



Cabinet minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 14 November 2023 in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 12.20 pm.

Members present

A Macpherson, G Williams, S Broadbent, J Chilver, A Cranmer, C Harriss, A Hussain, P Strachan and M Winn

Others in attendance

D Barnes, P Brazier, R Stuchbury and S Wilson

Apologies

M Tett

Agenda Item

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from the Leader, Martin Tett. Angela Macpherson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, chaired the meeting in his place.

2 Minutes

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 October 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Hot Topics

The following hot topics were noted:-

Cabinet Member for Transport

The Cabinet Member referred to the recent storm and that some roads had been closed and crews were working out of hours to clear branches etc. At the end of October the winter service had commenced with the first two grit runs over the weekend. Information on gritting routes was available on the Council website. In response to a question, it was noted that if a road was closed long term with a

diversion in place, consideration would be given as to whether gritting was required. However, temporary diversions were not always gritted.

<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-transport/check-to-see-which-roads-are-gritted/>

Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

The SEND Improvement Team held the annual 'Shout Out for SEND' Conference in the autumn term. The aim of the conference was to ensure that the Council was listening to young people with SEND. Their feedback helped the Council to develop services, policies and strategies so that young people with SEND could reach their full potential and access and participate in all walks of life. Young people took an active role in developing activities and running the conference on the day, which ensured that the Council co-produced the conference from start to finish. The conference was designed for pupils of secondary school age and was free to all attendees. Also invited were electively home-educated young people and those who lived in Buckinghamshire but attended schools and settings in other local authorities. The conference was organised and run with partners across Buckinghamshire. The two workshops were bullying and discrimination and Understanding and Awareness and how to make things better.

Cabinet Member for Homelessness and Regulatory Services

Buckinghamshire Council was inviting residents, businesses and organisations to share their views on its draft Housing Strategy for 2024-2029. The Strategy set out the Council's vision, priorities and actions to meet the current and future housing needs and challenges in the county. The Housing Strategy had been developed with the input and support of a wide range of partners, including housing associations, developers, community groups and other public sector organisations.

To achieve the Strategy, the Council had created three draft priorities:

- responding to the needs of Buckinghamshire's diverse population
- better homes: good quality, sustainable and matched to need
- new homes: affordable, accessible and appropriate

The consultation was open until midnight on Monday 18 December 2023 and could be accessed [online](#) or by requesting a paper copy from the Council. The feedback received would help shape the final version of the Strategy, which would be published in 2024.

5 Question Time

Question from Councillor Stuart Wilson to Councillor Peter Strachan, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration

The Q2 Capital Budget Adjustments and Reprofiting report submitted to this Cabinet contains references in Appendix 1 to a re-profiling of £345,000 for environment-led opportunities and, in particular, 'Spade Oak Lake and Little Marlow Visitor Facility business plans under development as original plans did not produce a net nil cost to the Council. Other options are being considered.'

Cabinet approved a programme of action to evaluate Little Marlow Lakes Country park in two phases last year, starting with a cross-function Officer group tasked with developing a commercial plan for the Council-owned land at Spade Oak Quarry. There has been no indication from this Officer group that this work has been substantially on progressed, beyond a workstream on the creation of a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace as mitigation for the impact of development in Bourne End on Burnham Beeches Special Area of Conservation.

What work has been completed to date that would enable this report to conclude that the original plans did not produce a net nil cost to the Council, including the restoration works required under planning condition, what assumptions are now being made for the £345,000 going forward including the timings of the delivery of a viable plan to Cabinet, and when will this be shared with all local Members with a strong vested interest in this proposal?"

RESPONSE from Councillor Strachan

As context, the £345,000 is existing capital budget which could be used towards funding the development and restoration works of the Council-owned land at Spade Oak Lake (the initial phase of delivery of the Little Marlow Lakes Country Park).

In line with Cabinet's decision to develop a scheme for this site which as a minimum would be a Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) compliant facility, and a business plan which ensures the facility is delivered as a cost neutral enterprise, officers have been focused upon the necessary steps towards SANG compliance, to attract SANG contributions to fund improvements (these would form part of the business plan for delivering the facility).

The SANG work requires a number of stages including visitor surveys to determine capacity at the site, approvals from Natural England, and development of management plans; this work has been progressing well with surveys undertaken over recent months and continuing discussions with Natural England, but will require time to conclude. Hence the reprofiling of the £345,000 capital budget into next financial year and the comments regarding net nil cost/other options, since the restoration works alone would use up this £345,000 budget.

In tandem, officers have also continued to liaise with partners to try and find a way to get Thames Water's £0.4m grant to the Community Partnership implemented for habitat and visitor improvements on the site.

The business plans for the site will continue to be progressed and will be the subject of a paper to Cabinet in 2024/25.

