



Cabinet Minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 7 July 2020 in via video conference call, commencing at 10.04 am and concluding at 10.58 am.

Members present

M Tett (Leader) (Chairman), 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

Apologies were received from Sarah Ashmead, Deputy Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer; Nick Graham, Service Director, Legal and Democratic Services, attended in place of Sarah.

2 Minutes

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June were AGREED as an accurate record.

Martin Tett, Chairman and Leader, advised that an addendum had been published relating to a correction to the minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2020. Nick Graham stated that the error, which related to the call-in procedure and parish council involvement, had not been noticed when the minutes were approved at the meeting on 16 June 2020. The webcast had been checked and the addendum clearly set out the verbatim record on page 11 and the clarification/amendment on page 12 of the all-in-one agenda pack.

RESOLVED: Cabinet APPROVED the amendment to the approved minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2020.

3 Declarations of interest

Angela Macpherson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, declared a personal interest as she was a member of the Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust Board (Item 7, Financial Outturn, Asbestos Warranty, page 63 of the all-in-one agenda pack) and would take advice from Nick Graham as to whether she would

need to leave the meeting if this point was discussed.

Bill Chapple, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, declared an interest in item 6, Children's Improvement Plan Progress Update, in that his son worked in the Children's Services Department, Buckinghamshire Council.

4 Question Time

Three questions had been submitted for this item, two from Cllr Robin Stuchbury and one from Cllr Alan Bacon. The question and response to Robin Stuchbury's second question would be published with the minutes. Unfortunately, Alan Bacon was unable to join the meeting so Martin Tett read out his question.

Test and Trace

"Government is allocating funds to local authorities across England to support Covid-19 test and trace services. Will the portfolio holder please report on the Council's progress in working with Public Health England to develop and improve these test and trace services in Buckinghamshire?"

Response provided by Gareth Williams, Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health:

Test and trace was designed to keep COVID infection levels low and prevent local outbreaks as lockdown restrictions were eased nationally. The Council had carried out the following:

- Multi-faceted outbreak plans had been developed.
- A Member Recovery Board, which included councillors, to oversee the outbreak control had been set up.
- The Health Protection Board had been created which would take the necessary action to prevent, contain and manage outbreaks. The Board included members from Buckinghamshire Council, PHE and the NHS. The Board met regularly and was chaired by the Chief Executive of Buckinghamshire Council.
- The Council had worked closely with PHE to develop focussed outbreak control plans for Buckinghamshire with specific focus on settings (e.g. schools, care homes, universities, hospices, workplaces etc.) and at risk population groups (e.g. homeless, people from Black Asian and Minority ethnic groups).
- Increased local testing capacity; there were two mobile local swab teams operating seven days a week in various locations in Buckinghamshire which were promoted by the Communications team. Residents had access to regional testing centres in Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire and a drop-in centre in Slough. Postal/courier-delivered swab kits were also available.
- The Council was working closely with PHE and the Joint Biosecurity Centre to closely monitor the data on cases and risks and spot rising levels of infection and outbreaks early.

- The Public Health team was also monitoring the Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 data.
- Communication was a very important element of the Member Recovery and Member Engagement Board and the Board would liaise with the public to support residents to stay safe.

M Tett clarified that Pillar 1 data referred to the data from tests carried out in a hospital and Pillar 2 data related tests carried out in a clinical setting.

Cllr Robin Stuchbury - Free school meals and all the equivalent support over the forthcoming summer holidays

“What work has been undertaken by the local authority based upon the information available to the council to ascertain what will be the true volume of children currently within education within Buckinghamshire who are/were in receipt of free school meals historically, who are currently, through the pandemic, not receiving this valuable support? And what preparation has been undertaken within social care to both identify these children as we approach the summer holiday period insuring no child goes hungry. The scheme was coming to an end on 17 June and was a multi-faceted voucher and credit card scheme.”

Response provided by Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Thank you for your question relating to free school meals. All children who were entitled to free school meals had been receiving supermarket vouchers through the DfE scheme since its inception at the start of the lockdown. As an authority we had lobbied the DfE to ensure that the early issues with the scheme were corrected and that all families received their due entitlement. We had occasionally had to contact schools to address issues regarding the deployment of the scheme that had been raised with us by parents – all of them had been resolved satisfactorily. The DfE announced on Tuesday 16 June 2020 that all children who were eligible for free school meals would be entitled to supermarket vouchers to ensure that they did not go hungry over the summer holiday period. All teams across children’s services would monitor the situation closely, and work with schools and families to resolve any issues should they arise. All children who were eligible would be reached and taken care of during the summer holidays.

5 Forward Plan (28 Day Notice)

RESOLVED: Cabinet NOTED the forward plan.

6 Children's Improvement Plan progress update

Mark Shaw, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, introduced the report. M Shaw advised that he had met with the children’s social care leadership team to discuss how the service had managed during the pandemic. The Children’s Services team had reacted swiftly at the start of the crisis; staff had worked from home and continued to do the best they could to protect the vulnerable children. Home visits

were increasing now that restrictions had eased but the virtual meetings had proved successful and provided learning for the future on how best to communicate and connect with young people and families. The recruitment challenge continued and new ways were being sought to encourage people to work for the Service. The Improvement Plan showed a number of positive changes but there were still some areas which required improvement. M Shaw highlighted that there had been an improvement in the data statistics and the recent staff survey had shown that the number of staff who felt well supported, with good engagement had risen from 85% to 89%.

