



# Buckinghamshire Council

## Communities & Localism Select Committee

### Minutes

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES & LOCALISM SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2023 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.53 PM**

#### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

M Harker OBE, A Waite, S Barrett, P Bass, P Cooper, P Drayton, M Hussain JP, F Mahon, C Oliver, G Smith, M Stannard and L Smith BEM

#### **OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE**

R Stuchbury, K Sutherland, S Bowles, R Goodes, C Harriss, W Morgan-Brown, S Payne, G Springer and R Bryant

#### **Agenda Item**

#### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP**

Apologies were received from Councillors Matt Knight and Arman Alam.

#### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- In connection with agenda item 6, Councillor Mimi Harker declared an interest as Vice-Chairman of the Missenden's Community Board and Councillor Ashley Waite declared an interest as the Chairman of the Haddenham and Waddesdon Community Board.
- In connection with agenda item 7, Councillor Mimi Harker declared an interest as a Domestic Abuse and Violence Champion for Buckinghamshire Council.
- In connection with agenda item 7, Councillor Gregory Smith declared an interest as he worked for the Suzy Lamplugh Trust.

#### **3 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

Members expressed their sympathy for the victims of the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. The Chairman encouraged the public to offer financial support to victims where possible.

#### **4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

There were no public questions.

## **5 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE**

The Chairman thanked Members and presenters for their contributions to the last meeting. A letter had been sent to East West Rail and HS2 to summarise the main points discussed and key actions agreed in the meeting, which had been circulated to Committee Members. An update would be provided once a response had been received.

## **6 COMMUNITY BOARD REVIEW - 6 MONTH PROGRESS UPDATE**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Steve Bowles, Cabinet Member for Communities; Roger Goodes, Service Director, Policy and Communications and Wendy Morgan-Brown, Head of Community Boards, to the meeting.

The Chairman explained that the purpose of this item was to receive an update following the Select Committee's review of the operation of the community boards. The review report, including recommendations, had been presented to Cabinet in May 2022.

During the presentation, the following key points were raised:

- Since the Select Committee's review there had been a demonstrable change in how Community Boards operated, in particular in terms of value for money. Community Boards had also been subject to a member task and finish group review and a review as part of the Better Buckinghamshire programme.
- Community Boards were not simply grant giving bodies. Community Boards played an important part in facilitating activity and engaging local partners to improve the local community. Examples included a repair café, tree planting schemes and the establishment of a community hub.
- Since their inception, Community Boards had delivered over 840 local projects, with a financial value of over £9 million, nearly half of which was provided by partners. Over the next financial year, there would be an increased focus on delivering further improvements, increasing contributory funding, reducing overheads and considering changes to the Boards in line with the Electoral Boundary Review which would be published shortly.
- It was noted that the forthcoming change of Highways Contract had led to some delays in transport related Community Board projects.

The following points were noted during the Committee's discussion:

- A Member noted that the new electoral boundaries would be implemented for the 2025 elections therefore if Community Boards were revised in light of boundary changes, this would need to be operational for 2025. The Cabinet Member commented that boundary changes would be taken into account as part of this year's Community Board review and it could be that the number of Boards would be slightly reduced.
- Members expressed concern that changes could lead to a further reduction in the Community Board budget and it was important that Community Boards were well-funded. The Cabinet Member explained that whilst the Community Board budget was being reduced for the coming financial year, there was a small underspend from 2022-23, where some projects had been delayed and reviewed and this would be carried forward to offset the reduction.
- In response to a question on improving community engagement with Community Boards, it was noted that some Community Board managers now worked in Parish Council offices and out in the community, which was encouraging more collaborative working. In addition, over the summer, there had been various Community Board events, which saw members of the public finding out more about the role of the Boards, helping

to create a more positive image.

