



Buckinghamshire Council

Communities & Localism Select Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES & LOCALISM SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2022 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 10.01 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.37 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

M Harker OBE, A Waite, 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, C Hawkes, G Springer, Mrs R Page, Ms L Davis, Mr J Weinberg and S Ashmead

Agenda Item

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies were received from Cllr Paul Bass.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 26 October 2021 and the informal meeting held on Thursday 16th December 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions had been received for this meeting

5 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

The Chairman updated Members on the following:

- The Chairman had visited a number of community boards and had found that they varied in how they operated and a number of different issues had been highlighted to her.
- The Committee also held two deep dive sessions, and two further evidence gathering meetings were planned for March. A list of invitees was being prepared and Members were encouraged to make suggestions as to who should be invited.
- Some Community Boards have presented Proud of Bucks awards. The Chairman had

attended an event in Amersham which had been very well-attended and enjoyed by all.

6 BUCKINGHAMSHIRE CULTURE

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Clive Harris, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Julius Weinberg, Co-Chair for Buckinghamshire Culture, Lallie Davis, Director for Buckinghamshire Culture and Ruth Page, Culture and Leisure Services Development Manager, to the meeting.

Julius Weinberg and Lallie Davis provided an overview of the work of Buckinghamshire Culture and the following main points were highlighted:

- Buckinghamshire Culture was created to be a co-ordinating body to support the implementation of the Buckinghamshire Cultural Strategy and develop a cultural partnership. In 2018, Discover Bucks Museum, the only national Portfolio Organisation in the county and the Council secured a grant from the Rothschilds Foundation to take this work forward.
- Buckinghamshire Culture formally became an independent charity in November 2021 and Rothschilds have also pledged a further three years of funding.
- Offices are being moved into Buckinghamshire New University, providing access to academics.
- A new Board of Trustees has been established which has some younger people on it.
- Key outcomes for creativity and culture are: Thriving economy and transformed places, equality of access to cultural activity and opportunities, improved health and wellbeing of the population and an energized creative and cultural sector. Buckinghamshire Culture aims to support projects that get organisations together to talk about different topics, fundraising and form new connections. For example, an intergenerational storytelling festival 'Summer of Stories' was held in 2021. Storytelling was specifically chosen rather than a more highbrow literary festival as storytelling was all encompassing as it can include films, books and strong verbal storytelling and folk song culture of some of our diverse ethnic minorities too.
- Further plans for similar projects in 2022 are in place including Bucks Open Weekend 28th-31st July, Bucks in 100 Objects and a project to celebrate 10 years since the 2021 Paralympics is also in development
- Partnerships across and beyond the cultural sector have been and are continuing to be built. Networks such as Bucks Cultural Leaders are inspiring people to get involved and lots of groups have approached Lallie Davis for advice on projects, collaboration and fundraising opportunities. A speed dating session had been held in November 2021 to encourage ideas and share best practice and two projects had been awarded seed funding as a result.
- Four action groups to support strategy delivery have been set up: Culture, Health and Wellbeing, Culture, Access and Inclusion, Culture and Placemaking and Storytelling. Buckinghamshire Culture are hoping to work more closely with Community Boards to encourage celebration of 'place'.

During discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included:

- Members praised the achievements of Buckinghamshire Culture to date and congratulated them on achieving charitable status. It was noted that the Cultural Leaders Programme was helping to promote their work and they had worked with students at Bucks New University to design their logo and branding.
- Buckinghamshire's cultural landscape is challenging as it is fragmented ranging from lots of artists working on their own in a studio in their shed up to the National Film and TV School in Beaconsfield and Pinewood Studios. People are also very focussed on their

immediate locality.