Tolis Vouyioukas, Corporate Director, Children's Services highlighted the following points:

- Paragraph 1.6 provided the detail of the work carried out at the start of the lockdown.
- Paragraph 1.21 highlighted that the work with schools had been exemplary and the leadership shown by school leaders across the county had been inspiring.
- The social workers had not been exempt from the impact of Covid-19; T Vouyioukas expressed his thanks and gratitude for their achievements during the pandemic.

The following points were raised by members of the Cabinet:

- In response to concern over the number of agency staff and the current percentage; T Vouyioukas stated that the Service was fortunate to have agency staff helping with the improvement plan work. Some agency staff had converted to a permanent contract and the recruitment plan had gone ahead during the pandemic. The Academy was going well, although there had been a slight delay due to the crisis. The number of agency staff varied between 20%-25% with some teams showing a higher percentage. Some teams were more difficult to recruit to but T Vouyioukas was optimistic about future recruitment. Richard Nash, Service Director, Children's Social Care, added that there were four people in the process of converting from agency to permanent; specific targeted work was being carried out to ensure the Service did not rely too heavily on agency staff.
- In response to a request from a cabinet member, T Vouyioukas listed the top three issues:
 - To ensure the percentage of management oversight supervisions on assessments continued at the same pace.
 - To capture the learning from Covid-19.
 - There had been significant improvement but 100% consistency was required.
- A member of the Cabinet asked if the Service was prepared for a possible spike in the number of domestic abuse cases. M Shaw acknowledged the

importance of the connection with the Police and Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust. It was possible that cases could rise when children returned to school in September and planning was underway to deal with an increase in numbers. T Vouyioukas added that it was difficult to predict; some areas had seen a spike at the beginning of lockdown, but this did not happen in Buckinghamshire. Close contact with partner agencies would be maintained in order to gain information and help families as much as possible.

- A Cabinet member emphasised the importance of all councillors being ‘corporate parents’ and that it was vital the ‘voice of the child’ came through all facets of the Children’s Service.
- T Vouyioukas advised that the learning from the pandemic would be applied to current and future practice.
- The quality of the relationship between the staff, social workers and young people is extremely important.

It was agreed that Cabinet should maintain a close oversight of the Improvement Plan.

M Tett thanked the Children’s Services staff, colleagues and partner organisations for their response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Improvement Plan update. He emphasised that improving Children’s Services remained a top priority for the council and one upon which he and the council were focused.

RESOLVED: Cabinet NOTED the service response to COVID-19 (C-19), the report on the impact of these actions the update on service improvement.

7 Financial Outturn report for 2019/20

Katrina Wood, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources, introduced the report which presented the financial outturn reports for the legacy councils for Buckinghamshire for 2019-2020. There was an overarching revenue and capital provisional outturn for that period with appendices which covered each legacy Council, noting that Chiltern District Council and South Bucks District Council reports were combined. The Wycombe District Council report also contained appendices for the High Wycombe Town Committee outturn and the capital carry forwards. The overarching report provided a summary of the revenue and capital outturn position and the general fund balances which in total forecasted £49.7m.

The revenue table in paragraph 1.4 showed that although all the Councils had achieved either a balanced or underspend position there were service pressures due to an increase in service demand and costs. These had been managed mainly through the use of reserves, favourable grant funding or favourable variances on corporate items. The total capital programme across the five councils was just under £168m against which £134m was spent. If approved by Cabinet, the majority of the unspent programme (£33.5m) would be carried forward to complete the projects in future years. The variances at the end of Quarter 3 were fully considered

as part of setting the budgets for 2020-2021 and the variances arising since then were being reviewed to understand any ongoing impacts and mitigations. This, along with the financial impact of COVID-19, would be reported as part of the Quarter 1 monitoring position. K Wood advised that the figures were provisional and work to complete year end was ongoing and could have an impact on the final outturn position. K Wood highlighted that there was an error in recommendation b (to approve recommendation in respect of capital carry forward £14.7m as detailed in the Aylesbury Vale District Council outturn report). The actual amount should read £13.825m not £14.7m; £14.7 is what was spent not what was being carried forward. Richard Ambrose, Section 151 Officer, added that the district council audits should be completed by the end of July 2020 and the Buckinghamshire County Council audit should be completed by the end of September 2020.

The following points were raised by members of the Cabinet:

- M Tett emphasised that the outturn was the start of the new Buckinghamshire Council and was the ending point of the previous councils.
- In response to whether the outturns were as anticipated; R Ambrose stated that the position was generally as had been assumed but there were changes in the final quarter in home to school transport; there were also some late variances for Aylesbury Vale District Council related to bad debt provision and the waste budget. These would be reported to Cabinet on 28 July 2020.
- A Cabinet member asked if comparative figures for the last year would be provided. R Ambrose advised that it would be difficult to provide comparators as it was not 'like for like'; however, comparisons would be carried out where possible.