- A Member asked for examples of how the Community Boards had positively reinforced Council campaigns as this could be another way of providing value in addition to funding community projects. It was reported that successes were being collated into an Annual Report, but one example was how a number of Community Boards had organised coffee mornings to support Ukrainian guests in the county.
- In connection with increasing community engagement, a Member suggested that Community Board meetings should include an item on the agenda to provide an opportunity for members of the public to ask questions. The Cabinet Member suggested that a bi-monthly newsletter might be useful to promote the work of the Community Boards and it was also suggested that a mechanism for sharing project ideas across the Community Boards would be useful.
- The Community Board roadmap which the Select Committee review recommended had not yet been completed, but this would be built into the upcoming review. The focus to date had been on operational improvements and the staffing restructure, but now these had been implemented the road map could be developed
- It was noted that highways schemes took up a large amount of Community Board funding. Cllr Bowles advised that the new highways contract provided an opportunity for significant cost reduction compared to the TfB contract. Some Community Board schemes would also be repriced moving forward.
- A Member asked about the support given to Community Boards which were not reaching their objectives as well as others, highlighting the significant difference in performance between some Boards in terms of attracting contributory funding and delivering projects which had a real impact for residents. On average Community Boards were achieving 87p per pound spent by the Council in contributory funding, but some Boards were attracting as much as £2. Mr Goodes advised that the management team attended Community Board meetings and regularly talk to Chairmen and Board Managers to identify areas of support. Some lessons were also taken from other councils running a similar model.
- It was noted that whilst it was not possible for Community Boards to change Council policy, it was possible to arrange for specialist officers to attend meetings if the public wished to discuss a specific issue with Council services in their area.
- The role of the unitary councillors on the Community Boards was discussed. It was emphasised that unitary councillors play an active role within their Community Board, particularly with regard to agreeing funding for projects. Whilst town and parish councillors did not have the ability to vote, they were still able to bring their views about projects forward and played a key role in contributing to the effectiveness of the Boards.
- Members noted that Community Boards received £3 million of funding, with £2 million being spent on projects and £1 million on overheads and questioned the value for money of the model. As part of the review, there was an aim to reduce overheads and increase contributory funding. However, it was highlighted that the importance of contributory funding should not be seen as a measure of a Community Board's success in isolation, as some communities would inevitably find it more difficult to raise funding but this didn't mean they had any less value as a community.
- A Member emphasised the importance of good chairmanship for the success of Community Boards and encouraging engagement from parish councillors. The Cabinet Member agreed and suggested that training could be considered as part of the review.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and Officers for their attendance and contribution to the meeting and re-emphasised the importance of effective engagement with the public. A further update around Community Boards would be provided to the Committee in the autumn.

## 7 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed Gideon Springer, Head of Community Safety to the meeting.

The Chairman explained that at Council in November, Members took part in White Ribbon Day, with several Members signing up to become Domestic Abuse Champions. The programme involved two days of training to learn how best to support victims.

During the presentation, the following key points were raised:

- Training courses for Members wishing to become domestic abuse champions are run throughout the year. Since White Ribbon Day, 33 Councillors and 160 other partners had signed up to the programme. Members interested in the programme were advised to contact Faye Blunstone.
- The Council was part of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and a subgroup had been set up to focus specifically on violence against women and girls (VAWG), which worked with key partners to positively impact womens' safety. The group had four objectives:
  - Early intervention and prevention focussed on several issues including domestic abuse, stalking and female genital mutilation.
  - Supporting victims, through statutory and non-statutory organisations and the voluntary sector. Further information can be found on the new domestic abuse website, which also included support for women who were victims of violence in other environments.
  - Pursuing perpetrators in partnership with the police.
  - Strengthening the partnership response: identifying pathways for victims to come forward. Violence against women and girls was significantly underreported. Much of this objective focussed around communicating with victims to ensure they receive support through judicial and non-judicial interventions by the police.