- Culture and impact on mental health is a key priority. There is an aim to have conversations with health about including cultural activities in social prescribing. In addition, Buckinghamshire Culture would like to work more closely with the education sector – Bucks in 100 objects could be a very educational project.
- A member gave an example of Haddenham Feast, which had brought artists and makers together as a way of helping to support and bind communities. Opportunities to pass skills and stories between generations should be encouraged.
- It was noted that Arts Council funding would be beyond the reach of lots of cultural groups in Buckinghamshire and members were pleased to hear of the role that Buckinghamshire Culture was playing in linking, co-ordinating and enabling individuals and groups to achieve and deliver their best. The Council should support this outreach work and encourage culture as an essential in life, not just a ‘nice to have’.
- Lallie Davis was working with Hearts of Bucks to support groups to access Arts Council ‘Let’s create Jubilee’ funding. She had held a day of virtual surgeries to discuss ideas and talk people through the application process.
- £300,000 of funding had been secured as well as support from the Council and support in kind from Buckinghamshire New University for the next three years, which covers running costs, some projects and staff salaries. We then bid for further grant funding for specific projects. In terms of sustainability in the longer term, the aspiration would be to create a county endowment pot which would be able to leverage significant change.
- In response to a question regarding the additional money invested in culture in the Council’s budget in 2021/22, Ruth Page explained that it had been difficult to spend this funding in the way the Council had wanted. The plan had been to use it for match funding for projects in partnership with Buckinghamshire Culture and other organisations, via the four action groups that had been established. However, it had been hard to launch projects due to a lack of capacity, which reflected the history of underfunding of the cultural sector over many years. Match funding has been put forward for the Paralympics Anniversary celebration and also a programme called Volunteering Futures, which aims to get volunteers from sections of our communities are under-represented.
- The Council has also used some of the funding to support cultural outreach via the library service.
- Buckinghamshire Culture work closely with the Cultural Educational Partnership and youth organisations such as Action for Youth to better engage with young people. There are also plans to develop a shadow youth board, with the Chair then attending the main Buckinghamshire Culture board.
- A member asked about how Buckinghamshire Culture could celebrate Buckinghamshire’s diverse culture and break down barriers. In response, Julius Weinberg explained that culture was not simply art and music, but any activity that people do in their free time are important. It has been more of a challenge to fully encompass diversity during the pandemic, but efforts are being made to engage with representative organisations to support diversity of cultural activity, for example through storytelling and dance.
- It was further noted that Buckinghamshire Culture appreciates the support received from elected members of the council, at events, meetings and through involvement in projects, especially during the pandemic. This communicates the importance of culture to the community.

The Chairman thanked all attendees for their contributions.

7 DOMESTIC ABUSE

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Steve Bowles, Cabinet Member for Communities, Claire Hawkes,

Service Director for Communities and Strategic Partnerships and Gideon Springer, Head of Community Safety, to the meeting.

The following points were highlighted:

- The strategy outlined ways to develop and improve the domestic abuse services over the next three years. It is underpinned by a smart action plan setting out the Council's commitments, which have been informed by review of the effectiveness of current practice, the changing national context and qualitative and quantitative data. Funding had been received for a second year and a strong Domestic Abuse Board has been established with partners to oversee the plans. The Domestic Abuse Strategy had received unanimous support from the Cabinet.
- The strategy has four key themes: early intervention and prevention, effective services to meet the needs of victims and their families, tackling perpetrators to reduce re-offending and supporting professionals to make a difference. Services are also provided for male victims, victims from diverse backgrounds and children of victims.
- In Buckinghamshire it is estimated that around 21,000 adults are victims of domestic abuse, which equates to 57 per day. However, the figure is significantly impacted by underreporting of domestic abuse, with only around 4000 cases per year being reported to the Police. This accounts for 15% of recorded crime in Buckinghamshire. In 2021, 71 % of victims were female. 64 % of perpetrators are under 40 years of age and 72 % of perpetrators are male. Between 2011 and 2020, there were 15 domestic homicides in the county. It is estimated that domestic abuse in Buckinghamshire costs around £687 million per year.
- Anyone could be a victim of domestic abuse but there is an increased risk to disabled adults, those with learning difficulties, mental health conditions and unemployed people. Single-parents, minority ethnic groups, LGBT+ people and low-income groups are particularly at risk.
- Victims are impacted by domestic abuse in terms of both physical and mental health. Conditions include chronic pain, memory loss, alcohol or drug abuse and self-harm. There is also an increased risk of homelessness, poverty and impact of unemployment.
- Children are also considerably impacted by domestic abuse. One in five children in the UK witness domestic abuse. 2,400 referrals for social care assessments where domestic abuse was a primary concern were completed in 2020/2021 in Buckinghamshire, which is 23 % of children referred. Long-term consequences for children include mental and physical health conditions as well as risks of becoming perpetrators and other criminal behaviour.
- The Domestic Abuse Board has developed an evidence-led action plan, focusing on needs assessment and communication with victims.
-

During discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included:

- Domestic abuse incorporates all forms of abusive and controlling behaviour - mental abuse, stalking and emotional control are included in the action plan.
- The Council aims to tackle the issue of underreporting of domestic abuse by making experts available to victims. Some programmes have been launched in schools to identify the impact on children. A pilot programme had also been put in place for doctors to identify domestic abuse. Family hubs will also be piloted, which will see domestic abuse staff involved in educating people on domestic abuse and improving communications and outreach. The council is also working closely with the police and consulting other authorities to identify best practice.
- Two years funding had been received from Government as a result of the Domestic

Abuse Act. The Council aims to seek further funding if this investment is not continued centrally. The Council would have to consider how the services could continue to be supported as a priority.

- It was noted that it is important to recognise that domestic abuse is a widespread issue and that everyone has a role to communicate that it is socially unacceptable. The council is taking a joint approach with health and education to address domestic abuse. Whilst there is still a lot that needs to be done, the partnership is hoping to support victims and reduce the levels of abuse experienced.
- Two government consultations are currently being held around housing for domestic abuse victims. The council's strategy already requires housing providers to make victims fleeing domestic abuse a priority.
- The issues domestic abuse victims are facing are complex and the council aims to address these on an individual level as much as possible. For example, some work is carried out with children's services to support referrals for children from abusive backgrounds.
- There are procedures in place for domestic abuse victims that approach the council directly, however, each case is considered individually. It is first investigated whether police are aware of the issue. The victim's permission must be obtained to report the abuse, which victims do not always want. However, support to victims is provided regardless of prosecution. There are also a number of charities, such as Women's Aid, which the Council funds to support individuals.
- To support victims of domestic abuse properly, specialist training is required. However, the Council also aims to train staff in frontline services to recognise signs of domestic abuse and signpost victims accordingly. School Safeguarding leads have also had training to help them support children in school.
- A member noted that the 'Ask for Angela' campaign (which encourages people in vulnerable situations to notify staff of bars, clubs etc. to signal their problems) has not been sufficiently promoted. It was advised that promotion of this and similar safety measures was being considered as part of the Council's comms campaign. However, perpetrators becoming aware of the scheme presents a problem.
- The majority of perpetrators were not convicted. A member argued that more focus needs to be put on perpetrator rehabilitation as well as preventing abuse altogether and providing a support network for perpetrators wishing to get help. Currently are not a lot of services like this, but the Council was looking to spend a proportion of funding to evaluate perpetrator programmes. Several issues, such as timing of intervention have to be considered, making it a complex issue.
- The job posts referred to in the presentations would be funded by the Council but based in third party organisations. For example, Women's Aid provide a lot of services, but other organisations are also funded to provide support.
- Anyone needing help and support can find information on the Council's website or call the national domestic abuse helpline - [0808 2000 247](tel:08082000247).

The Chairman thanked everyone for their contribution to the meeting.

8 WORK PROGRAMME

- A member suggested inviting HS2 and East West Rail to future Communities and Localism Select Committee meetings. The Scrutiny Manager advised that HS2 were attending the next meeting of the Transport, Environment and Climate Change (TECC) Select Committee. It was agreed that a future item on the Communities and Localism agenda would be reviewed following that TECC meeting
- The Chairman noted that today's agenda items would both warrant further consideration by the Select Committee in future, so that members could be reassured

that progress was being made. The Chairman advised that members who wish to suggest agenda items are welcome to email herself or Kelly Sutherland.

- An annual report to full Council will be produced from all Select Committees to highlight the work done throughout the year.

9 DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Select Committee would be Wednesday, 13th April 2022 at 10 am.

ADDENDUM – Following the meeting, the date of the next Select Committee was changed to Tuesday 26th April 2022 at 10am.