M Tett stressed the need to understand the implications of Covid-19 as the Council had suffered a huge loss of income. The Government had provided support on expenditure and had recently announced the provision of additional funding on income protection but the Council would have to pick up the first 5%. R Ambrose acknowledged it was likely that there would be a gap between the additional expenditure due to Covid-19 and lost income compared to the funding provided. A report would be presented to Cabinet on 28 July 2020 which would set out the strategy for mitigating the pressure. The strategy, currently, was to protect the general fund or unallocated balances, as the reserves could only be used once and it would be better to use them in a planned way rather than to cover any shortfall in the current financial year, but it provided some flexibility to ensure a sustainable budget going forward.

RESOLVED: Cabinet AGREED to:

- a) CONSIDER and NOTE the summarised Revenue and Capital outturn for all the five legacy Councils.**
- b) APPROVE recommendation in respect of Capital carry forward £13.825m (this**

amount was amended during the meeting as the figure of £14.7m in the agenda pack was an error) as detailed in the Aylesbury Vale District Council outturn report.

- c) **APPROVE** recommendation in respect of Revenue (£1.2m) carry forward and Capital (£4.5m) carry forward as detailed in the Wycombe District Council outturn report.

8 Date of next meeting

28 July 2020 at 10.00 am.

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Question from Cllr Robin Stuchbury for the Cabinet meeting on 7 July 2020.

Following the “significant concerns” highlighted by the Inspector during the examination of the Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan, and the ongoing delays and uncertainty surrounding the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan – which looks less than likely to be a made plain in the foreseeable future, what will Buckinghamshire Council do by way of protecting Buckinghamshire from excessive development until plans are finally accepted by the inspector? We, Buckinghamshire council, re-engage with communities, including town and parish councils, to draw up new or improved local neighbourhood plans so they are fit for purpose in light of the pressures from outside the county, and the changing demand in housing which could arise now following the Covid 19 restriction. And will the Council be insuring that comprehensive engagement with other local authorities is carried out and undertaken so that unreasonable requests for Buckinghamshire to take on other local authority’s housing demands can be effectively rebuffed or curtailed?

Response

I’d like to thank Cllr Stuchbury for his question.

The Council will very soon be commencing the formal process of preparing the new Buckinghamshire Local Plan. This will provide us, for the first time, with County-wide coverage from a single Local Plan. However the new plan will not be adopted until 2025, so in the meantime our focus very much remains on securing up to date Local Plan coverage across the whole Council area. Having up to date plans is the single most important way of providing certainty to our residents and businesses and which is why I have highlighted these projects as one of my key priorities this year.

As you will know, the Wycombe area has an up-to-date local plan and the Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP), whilst delayed, is also in the final stages of examination. As a consequence, both the Wycombe and the Aylesbury Vale areas are able to demonstrate that they have more than five years’ supply of deliverable housing sites in accordance with Government policy. These measures help to protect communities from inappropriate and unsustainable development. The picture is slightly different in the Chiltern and South Bucks areas where the supply of available housing land equates to less than five years. However, here more than 87% of the land in is in the Green Belt where new housing and commercial development is generally held to be inappropriate.

We already have a number of town and parish Councils who have actively engaged in the planning process by preparing neighbourhood plans and we would support further approaches from town and parish councils interested in promoting some sustainable development in their areas. The preparation of neighbourhood plans is a very important part of the planning framework in Buckinghamshire and I am very happy to re-iterate the Council’s support for any town and parish council wishing to prepare a plan for their area. Following a recent update in Government guidance on neighbourhood planning in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we are advising town and parish councils wishing to continue to prepare their neighbourhood plans to contact the relevant Planning Policy team for their area for detailed discussions.

Progress on neighbourhood plans continues to be made notwithstanding COVID-19. The Great and Little Kimble-cum-Marsh and Ickford Neighbourhood Plans are at their final stage pending referendums which cannot now be held until May 2021. Consequently, they can be given significant weight in decision-making insofar as the plans are material to a planning application. The Denham Neighbourhood Plan is also currently at pre-submission public consultation stage until 31 July.

In relation to neighbouring authorities, the Council is under a duty by law to have positive and ongoing dialogue with neighbouring councils in preparing our Local Plans. This is known as the 'duty to cooperate'. Therefore, as part of the preparations for the new Local Plan we are developing a strategy for how we respond to requests from neighbouring councils unable to meet the housing needs arising within their own administrative areas.

Our response to such requests will be to say that whilst we are happy to engage constructively, we will not be in a position to discuss our ability to meet development needs arising in other areas until the preparation of the Buckinghamshire Local Plan is at a more advanced stage and relevant evidence has been prepared. We will however be reminding any such Council that in the preparation of the current round of Local Plans, there was no evidence of additional capacity to accommodate housing needs from outside of Buckinghamshire, indeed in the southern parts of the County, there was insufficient capacity to even meet the needs arising locally requiring a significant re-distribution of growth to the north of the County.