The following points were noted during the Committee's discussion:

- The Chairman thanked Mr Springer for his work on the subject and highlighted the importance of communicating the issue to the public, for example through distributing posters outlining ways that individuals could get support.
- Cllr Stuchbury posed the following question which included national figures from the Office of National Statistics: *According to recent ONS statistics, in the year ending June 2022, 194,683 sexual offences were reported to the Police nationally but just 4,466 rape cases were referred to the CPS. Of these, referrals, charges were brought in 2385 cases. While this was a slight increase on the previous year, it falls short of the 3,671 cases in which charges were brought in 2016.*

*In the year to June 2022, there were 1,765 convictions for rape, compared to 2,991 convictions in 2016.*

*Have we got any comparable data for Buckinghamshire or the wider Thames Valley area? I think it is important to understand a baseline of data so that we can see how partnership working to prevent violence against women and girls translates into reporting of offences and subsequent prosecution and conviction of perpetrators, so that we can give more confidence to individuals in disclosing traumatic events that have happened to them.*

- In response, Mr Springer emphasised that the ONS data only included reported incidents and it was important to note that rape and sexual assault against females were

significantly underreported crimes. The Council's aim was to increase the reporting of offenses, as well as reducing the occurrence of incidents. Within Buckinghamshire, there were 894 sexual offenses reported in 2021, 1,149 in 2022 and 1,100 in 2023 so far. It was difficult to compare this data to the national figures, as the police recorded offenses per thousand population. The majority of those offenses were committed by men, thus efforts should be made to educate children, young men and families on how they could support this issue. In 2021, 27 rape crimes within Buckinghamshire resulted in formal action. There were many complex reasons behind the low number, some of which related to the law and current Crown Prosecution Service backlogs. Mr Springer recognised the need to improve these figures and noted that there were also targets set by the government to improve the figures.

- A Member asked whether the Council was satisfied with the response provided by the police, highlighting the issue of staff turnover. It was noted that the police forces across the country were recruiting additional staff, with Thames Valley, in particular, experiencing a significant uplift. Front line officers were often the most inexperienced. Training programmes were in place, though gathering experiences would require some time. However, the issue extended beyond the police, with key partners in the community all playing a significant part in mitigating the issue. Work needed to be done in terms of changing attitudes around violence, which relied on parents, the education system and men collectively to discuss the issue of female safety.
- It was suggested that posters outlining options for support for victims of violence should be provided to different establishments. Cllr Bowles welcomed the idea and noted that the 'Ask Angela' scheme was still being promoted to hospitality venues by community safety officers, street wardens and neighbourhood policing teams. However, mail drops were not identified as the most effective method to raise awareness for the scheme, with training and discussion yielding better results. Work was also being undertaken with key partners to raise awareness. The Council was also working on developing effective awareness-raising campaigns, and any suggestions were welcome.
- The importance of ensuring that younger people were sufficiently educated around violence against women and girls was highlighted. It was noted that most schools had included PSHE (Personal, Social & Health Education) in their curriculum, where children were taught about appropriate relationships. The Council's education department also had a number of staff in safeguarding who visited schools to inform pupils around safety on the internet. There was also a safeguarding lead in every school to deal with issues of this nature.
- A third-party community-led organisation provided a sexual assault service in Buckinghamshire for victims, which would support individuals even if they didn't wish to report the crime to the police. Information about these organisations was available on the Council's website.
- A Member highlighted the importance of providing support for members of the LGBT+ community. It was noted that a third of reported incidents in Bucks had male victims, and the new domestic abuse service included support for men as well as members of the LGBT+ community.
- A Member asked whether any work had been undertaken around creating positive role models against violence, such as the 'Lads need Dads' charity. Mr Springer advised that the onus to educate children around appropriate behaviour was on parents. Many incidents committed in school and similar environments were committed by young people who had not received sufficient education about appropriate sexual behaviour.
- In response to a Member's question, it was noted that one of the sub groups focused on stalking, and aimed to support victims to come forward. There had been a significant increase in incidents, particularly due to the rise of digital communication. Whilst the Council was working closely with the police on this issue, there was currently no

statutory resource to address the issue effectively. Work was particularly focused around prevention, though more needed to be done to increase people's confidence to report incidents.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Bowles and Mr Springer for their work on the topic, and reiterated the importance of prevention, early intervention and education on what constitutes acceptable behaviour.