Question from Councillor Robin Stuchbury to Councillor Steven Broadbent, Cabinet Member for Transport

In Buckingham and North Buckinghamshire it is evident that there are drainage issues with drains both being blocked and not functioning to their full capacity. As an example poor drainage has had a negative impact on property and in two instances within Buckingham children are being impacted greatly by standing water on the road when walking to school. What is the total resource within the local authority for dealing with this situation by way of vehicles and manpower and what plans do you have for budgeting & planning long-term to address these matters to reassure our residents, particularly with increasing storms?

RESPONSE from Councillor Broadbent

Buckinghamshire Highways are responsible for the following aspects of highways drainage and flooding:

- Maintaining highways drainage systems across Buckinghamshire, including gullies, catchpits, soakaways and highways drainage ditches.
- Developing new capital schemes to alleviate highways related flooding.
- Road closures and flood warning signs as part of emergency response to flooding.
- Maintaining supplies of sandbags at each depot and distributing where appropriate and resources allow, to mitigate highway and property flooding. The following supplies of sandbags are maintained:
 - 500 full sand bags (rot proof) in each depot
 - 1000 sand bags (rot proof) empty in each depotThese are primarily for Highways purposes, but if the service has capacity, it will distribute sandbags to properties at risk of flooding at the request of the Emergency Operations Centre or appropriate Duty Officer.
- Providing information to riparian land owners adjacent to the highway about their responsibilities and enforcement where appropriate.

The maintenance of highways drainage assets is carried out by Buckinghamshire Highways through our Term Maintenance Contractor. The Council has committed to ensuring cyclical maintenance of all the 85,000 gullies which is a significant investment and commitment. Officers set out a specific work programme annually, with a reactive maintenance response as necessary during the year. The Term Maintenance Contractor is then responsible for ensuring sufficient resource is available to deliver this work.

Through its Medium, Term Financial Planning (MTFP) process, the Council has allocated the following budgets for highways drainage maintenance in 2023/24:

- £1.367M for Cyclical Gully Maintenance, which includes maintaining all 85,000 of the Council's gullies.
- £1.022M for drainage repairs. These are identified from inspections during the gully maintenance programme as well as following reports from Members and the public.
- £0.25M for reactive gully cleansing. For example, during very wet weather or

where a gully is reported as blocked outside of the cyclical programme.

Currently there is a dedicated crew and gully machine operating out of each of the three main depots, with two additional 'supersucker' gully machines working across the County. This is supplemented by supply chain partners operatives and equipment as and when required to fulfil the needs of the service. Additionally, there is an out of hours emergency service with crews trained and resourced to deal with a range of highways emergencies, including flooding.

There is also a specific "Severe Weather" reserve maintained of around £1.5M. This is to mitigate any additional and unplanned costs associated with storm events etc, beyond what is anticipated for a normal year which could include flooding, fallen trees and long lasting snow or ice as well as repairs to the highway such as following last year's severe winter. It is recognised that severe events are becoming more common place, more damaging and not confined to the winter season and the revised recurrence of severe events is taken into consideration in line with Government formal guidance on Flood Risk Assessments.

In addition, the Council has allocated £2M for capital drainage works. This includes identifying and prioritising new drainage schemes as well as replacing obsolete or broken drainage assets. Again, there is not a specific dedicated resource allocated to this but work is allocated to designers, engineers and other specialist through our Buckinghamshire Highways Alliance partners as required.

The Strategic Flood Management Team is responsible for identifying the Council's flood management strategy and the team work closely with the Highways team to identify priorities to mitigate property flooding where there is a highways element. It should be borne in mind though, that it is principally the responsibility of the homeowner to protect their property from flooding unless this is directly caused by the failure of a highway system. Where the Flood Management Team identifies a particularly need for a highway scheme, this would be dealt with by a bid through the MTFP process.

Like most Highways Authorities, our historic highways drainage systems were not designed to accommodate the increasing intensity and frequency of severe rainfall events we now regularly see. For example, it is not uncommon for rainfall intensity to exceed the capacity of our soakaways and residents may well see standing water in places where there hasn't been previously, until the drainage system has had time for the water level to subside. This is, of course, a national issue and something that is being taken into account in emerging design standards for new highway drainage systems, though even new systems may not be able to deal with every extreme event. It is also not feasible or affordable to upgrade existing highways drainage systems wholesale. Where a specific problem is identified, and prioritised as needing action we will investigate, assess against other proposed schemes and bid for additional funding through the MTFP process as required.

The Deputy Leader introduced the Forward Plan and commended it to all Members of the Council and the public, as a document that gave forewarning of what reports would be discussing at forthcoming meetings.

RESOLVED – That the Cabinet Forward Plan be noted.

7 Select Committee Work Programme

The Deputy Leader introduced the Select Committee Work Programme and commended it to all Members of the Council and the public, as a document that gave forewarning of what Select Committees would be discussing at forthcoming meetings.

RESOLVED – That the Select Committee Work Programme be noted.

