



Cabinet minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 26 May 2020 via video conference, commencing at 10.08 am and concluding at 11.12 am.

Members present

M Tett (Leader), A Macpherson (Deputy Leader), K Wood (Deputy Leader), S Bowles, B Chapple OBE, J Chilver, A Cranmer, I Darby, T Green, C Harriss, P Hogan, D Martin, N Naylor, M Shaw, W Whyte, G Williams and F Wilson

Agenda Item

1 Apologies

There were no apologies.

2 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 21 and 30 April 2020 were AGREED as an accurate record.

4 Question Time

The following question was received from Councillor Robin Stuchbury.

“In view of the changes under the Buckinghamshire Council planning procedures to established practice in the Aylesbury Vale area, will there be any consultation with explanation to the parishes on how to best maintain an equivalent level of local representation in planning matters at committee, bearing in mind the position statements from the Buckinghamshire authority about wishing to work closely with town and parish councils? It is also the reality that many of these elected bodies will be preparing local plans presently and in the future and it would appear completely contradictory to the Council’s stated aims if these previous opportunities and rights to parishes were not reinstated at the first possible opportunity. In addition, for the Member to call in an application under the constitution, they may have to wait for the Parish Council to meet and agree a response to an application that triggers calling-in, and the time-scale of 28 days may not be adequate to allow this due to the schedule of meetings, especially if the period includes public holidays.”

Martin Tett, Leader, clarified that Councillor Stuchbury's question only related to the Aylesbury Vale area.

Councillor Warren Whyte, Cabinet Member for Planning, provided the following response.

W Whyte advised that the changes to the constitution had been made and approved by the Shadow Executive and Shadow Authority in February 2020. The rules of engagement had been inherited so the process had not changed in other areas of the County, just the Aylesbury Vale area. W Whyte clarified the call-in procedure; parish councils had the ability to call-in applications during the first 28 days of an application but they were also given a further seven days, once they were aware of the officer recommendation, to choose whether they still wished to exercise the call-in. Parish Councils had been engaged in the process, including a workshop for parish councils in December 2019; however, the training planned in March 2020 had to be postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic which was unfortunate. However, the council has also recently published further guidance to town and parish councils on how to engage with the planning process. This guidance gives specific advice to town and parish councils on the changes, in some areas, to the call in process. Online training was also available to town and parish councils. Like all matters in the new Council, this would be kept under review.

5 Forward Plan (28 Day Notice)

John Chilver, Cabinet Member for Property and Assets, advised that the decision on the Bledlow Household Waste and Recycling Centre (page 28) had been deferred until at least June 2020 as it was subject to the outcome of the planning application which was due to be determined at the Strategic Sites Committee meeting on 11 June 2020.

ACTION: Democratic Services

RESOLVED: Cabinet NOTED the forward plan.

6 Covid-19 Update

Martin Tett, Leader, stated that all the Cabinet Members had contributed to the Covid-19 update in the agenda pack. M Tett advised that the impact of the pandemic had been sudden and unprecedented and had resulted in the re-prioritising and re-direction of many areas of work and staff. A co-ordinated structure was created with the Thames Valley, Oxfordshire and Berkshire Local Resilience Forums to work collaboratively e.g. on potential storage facilities and the sourcing of personal protective equipment (PPE), in order to mitigate the effect of the pandemic on the public. Bi-weekly communications had been emailed to approximately 200,000 residents and would continue on a weekly basis. Work was being carried out with the care homes, supporting the vulnerable communities and with the education services to enable children to return to school. Information had been received from the government on the new policy for testing, tracking and tracing the infection and procedures would be put in place.

Rachael Shimmin, Chief Executive, Buckinghamshire Council, added that the Covid-19 planning started in advance of the transition to the unitary council and it had been clear that the unitarisation work, in the lead up to the start of the new Buckinghamshire Council, along with the existing partnership work with the health sector, had been extremely advantageous in Buckinghamshire's response to the pandemic. 'Business as usual' had continued and the report (pages 46-50) outlined the work by each service area. Many staff e.g. library staff, had been re-purposed to work in the community hubs. The 'outbreak control plan' would be developed and reported to the Cabinet in future.

M Tett highlighted the financial implications. Finances were being used in line with the government guidance but expenditure to protect the vulnerable had been high and the Council's income had reduced significantly. The Council was now entering recovery and looking to re-build the economy across Buckinghamshire.