## **8 FILM OFFICE UPDATE**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Clive Harriss, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Sophie Payne, Service Director, Culture, Sport and Leisure and Ruth Bryant, Buckinghamshire Film Officer, to the meeting.

The Film Office offered a service for people wanting to film in locations across Buckinghamshire. The service was self-funding, meaning that the income of the Council from filming fees covered the costs of the service.

The following points were noted during the Committee's discussion:

- A Member noted that most of Buckinghamshire's filming locations were centred around infrastructure in the South of the county and asked whether the North would become more involved in the film business in the future. Cllr Harriss noted that the whole of the county had already been involved in terms of location filming. In terms of film studio sites, individual companies could choose their locations and the south of the county had proved popular in the past as it was to the West of London where there had traditionally been studios at Ealing and Park Royal and many skilled technicians who had commuted into London in the past lived nearby.
- A Member asked about the target income set for the film office in the ensuing financial year. It was noted that a similar target had been set but the aim was to maximise opportunity and income for the Council.
- In response to a Member's question, it was explained that the film office had launched a website in December 2022 which included a facility for people to self-register locations for filming. So far, 120 applications had been received, and more were continuously encouraged. There was a wide variety of locations that would be of interest to productions, such as empty warehouse spaces, agricultural land and stately homes. The Film Office had been promoted at several Community Boards and they would be writing out to Town and Parish Councils to promote opportunities and the Code of Practice which had been developed to ensure that disruption from filming was minimal.
- Some Members raised concerns about new film studio space planning applications in green belt areas. Whilst it was acknowledged that filming in the county was exciting and brought with it job opportunities, there needed to be a balance in terms of protecting green space. The Cabinet Member explained that the relevant Planning Committee would have to take a view according to planning policy; this was not a matter for the Film Office. In response to a Member's concerns around frequent highway disruption as a result of filming, it was noted that film crews had to obtain permission to film on their desired roads and often alternative locations or very specific timeframes were offered to ensure disruption for local residents and traffic was minimised.
- A Member questioned whether there was a chance that the filming 'bubble' could burst but the Cabinet Member confirmed that it was currently a growth area because of the increased demand for streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon. Buckinghamshire was known as a centre of excellence in terms of the creative industries and this could only be a good thing for young people who wished to pursue a career in

this area.

- It was noted that film crews had a variety of roles behind the scenes, ranging from sound, filming, lighting and security to catering. There were also various colleges that offered film and media education, with many opportunities to work for production companies locally in Buckinghamshire. Pinewood had also recently run a 'Futures Festival', attracting 4000 young people with opportunities of working with high-profile companies such as Sony.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and Officers for their attendance and contribution to the meeting and hoped that the Film Office would continue to go from strength to strength.

## **9 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman led Members in a discussion around ideas for the future work programme. The Chairman advised that she had been considering possible topics for the Committee's next piece of review work and suggested that Digital Exclusion might be worth investigating. She noted that there was a drive to deliver more Council services digitally for efficiency and costs reasons, which might put accessibility at risk. Several Members agreed that more and more services moved to digital delivery, partly due to the pandemic, and agreed that there was a need to discuss this issue. The impact of digital delivery on older adults, disabled people, community engagement, and the environment was highlighted. It was agreed that Scrutiny Manager would carry out some background research to formulate a scope on the topic for the Committee to discuss.

**ACTION: Kelly Sutherland**

Further suggestions raised included:

- Cost of Living;
- Performance of Social landlords;
- Barriers to devolution for Parish and Town Councils
- New Highways contract

It was noted that some of the suggestions might fall under the remit of one of the other Select Committees. The Scrutiny Manager would pass the suggestions on to colleagues in the team as appropriate.

**ACTION: Kelly Sutherland**

## **10 DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting would be Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2023 at 10am.