8 Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023: Mental Health

Each year, the Director of Public Health produced an annual report on the health of the population. This year, the report focussed on mental health. The Director of Public Health Annual Report 2022-23 described the factors that supported good mental health, identified groups that were at risk of poorer mental health and made recommendations for the Council and its partners to promote mental health and well-being. The report was a call to action for partners in Buckinghamshire, asking partner organisations to reflect the recommendations in existing multi-agency plans, for the Start Well, Live Well and Age Well Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy.

Mental health was as important as physical health for health and wellbeing. It underpinned people's ability to build strong relationships, to do well at school or in employment, and shaped how people interacted with the world around them. Good mental health often led to better physical health, as well as a reduced chance of dying at a younger age.

People in Buckinghamshire generally enjoyed higher levels of good mental health and wellbeing compared with the England average. However, good mental health was not experienced by everyone and many people experienced periods of poor mental health during their life. Fortunately, there were many things residents could do to improve and protect mental health. There were also actions that schools and organisations could take to support the mental health of those who lived, learnt and worked in Buckinghamshire. These preventative actions were the focus of the 2022-23 annual report.

The report did not consider the different types of mental health conditions, nor did it cover treatment and support for mental illness. These were important subjects that would require a long and detailed report in their own right. Many people with a mental health condition enjoyed a good quality of life and many of the preventative actions in the annual report might support them, in addition to formal treatment. The report further detailed formal research and local data and mentioned that it was not surprising to find a strong overlap between the factors that were important to children and young people and those that were important in adulthood. The things

that affected mental health did not change as people grew older. However, two additional factors become important as people aged – the impact of retirement and increased risks of becoming socially isolated.

The Director of Public Health reported that while the factors for mental health listed could affect everyone, some people in Buckinghamshire were more likely to be vulnerable to poor mental health. National research had demonstrated a link between poverty and mental health and this was evident in Buckinghamshire. While not all mental health conditions and disorders could be prevented, individuals could take steps to improve their own mental health by focusing on the protective factors listed in the report. The Director of Public Health also highlighted those people who were at risk, such as children living in poverty, who were four times as likely to have mental health issues by the age of eleven, or those living in cold homes, who were five times more likely to have mental health issues. Promoting access to green spaces, culture and leisure would provide help and initiatives such as the Opportunity Bucks Programme which helped deprived areas looking at employment opportunities and housing. The Director of Public Health particularly referred to how crucial the early years for children were regarding their mental health and that this started with their cognitive, emotional and social development whilst the mother was still pregnant. Stress in pregnancy also resulted in poorer mental health.

The report made a number of recommendations regarding actions that schools, Buckinghamshire Council, the local NHS and employers and voluntary sector organisations could take to promote good mental health. These actions were grouped into five areas:

1. Support our children, young people and their families.
2. Encourage lifestyles that protect mental health.
3. Provide opportunities for people to build their social network, learn new skills and give to others.
4. Take action on the things that increase people's risk of poorer mental health.
5. Encourage open conversations about mental health.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing reported that mental health was as important, if not more important, than physical health for people's wellbeing. This year's Annual Report was about how individuals, communities and organisations could improve and protect their mental health. This was particularly important at a time when recent rises in the cost of living were affecting many people's mental health. The report summarised the things that could promote and protect mental health and highlighted factors that could have a negative impact. It also highlighted groups that could be at risk of poorer mental health so that the Council and partner organisations could consider what actions could be taken to level up mental health across Buckinghamshire. In line with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy it covered mental health throughout life using the themes Start Well, Live Well and Age Well. The report contained recommendations for action for all partners as well as things people could do for themselves and where to get help.

As well as partners, there was a lot the Council could do to help improve mental

health and every portfolio holder could make a real difference to improving people's mental health. This could be by using the Opportunity Bucks Programme to help address financial insecurity, skills, good quality employment and wider work with schools, communities and the voluntary and community sector to support children's mental health or improving the built and natural environment or increasing access to leisure and cultural opportunities or supporting strong connected communities to reduce loneliness and isolation. This report was a call to action to partners in Buckinghamshire. Actions arising from the report would be incorporated into the existing multi-agency plans addressing mental health in children and adults in Buckinghamshire.