M Tett invited the following Cabinet Members to provide an update:

Gareth Williams, Cabinet Member, Communities and Public Health

- Staff had been redeployed to work in the eight community hubs.
- There were 3,522 'shielded' people in Buckinghamshire and over 500 food parcels had been distributed since the end of March 2020.
- Approximately 1,800 volunteers had been assigned, by the Clare Foundation and Community Impact Bucks, to local community groups.
- Weekly calls were held to prioritise where funding should be used and ensure there were no gaps.
- Work was being carried out in the community hubs encompassing both public and voluntary sectors and organisations in the fields of mental health and financial insecurity in order to prioritise recovery towards those that were most vulnerable.
- A section of the Buckinghamshire Council website was dedicated to Covid-19.

Angela Macpherson, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

- An enormous amount of work had taken place to support the care homes; there had been only one confirmed case of Covid-19 in the last week in the care homes.
- The Care Home Support Plan had been drafted and needed to be submitted by 29 May 2020. The plan would be available to the public and would cover the use of PPE, infection control advice, the tracking process, commissioning around discharge from hospitals to provide alternative isolation facilities, clinical support for care homes, the workforce, support from volunteers and the financial support offer.
- Infection control plans were being developed jointly by the Public Health team and Adult Social Care.
- The Local Government Association (LGA) had used the Council's enhanced offer to the care homes as an example of good practice on their website.

- Excellent feedback had been received from some of the vulnerable residents regarding the regular phone calls from volunteers and there had been requests for the calls to continue indefinitely, possibly by incorporating it into the Befriending Service.

Mark Shaw, Cabinet Member for Children's Services

- Support had continued to those in the Early Help Service via remote video conferencing.
- Regular contact was being made to children of concern via virtual meetings and some home visits had been undertaken where necessary.
- The Portage Service had posted videos with suggestions of things to do and useful tips.
- Creative methods had been used to reach out to families and children in crisis.
- Preparations were being made for the challenge of increased cases when children returned to school.

Isobel Darby, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

- Tribute was paid to the housing teams who had worked together incredibly well.
- 80 rough sleepers were in temporary accommodation.
- Outreach work was continuing for the few rough sleepers who had not taken up the offer of temporary accommodation.
- Planning was being carried out for the homeless for when the temporary hotel accommodation was no longer available; permanent sources of accommodation were being freed up by moving people to permanent solutions.
- The department were mindful that there may be an increase in victims of domestic abuse or homelessness due to the loss of income as a result of the pandemic.

Bill Chapple, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change

- There had been over 40,000 visitors to the recently re-opened household recycling centres. Visitors were required to provide proof of residency in Buckinghamshire.
- The bank holiday weekend had been busy; B Chapple thanked officers and contractors for their hard work and visitors for their co-operation.
- Garden waste collections had resumed.
- There had been approximately 500 new subscriptions for garden waste collections.
- The bulky waste collection service was running as normal.
- The amount of recycling waste had increased and food waste collection had re-started.

- There had been a 26% increase in general waste collection in April 2020 compared to the previous year.
- Full credit would be given for the period when the garden waste collections were suspended.

Clive Harriss, Cabinet Member for Sport and Leisure

- There had been an increase in the number of people taking regular exercise during the lockdown and this should be encouraged after lockdown to combat obesity.
- The country parks had re-opened. However, due to poor parking by some visitors, short-term parking regulations had been implemented to maintain the safety of the public.
- Children's play areas would remain closed as children were unable to socially distance.
- Golf and tennis clubs had re-opened.
- The leisure centres remained closed and the loss of income had added to the financial pressures for the Council.
- The building of the new Amersham Leisure Centre and the refurbishment at Chesham Leisure Centre were going ahead.
- A bid would be submitted for an active travel plan to help keep cyclists safe and maintain the flow of traffic across Buckinghamshire.

The following points were raised by members of the Cabinet:

- In response to a query on whether the Befriending Service extended to the whole community or just care homes, A Macpherson advised it was a community based service which currently focussed on the care homes and vulnerable residents; however, it would be worth exploring the possibility of extending the service to the wider community.
- Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education, stated that the government had provided guidelines regarding the re-opening of schools. Many staff had worked continuously through the school holidays to provide schooling for special needs children and key workers' children. A Cranmer emphasised that there was no legal obligation for schools to re-open or for parents to send their children back to school and fines would not be issued if children were kept away from school.
- Following a question on whether public toilets in the country parks could be re-opened safely, C Harriss advised that on re-opening the toilets visitors would be asked to bring their own hand sanitiser. The cleaning of the toilets would be increased but could not be cleaned after every use. It was an unusual, difficult situation and the design of toilets was a problem; disabled toilets could be the easiest to open.
- A cabinet member highlighted the positive figures for looked after children which had decreased slightly; also, the total number of children on a child protection plan had decreased to 530 from 600. M Shaw explained that 23 children had left care and 18 had come into care; the service remained in

contact with all the children and had found that better relationships had been maintained via virtual methods and this would be considered as a way forward after the pandemic.

