an end, however the council continued to work on assisting with the transition from emergency accommodation to something more sustainable. This involved partnership working with local housing

organisations as well as with organisations who assist in providing coaching and encouragement to support the pathway away from rough sleeping. In terms of where housing for rough sleepers was provided, the Committee was advised that council sites were utilised along with housing from a range of providers. A new build site in Wycombe was due to open toward the end of the year and a site in Aylesbury had recently been opened using funding from successful government funding applications.

- In relation to affordable housing on new developments, the committee was advised that there was an intention to align the policies across the legacy areas, although this would take time and would be a complex process. Cross portfolio work with the planning directorate was taking place to identify council owned land for affordable housing development as well as requests being made for private developments to include affordable housing, particularly for local people. There were a range of options available to the Council when it came to affordable housing, all of which were being explored.
- The Buckinghamshire Lottery was raised as this was a scheme ran by a number of the legacy councils. The Committee heard that the Council does not license its own lottery, this was undertaken by the Gambling Commission, however the scheme remained operational and further details could be shared with the committee. The benefits to community groups of the lottery scheme in terms of funding were highlighted.
- The joint trading standards arrangements with Surrey were said to be working well. Performance continued to be monitored through a joint committee and the contract was reported to be stable.

The Chairman thanked each of the Cabinet Members, along with the senior officers for their attendance, input and presentations.

## **7 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee was invited to put forward suggestions for the 2021/22 work programme. The Committee was advised that suggestions made would be developed in to a work programme in consultation with the Chairman and Cabinet Members. The work programme would be presented to the Committee at its next meeting for agreement.

Suggestions made by the Committee included:

- Community Boards: with a view to assessing how they were operating, and to ensure that the momentum from the previous year was being carried forward. There was some concern that three months of the financial year had passed with some boards having used very little of their budgets. The suggestion was also made to increase the level of publicising given to the boards to spread the message wider, in addition, the Committee also sought assurance that the council had a record of all voluntary support groups and provided support to them as required.
- Community Boards: Encouraging young people to engage with the boards to ensure the board memberships reflected the communities they served.
- Leisure Facilities Strategy: To review and provide input on the draft strategy.
- Tourism: To look at ways to promote all Bucks has to offer and help support economic recovery by bringing more residents in to the county to use local businesses.
- Helping Hands: to review and input on the longer term plans for the service following the additional year the service would be in place.

Other areas suggested that are covered by alternative select committees (these would be passed on to the relevant committee):

- Recycling: there was significant concern around household waste being burned at the Greatmoor site and a desire to do more locally to sort recycling and manage waste better.

- Environmental schemes: with view to providing more electric charging points locally; introduce wider 20mph zones; improve/increase number of cycleways and connectivity.
- Mental health: moving out of lockdown, there was concern that there would be a significant increase in mental health issues, particularly in young people and support should be in place.
- Affordable housing: to look at ways the Council is planning to ensure good quality affordable housing provision for local people.

## **8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Thursday 7 October 2021 at 10 a.m. The Committee was advised that this date may change due to Cabinet Member availability and confirmation of the re-arranged date would be circulated in due course.