During discussion the following points were noted:-

- Help was available for houses with damp and mould. The first port of call would be the landlord, as they were responsible for maintaining the house. If the landlord refused to help, then the resident should contact the Environmental Health Team. The Housing Strategy also included information on how to improve homes and the Council's role in this regard and making more sustainable homes in the future. Housing Associations also had a role in energy efficiency. Helping Hands would also help residents who were struggling to pay their bills. The importance of good sleep was also key.
- With regard to mental health in young people, reference was made to a study, which had been undertaken during the pandemic, where a quarter of sixth formers experienced loneliness. A further study was being undertaken and it would be very helpful to compare figures. Different schools had different approaches, but it was key to build resilience in children. The Chief Medical Officer had given advice on the amount of screen time a child should have. The Director of Public Health reported that they had someone dedicated to working with schools on PSHE, which covered physical and emotional health. They also ran a Healthy Schools Accreditation process, which included a whole school approach to mental health. Furthermore, they had recommended the Penn Resilience Programme to schools and offered peer support groups. There was also the 0-25 Children's and Young People's Programme which included school nurses and health visitors who ran drop in sessions and a teen health website. It was noted that the approach by schools was variable.
- Reference was made to regional variations and an example was given that North West Chiltern (area 7) had poorer outcomes than South West Chiltern (area 12) and the reasons for this. The Director of Public Health reported that the map used national methodologies to look at outcomes, such as anti-depressant prescribing etc, which could be affected by individual GP behaviour or demography, such as older people isolation particularly in rural areas. This would be addressed in the Healthy Aging Strategy by working with the voluntary sector to increase social participation. There would be an exhibition in Buckinghamshire about how to age well. The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing also referred to this Strategy and the importance of transport to help isolation and the need for demand responsive transport.

- This report would be communicated to Members and Community Boards including the Health and Wellbeing Board and Community Groups.

Members welcomed the report.

RESOLVED –

That the Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023: Mental Health be NOTED, and the Council and partners be recommended to incorporate the actions identified in the Annual Report into existing mental health action plans and the Buckinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy Action Plan.

9 Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2022/23

Working Together 2018 stated that partnerships must produce an annual report “at least once in every 12 months period.” The report must set out what they have done as a result of the arrangements, including on child safeguarding practice reviews, and how effective these arrangements have been in practice.

The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Education introduced Walter McCulloch - Independent Chair, Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership. The Partnership was a multi-agency partnership including police, fire, NHS, Thames Valley Rehabilitation Service and National Probation Service which dealt with 124,000 children. The main vision of the Partnership was to hear the Voice of the Child.

The Independent Chair reported that the report was work in progress and represented his first six months as Chair. He commented that the report should include:

1. evidence of the impact of the work of the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including training, on outcomes for children and families from early help to looked-after children and care leavers. This should include looking at data to see if actions were having a positive impact on children, looking at the qualitative assessment, what staff would say across the Partnership and listening to the voices of those with lived experience.
2. an analysis of any areas where there has been little or no evidence of progress on agreed priorities.
3. a record of decisions and actions taken by the partners in the report’s period (or planned to be taken) to implement the recommendations of any local and national child safeguarding practice reviews, including any resulting improvements.
4. ways in which the partners have sought and utilised feedback from children and families to inform their work and influence service provision.

This information had helped the Partnership develop the Business Plan and narrow down the priorities which include:-

- developing the Partnership further so that Partners could hold each other to account and to increase collaborative working

- the collective front door and managing demand through the different agencies
- learning through Case Reviews and the evidence for change
- learning from the lived experience

The Independent Chair thanked Public Health colleagues for the assessments relating to the Child Death Overview Panel, which was a statutory requirement as part of the partnership and stressed the importance of analysing the cause of any tragic deaths. There would be a progress report in 2024 which would show that the Partnership was up to date with their statutory duties. The training needs analysis was work in progress.

These requirements formed the chapters for the annual report that was submitted and considered by Cabinet.

Next steps for the Partnership

- To agree a new business plan with measurable priorities and ensure this was shared with the sub groups for action.
- To review the current membership and structure to ensure that it could deliver what was required.
- To agree and implement a front line staff and residents engagement plan.
- To re-establish and strengthen the links between the relevant Partnership Boards.
- To implement and measure the impact of the revised training offer.
- To review the evidence based from practice reviews and ensure that the learning was shared.

During discussion the following points were noted:-

- Reference was made to the 170 children missing from education, which meant that they were missing from the mechanism for early warning signs. It was important to understand why they were missing and any areas of concern. There were also 1091 children who were electively home educated, and it was important to understand what the checks and balances were for their safeguarding. Reference was also made to community partnerships such as youth organisations and the importance of sharing information. The Independent Chair reported that Buckinghamshire numbers were lower than the previous County he had worked in. Children missing from education were kept under close review including those home educated. This had been recently discussed at a Select Committee meeting. The Corporate Director reported that for children that were home educated, there was an annual requirement for a home visit to take place. For those missing from education there was a partnership approach to sharing information to ensure that those who have a school place access their education and access the support required to enable them to attend school. There was a national profile around attendance and the Council had undertaken a self-assessment in this area with a session with the DfE in early 2024. The Independent Chair

referred to community groups and re-instituting a community based meeting in December, which could be locality based, to hear the voice of those directly involved and benefit from sharing information and further training.

- In terms of collaboration, it was noted that through the community based meeting and other mechanisms there was good collaboration linking services, for example housing and safeguarding and listening to any concerns to protect children and young people.
- 20 causes of death were in the perinatal period which related to the previous report where the Director of Public Health had referred to mental health during pregnancy.
- At the September Partnership meeting there was a good presentation on learning from lived experiences and looking at examples where action could be taken as one of the four key priorities of the business plan. This also linked with a recent HMIC report on child protection.
- Referrals, as was the case with adults, had increased in numbers and complexity. When talking to partners they also commented that there had been an unprecedented rise in referrals and to ensure that the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub was taking a consistent approach to referrals by looking at thresholds and ensuring good decision making.
- The Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services reported that the numbers were lower for children missing from education (27) as some families had moved from the area and not notified the local authority.