M Tett stressed the importance of supporting local businesses and advised that Bucks Business First was the main point of contact for advice on the government initiatives launched during the Covid-19 crisis. 82% of eligible businesses had been awarded a business grant (approximately £75 million in total). Details would follow on the Discretionary Business Grant once the criteria had been established.

R Shimmin and the Cabinet members expressed their thanks to Buckinghamshire Council staff for their hard work during this difficult time.

RESOLVED: Cabinet NOTED the Covid-19 Update.

7 Confidential Minutes

To agree the confidential minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2020.

RESOLVED: The confidential minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2020 were AGREED as an accurate record.

8 Exclusion of the public (if required)

Not required.

9 Confidential Minutes

RESOLVED: The confidential minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2020 were AGREED as an accurate record.

10 Date of next meeting

16 June 2020.

Response to Robin Stuchbury

Question

Will the education authority be in a position to publish any advice from the government regarding sending children back to school on the 1st June? This is a difficult enough question for yourself, let alone the parents who will be making that decision within their own family who will look to the council for guidance when making their decision.

Further to this, what work is being undertaken with trade unions, school head teachers and officers to be in a position to give advice to schools supported with scientific advice to support decisions and recommendations around children from certain age groups returning to schools and ensuring a safe environment for pupils and teachers?

Response

Following the release of the recent government guidance in relation to schools re-opening senior officers have been working with our Headteacher representatives, Public Health advisor and trade union reps to discuss the requirements in relation to a safe return to school for the priority groups identified. We are aware that there are concerns amongst parents in relation to this and are encouraging parents to speak directly to their headteacher, as it is ultimately for headteachers to make their own decision based on the information available according to their individual context, prioritising the wellbeing and safety of their staff, pupils and families.

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Response to questions from Cllr P Jones**Question**

1. In a letter dated 7th May 2020, the inspectors examining the proposed Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan have stated (paragraph 32) that "there is a strong likelihood that the only option will be for the Council to withdraw the plan". This is because of the supposed failure to consult with Slough over that Council's wish to have some of its required housing needs built in the area of the former South Bucks DC. The inspectors also (paragraph 25) state that "the Green Belt has therefore not precluded land from being identified for development in the submitted plan". Put another way, they seem to be saying that we cannot use the Green Belt status of land in the south of Buckinghamshire as a reason for denying space to Slough, when at the same time the Chiltern and South Bucks Plan proposes significant changes to the Green Belt for residential and office development elsewhere. To counter the threat from Slough, would it not make sense to withdraw immediately the self-imposed threat to the Green Belt around Chesham, Beaconsfield and elsewhere?

Response

I'd like to thank Cllr Jones for his question.

You will be aware that each local authority has to produce a local plan for its area or face the risk of the government intervening and preparing one for them.

Each plan also has to demonstrate how it will accommodate the level of development required. The Chiltern and South Bucks plan has done that and it will be the subject of the examination if the inspector agrees that the plan can continue.

The Inspectors letter on the Duty to Cooperate, in my view, takes a bizarre and unconventional approach to the release of further green belt land in South Bucks to accommodate Slough's future growth.

Therefore, I do not believe that changing allocations in the Chiltern and South Bucks plan would strengthen the case against Slough.

Buckinghamshire has to accommodate its own growth and Slough should do the same. We have taken barristers advice, and are making that point as strongly as possible to the Inspector, in particular, asking for a hearing to make our case.

Question:

2. For various good environmental, economic and social-distancing-to-counter-the-coronavirus reasons, other areas in Britain and around the world are proposing wider footpaths /pavements, wider and more cycle lanes, and help for commuters to afford and use electric and regular bicycles. Will the Cabinet please ask for an urgent report on what can be done in Buckinghamshire, particularly around the main employment areas such as High Wycombe, Aylesbury and Amersham / Chesham? "

Response:

I'd like to thank Cllr Jones for his question. I am pleased to report that Officers have been working to identify the possible measures that the Council could introduce to ensure that social distancing can occur on public transport, and on our streets and in town centres, as people return to work, and as our children return to school. Buckinghamshire Council has already re-introduced a scheme that provides discounts to staff to purchase bicycles. I have asked for a report to be provided to Cabinet as a matter of urgency, given the tight timescales set out by DfT to introduce temporary measures.