RESOLVED –

That the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2022-23 be NOTED.

10 Climate Change & Air Quality Strategy - Annual Progress Report 2022/23

The Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy 2022-2023 Progress Report provided an update on the significant progress made against the aims, objectives, and actions set out in the Council's Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy within the second year following its adoption on 19 October 2021.

Details of 51 activities were provided, many of which addressed several actions in the Strategy. These had contributed to greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) decreasing by 7.73% from 2019 to 2021; nitrogen dioxide concentrations staying within the annual mean value in 2022 (apart from one location where new diffusion tube monitoring was established within the Friarage Road Air Quality Management Area in 2022); and, the Council's GHG emissions being 73.7% lower in '22/'23 compared to its emissions from 1990.

The Council was responsible for 5,401 tCO₂e (net emissions) in '22/'23. It had kept comfortably within the Council's carbon allocation for '22/'23 (6,953 tCO₂e) and was on track to reduce the Council's carbon emissions by at least 75% by 2030.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment stated that these figures

were a result of partnership working with voluntary and community groups, schools, the waste team, libraries and other organisations such as the Forestry Commission. The Council applied for any available government grants in this area and also had reduced the cost per tree to provide value for money whilst planting on a reasonable scale (145,000 trees over a 12 month period). The target was 543,000 by the end of 2031 planting season, which was effectively one per resident in the County and included smaller planted areas in schools to tree plantations on a larger scale. The Council had met over 35 climate and environmental groups across the County and had a thriving eco – system of local community groups which dealt with a range of different projects and initiatives. There was a dedicated Project Officer to ensure that there was good cross-collaboration between the groups. The Council were looking at projects regarding insulating homes and using solar panels and the two big initiatives in this regard were the Solar Together Scheme and the Energy Doctor Scheme. The Solar Together Scheme, which used bulk purchasing to get good deals for local residents, had delivered 4,356 panels across Buckinghamshire which was equivalent to 2.1 megawatts. The Energy Doctor Scheme had helped 150 homes to obtain better insulation which included advisors visiting qualifying homes to improve on carbon emissions and energy saving. The first electric bin lorry had been ordered and another 8 different vehicles were coming in across the fleet as part of the commitment on transport. With regards to air quality, air quality monitoring showed there was only one exceedance of the annual mean National Air Quality Objective for NO₂ within Buckinghamshire. This was a new monitoring location added in 2022 located within the Friarage Road Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in Aylesbury. There was a Climate Change Newsletter with 4,000 readers and also a large range of information online. <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/campaign/bucks-climate-challenge/>

During discussion the following points were made:-

- There was a Green Schools Competition on 8 December 2023, which was held annually.
- In terms of technology, the Cabinet Member reported that they had their first upcycled refuse lorry, which was making use of the chassis and mechanics that were still in good working order after eight years use. A local provider was converting them to use battery packs. This upcycled lorry would be tested in Buckinghamshire before converting other vehicles to ensure it was fit for purpose. As refuse lorries were heavy, they might not be good for hilly routes and were more suited for urban routes, particularly where air quality management plans were in place. The Council had been awarded an Air Quality Grant from Defra of £578,000 to upcycle and electrify the refuse collection vehicle (RCV). Procurement of a supplier for the contract for the retrofit work had been awarded to Lunaz Applied Technologies Ltd. Delivery of the upcycled vehicle was expected before the end of 2023.
- Buckinghamshire Council was delivering on its commitment to upgrade the nearly 29,000 streetlights it maintained to energy-saving LED light bulbs. Over 91% had already been converted and more streetlights, illuminated bollards and signs, and belisha beacons were scheduled for upgrading by the end of the year. The Cabinet Member commented that working across

portfolios was a key requirement as climate change affected every area.

- Home to School Transport taxis and minibuses, which had up to and including 16 seats, had to meet Euro 6 emission and heavy duty vehicles, such as buses and coaches, had to meet Euro 5 emission standards. As reported at Select Committee, the rules for this had changed this year. Incremental changes were made to the fleet to reduce emissions over time. Any ultra-low emission taxi vehicles could be licenced for up to 15 years rather than the standard period of ten to provide incentive.

<https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=343&MId=18212&Ver=4>

Cabinet welcomed the progress made.

RESOLVED –

That the progress made in 2022-23 against the aims, objectives and actions in the Council’s Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy be NOTED.

11 Opportunity Bucks – Progress Update

Opportunity Bucks was the Council’s local partnership approach to levelling up, working in partnership across the county to improve outcomes for people who were experiencing the most hardship. Outcomes for people across the county were, on average, good. Income was above the national average, educational attainment was high, and the proportion of people claiming out of work benefits was low.