Responses to questions to Cabinet from Councillor Robin Stuchbury

1. Cambridge to Oxford expressway and planned housing development across the Oxford to Cambridge Arc

I'm seeking advice on at what point the new Buckinghamshire Council will be in a position, based on the evidence available, to state its position on the Oxford Cambridge Expressway project with the additional proposed planned housing development across the Cambridge to Oxford Arc, and with the known environmental impacts/challenges and economic pressures these two projects may produce.

Historically there were strong positions taken by the leaders of the then two local authorities; Buckinghamshire County Council and the now historical Aylesbury Vale District Council leaders. Where, as you are aware, motions were taken to both councils on the Oxford Cambridge Expressway of which both local authorities saw these proposals at that point as sinister. I will be guided by your response on where you believe, and when you believe, it is appropriate as stated previously with the evidence available to bring these matters before the local authority either within a future report or as a proposal form. The executive, with a view from our new Buckinghamshire council on both these challenging proposals/projects, and their implications on the environment/economics of the future of Buckinghamshire.

Response

I'd like to thank Cllr Stuchbury for his question. He has helpfully reminded Cabinet that the legacy Councils of Buckinghamshire County Council and Aylesbury Vale District Council agreed their opposition to the Expressway. We were delighted to hear that the Expressway project has been "paused" and there is no suggestion that this will change in the short term. In terms of the Oxford Cambridge Arc more generally, it is early days in terms of the project, and little has happened during the current Covid emergency. However, once the work steps up, the Council will be fully engaged in the development of its proposals and making the case for what is best for Buckinghamshire. Part of that process will be understanding the detail as it develops and I intend to keep members informed throughout the process.

Question

2. Vale of Aylesbury Plan to Buckinghamshire Council

In light of the fact the Vale of Aylesbury Plan was not in conformity when the Buckinghamshire Council came into operation, minded to the pressures and sensitivity of the VALP which is not in conformity with the historical southern district plans. In provision of affordable housing and infrastructure levy, of which both have a large financial implication going forward for the Buckinghamshire Council, at what point do you believe Buckinghamshire Council will be in a position to comment on the Vale of Aylesbury Plan as a local authority and how it seems these matters are progressing or not. And at what point would a body of work be taken forward within the department to harmonise the questions of infrastructure levy within Buckinghamshire and the affordable housing targets? I'll be guided by your response before forming a position. All views on these matters, though my opinions are well known and my concerns were raised within questions to the now historical shadow authority. It is only appropriate now that Buckinghamshire Council, as

the principal planning authority, seek clarity from the new Cabinet Member and Buckinghamshire Council on these concerns. Questions which will be a major part and inference going forward on the lives and aspirations of the Buckinghamshire Council constituents.

Response

Can I thank Cllr Stuchbury for his question.

Firstly, I would like to address the statement that the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) was “not in conformity” at the new Council’s inception. This may be a reference to the fact that VALP is not yet adopted, however, the VALP Inspector has already confirmed in his Interim Findings that the VALP is capable of being made sound through limited modifications. There is therefore no indication that the VALP is not in conformity with Government planning policy.

The question then refers to the matters of affordable housing and infrastructure levy which is taken to mean the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The reference in the question to “conformity with southern district plans” is taken to refer to the fact that the Wycombe Local Plan affordable housing policy is different from the policy in VALP and the fact that a CIL is in place in the Wycombe, Chiltern and South Bucks areas but not in Aylesbury Vale.

The matter of the difference in the affordable housing policies is still before the VALP Inspector. Until he writes his final report we will not know the outcome of his deliberations. This difference is clearly noted but the VALP policy is based on the published evidence supporting that plan in the same way that the Wycombe policy was justified by evidence taking into account the circumstances in that area. I should point out however that the Council has suggested a modification to the relevant VALP policy to allow the retention of the higher levels of affordable housing required in existing neighbourhood plans.

Going forward the new Buckinghamshire Local Plan will be the means to establish an affordable housing requirement for the whole of the new council’s area that conforms with the revised NPPF. In the meantime, Neighbourhood Plans may be able to adopt higher affordable housing targets should they produce evidence to support such targets and the VALP policy refers to a minimum of 25% percent being required.

With regard to CIL, Aylesbury Vale District Council did not progress a CIL within its area. However, the new Council has the opportunity to reassess this position as part of its plans for future work and it is my intention that this will now be progressed as a priority.