However, the county averages masked the challenges that some people in some specific parts of the county were facing. 10 ward areas had been identified where outcomes were substantially worse for residents, with more people in these wards claiming benefits, having worse health outcomes, experiencing higher crime and having limited opportunities. The Council’s aim, through the Opportunity Bucks programme, was to ensure that everyone in the county had the opportunity to succeed, that we grow together as a place and that nobody was left behind. The Cabinet report provided an update on progress made since the official launch of the programme on 7 December 2022.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing reported that it was a flagship programme to improve outcomes for residents who were experiencing the most hardship. The Council delivered targeted intervention into the ten wards identified to ensure everyone had the opportunity to achieve such as:-

- A good quality job
- Learning and career progression
- A good standard of attainment and skills
- A healthy and active lifestyle
- A decent, warm home
- Pride in where they live

The Cabinet Member reported that this Project could only be successful with strong partnership working and a strong multi-agency commitment with statutory partners, the voluntary and community sector, local stakeholders, community groups and resident associations. There were 3 levels of working:-

- Thematic partnerships which operated at a strategic level and focused on improving education and youth engagement, job careers and skills, the quality of the public realm, living standards and health and wellbeing for residents across all ten wards.
- Ward Partnerships which had been established at a community level in all of the ten target wards which were led by local members with officer support and involving local stakeholders and community groups who enabled the Council to identify the key local challenges that residents were facing.
- At an individual level a Making Every Adult Matter team to support residents who were experiencing multiple disadvantage and to improve outcomes.

This Project was being monitored through performance indicators. The Cabinet Member for Communities gave a few highlights on what had already been achieved:-

- implementing traffic calming measures in Castlefield to improve the local area.
- a policy change to Buckinghamshire's main Registered Social Landlords to that they could no longer remove carpets by default when tenants change and instead the carpets were offered to the incoming tenants for a nominal fee.
- securing additional funding to support the aims of the programme including £2.1m funding from Government to improve numeracy skills through the Multiply Scheme.
- making functional improvements to the Totteridge recreational group, targeted community clean ups and litter-picks and establishing community cafes.

The Chief Executive informed Members that this was a Buckinghamshire initiative, not national, which the Council wanted to undertake to help disadvantaged residents improve their outcomes and was an innovative approach to the levelling up agenda. It also had buy-in from private and public sector partners who all had a sense of ownership in the programme. Some of these initiatives were short term but other areas such as health, education and housing would take longer to show active improvements. The Service Director for Business Intelligence & Community Support reported that there was an ethos of identifying what worked well and looking at tangible feedback to ensure that funding was invested in the right areas with the highest impact. There was a suite of performance indicators capturing activity taking place and the benefit this provided. The Chief Executive reported that these metrics showed any return on investment particularly for the shorter term and the longer term objectives would not show initially. National metrics could also provide a useful measuring tool.

The Cabinet Member for Homelessness and Regulatory Services reported that this initiative had already helped some previously entrenched rough sleepers who were now using accommodation. Also there had been improvements to living conditions as professionals had referred any concerns to Environmental Health so they could investigate. Work had also been carried out linking in with Community Boards and holding workshops to identify what initiatives could be carried out in those ten wards.

The Cabinet Member for Transport referred to the traffic calming scheme, which had improved community cohesion. Children would be able to play outside which would help to improve their mental health and initiatives like this could be used elsewhere in Buckinghamshire.

Reference was made to the Horizons Programme which provided continued coaching and guidance from the Career Development Consultant, a personalised Horizons learning plan, training and development recommendations and networking opportunities for those who had been referred. The Service Director reported that this programme launched at the end of September and there had been nine referrals so far. The target was 30 individuals of which 20 should come from Opportunity Bucks areas.

Cabinet thanked officers for all their work and the work carried out by Members in the ten wards.

RESOLVED –

That the progress of the Opportunity Bucks programme be NOTED.

12 Q2 Capital Budget adjustments and Reprofiting

The Capital Programme for 2023-24 to 2026-27 was approved by Full Council in February 2023, with an expenditure budget of £505.9m. The programme was revised to £556.8m following additions agreed by Cabinet in July 2023. The Council often received ringfenced funding in-year from Government and Developers which were added to the programme in a supplementary budget change. Additionally, the programme was reviewed quarterly to check that the profiled spend remained realistic. The report set out the recommended additions and reprofiling for Quarter 2, and also recommended 3 projects to be reduced or removed from the programme. These budget changes would ensure the programme remained realistic and deliverable and released budget for reinvestment. The recommended changes would increase the 4-year Capital Programme to £582.6m by 2026- 27 and would reduce the 2023-24 current year budget from £149.3m to £124.6m.

There were £8.246m of recommended additions to the Capital Programme. In summary:

- £5.908m of new projects funded from external ringfenced funding - £2.567m for new or existing projects funded from ringfenced Government Grants and £3.341m for projects funded by ringfenced s.106 developer contributions. The conditions of

this funding meant that it could only be spent on these specific projects.

- £1.738m of additions made up of 2 existing projects were experiencing overspends due to inflationary pressures, the Biowaste Project and Hampden Memorial Chapel. The proposal was to fund these overspends from earmarked reserves (£1.738m); and
- 1 priority project – CCTV control room upgrades £0.600m funded from a contribution from the RCCR (Revenue Contributions to Capital) reserve.

Since the Quarter 1 update to Cabinet, £18.055m of projects had been added to the programme through separate Leader or Key Decisions. This gave total additions to the programme since Quarter 1 of £26.301m. The Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources also referred to Appendix 1, which showed MTFP Reprofile Detail by Portfolio and specifically mentioned the South East Aylesbury Link Road and that the funding negotiations with HS2 and Homes England were now resolved.

Leader Strategic Infrastructure projects: percentage profiled spend achieved This was mainly due to the South East Aylesbury Link Road project as negotiations had taken longer than expected with the Government and Homes England. This had now been resolved and a Leader decision was awaited. A further paper was expected to come back to Cabinet.

The Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources also referred to Appendix 1 which showed MTFP Reprofile Detail by Portfolio and specifically mentioned the South East Aylesbury Link Road. Members noted that the Council remained committed to the delivery of the South East Aylesbury Link Road and continued to be involved in discussions with central government regarding the financing of the project. Securing these funds had taken far longer than anticipated, however a substantial portion of the funding, through the Housing Infrastructure Fund, had now been agreed with Homes England.

RESOLVED that the following Budget adjustments to the Capital Programme be approved:

- 1. Addition of £5.908m to the programme for new externally funded ringfenced grants and S106 developer contributions.**
- 2. Addition of £2.338m to the programme funded from Corporate Resources, to fund inflationary pressures or new spend on existing, priority projects.**
- 3. Removal of £0.460m for projects which have completed or are no longer proceeding.**
- 4. Reprofile of £24.335m from the current year into future years.**

13 Q2 Budget Monitoring Report 2023-24

This report set out the forecast Revenue and Capital outturn position for Buckinghamshire Council for the financial year 2023/24 as at Quarter 2. The Council was continuing to experience significant financial pressures due to continued increase in demand and complexity of need in key services, such as Adults Social Care and Children's Social Care. The forecast revenue outturn position at Quarter 2

was an adverse variance of £8.6m, (2% of Portfolio budgets), an increase of £0.3m from the Quarter 1 reported position of £8.3m. This was primarily due to pressures in Health and Wellbeing and Education and Children's Services from demand and market insufficiency issues, coupled with pressures in Housing & Homelessness & Regulatory Services in Temporary Accommodation budgets and Transport budgets. Within the overall position there was an adverse variance of £15.2m (3%) in Portfolios (£14.0m last quarter) offset by a £6.6m (£5.7m last quarter) favourable variance in Corporate & Funding.

The £15.2m (£14.0m last quarter) adverse variance in Portfolios included:

- i. £3.4m pressure (£3.9m last quarter) in Health and Wellbeing due to growth in client numbers, and increased cost of care packages, particularly in Residential, Nursing and Supported Living.
- ii. £9.8m pressure (£3.9m last quarter) in Education & Children's Services predominantly due to the national insufficiency of placements for children looked after leading to a shortage of available placements and very high unit costs of those placements that could be accessed.
- iii. £1.1m adverse variance (£1.5m last quarter) in Housing & Homelessness & Regulatory Services in Temporary Accommodation budgets due to increased demand, particularly for nightly paid accommodation.
- iv. £1.3m adverse variance (£3.2m last quarter) in Transport Services. This was predominantly in Transport costs £1.3m pressure (£0.8m last quarter) due to increased contract costs in Home to School Transport with provider pressure to increase costs on letting of new contracts.
- v. The position also reflected a forecast shortfall on Energy from Waste income of £4.8m due to the reduction in market energy prices.

Following the Quarter 1 position, detailed Portfolio Action Plans had been implemented to address pressures, with a view to urgently bringing budgets back into line. The Quarter 2 position reflected positive variances across several portfolios linked to the delivery of the action plans, however, the financial position had deteriorated overall due to increasing pressures within Education & Children's Services which were detailed in the report. Mitigations of £1.3m had been identified linked to additional electricity income from the EfW plant, relating to a prudent estimate of income projections for 2022-23. Capital spending was forecast to be 99.5% of budget, a variance of £0.6m.

Unsecured debt over 90 days had seen an increase of £5.1m in comparison to Q1, rising from £9m to £14.1m in Q2. This had been scrutinised closely at a recent Select Committee meeting. For Q2 current overall invoice payment performance was 96.1% paid on-time.

Cabinet Members noted that budget pressures were being faced nationally. The Section 151 Officer referred to the risks in the budget as already reported by the Cabinet Member (home to school transport, children's services (particularly placement costs), temporary accommodation and adult services and commented that the current pressures could be met by contingency budgets. The Cabinet

Member reported that the Council was on track to meet its savings targets.

RESOLVED that Cabinet note the report and the risks and opportunities contained within it and also note the actions being taken to mitigate pressures as set out in para 3.9 of the report.

14 Q2 Performance Report 2023-24

The report included the performance report, which provided details of the key performance measures reported through the corporate performance framework for 2023/24 and the performance scorecard, which provided information on four key elements of performance for the Council covering Finance, Customer Service, Performance and Human Resources indicators. Within the performance report and performance scorecard, outturns which were performing at or better than target were classified as Green, those which were within 5% of the target are Amber and those which were more than 5% of the target were Red. At the end of Quarter 2, 92 indicators had outturns reported with a Red, Amber or Green status. Of these, 62 were Green (67%), 10 were Amber (11%) and 20 were Red (22%).

Each Cabinet Member addressed the performance indicators which had a red status as follows-

Leader

Strategic Infrastructure projects: percentage profiled spend achieved

The Council remained committed to the delivery of the South East Aylesbury Link Road and continued to be involved in discussions with central government regarding the financing of the project. Securing these funds had taken far longer than anticipated, however a substantial portion of the funding, through the Housing Infrastructure Fund, had now been agreed with Homes England.

Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources

Average Call Wait Time

This was below 5 minutes for the last four quarters, but it was still above the target level of 3 minutes although there was an improvement in Quarter 2. Quarter 2 was a busy period with home to school transport at the start of term and garden waste renewals. Online contacts were being promoted, including development of chat bots in four key services and use of call back facility.

Overall revenue (forecast) variance (%) across the Council

Addressed in the previous report.

£ value of unsecured debt > 90 days (excl Business Rate, Housing Benefit and Council Tax, and not secured against a property or asset) across the Council

Addressed in the previous report – the service area had set up a Task and Finish Group for adult social care debt and was also looking at improving processes including automation.

Average time for processing new Housing Benefit claims (days)

Average time for processing Housing Benefit change claims (days)

The backlog of claims was due to closing the previous system and now having a single system as this was an annual rolling target. However, the backlog of claims had now been cleared so improvements were expected.

Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

% of children's social care assessments completed in 45 working days

% of children with Initial Child Protection Conferences completed within 15 working days of the strategy discussion

% of Children in Need seen within 4 weeks

Percentage of new Education, Health and Care plans issued within 20 weeks (excluding exceptions)

% of initial Family Support Plans completed within 31 working days

The Cabinet Member responded to all the red indicators commenting that the red status was due to an increase in demand, staffing and recruitment issues and less educational psychologists. The service area was also going through a transformational change to improve services but left a period of uncertainty.

Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

Number of younger people (aged 18-64) admitted to permanent residential or nursing care homes per head of 100,000 population (cumulative)

In line with national trends there was an increase in demand and the Service Area were using the Better Lives Strategy to improve outcomes and enable residents to live at home where possible.

% of young people whose Adult Social Care Assessment was completed before they turned 18 years old (cumulative).

The Cabinet Member reported that she had been working with the Corporate Director to address this, whilst there were small numbers it was important to ensure that the Improvement Plan brought this back on track.

% of successful drug treatment completions of those in treatment

Percentage of service users with needs related to Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) seen or assessed within 2 working days of first contacting the service

These two indicators related to Public Health and recent data coming through showed an improvement, which would hopefully mean that future indicators would no longer be red.

Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration

Percentage of Planning Enforcement Notice Appeals Upheld

The Cabinet Member reported that the Q2 outturn was 21% against a target of 20% which was due to the decisions of the Inspectorate that were difficult to predict.

Cabinet Member for Transport

Percentage of Category 1 and 2H defects repaired in 2 and 5 working days respectively

Performance in Q2 was 89% which was lower (worse) than the target of 95% but was an improvement from Q1 (70%). There was a 300% increase in the number of reported defects towards the end of last year due to a significant period of sub-zero temperatures last December followed by repeated cycles of wet and freezing conditions into January. There had been improvements since.

Percentage of reported Rights of Way issues dealt with in target time

There was an increasing use of rights of way which led to more queries. In addition, there had been vacancies in the team which had been filled in September, so performance improvements were expected.

Number of uncommitted s106 contributions that must be used within two years

At the beginning of this year the Council undertook a review of all the s106 contributions that it held. This identified contributions deemed to be at risk as they were unspent and approaching the expiry date set out in the relevant s106 agreements (this situation arose due to multiple factors pre and post unitary). Following the review, the use of contributions has been prioritised so that contributions most at risk were able to be used in accordance with the relevant s106 agreements and a new decision making and monitoring process had been introduced for 2024 to ensure contributions were committed at an earlier stage.

RESOLVED that the performance report be noted including the action taken to improve performance where required.

- 15** **Date of next meeting**
12 December 2023 at 10am.