



Cabinet minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 8 June 2021 in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, HP19 8FF - Aylesbury, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 10.44 am.

Members present

M Tett, A Macpherson, G Williams, S Bowles, S Broadbent, A Cranmer, C Harriss and N Naylor

Others in attendance

T Butcher, R Stuchbury and S Wilson

Apologies

J Chilver and P Strachan

Agenda Item

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from 2 Cabinet Members, Councillors J Chilver and P Strachan, and 2 Deputy Cabinet Members, Councillors J Jordan and P Martin.

2 Minutes

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2021 be approved as a correct record.

3 Declarations of interest

There were none.

4 Hot Topics

Angela Macpherson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health and Well-Being updated the meeting on the Adult Social Care Transformation Programme that had been set up approximately 3 years ago. The thrust of the programme had been to radically improve the quality of the service delivered. This was being monitored through a Quality Practice and Improvement Board that had been set up with an independent adjudicator. The following improvements were highlighted:

- The highest number of compliment ever had recently been received from

service users.

- Audits of case work, that had been externally validated, had shown that 67% of them were rated as either good or outstanding (a 16% improvement on the previous year).
- Voluntary staff turnover had reduced from 17% to 10%, with 79% of leavers stating they would recommend Buckinghamshire Council as a place to work.
- New starter surveys were showing a 100% engagement level after 3 months of service.

Thanks were expressed to all staff who continued to work particular hard in this service area.

Gareth Williams, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration informed Members that the DHCLG had issued a new Local Design Guide for Housing Development. The Council was one of 14 across the country that had been awarded grant funding to test the use of guides as part of the planning process.. Work would also be done locally, including engaging with local communities, to develop a local code.

Steve Bowles, Cabinet Member for Communities, informed Members that 2 induction sessions for Community Board Chairmen and Vice Chairmen had been delivered yesterday. He looked forward to working with Community Boards going forward to deliver local initiatives.

Nick Naylor, Cabinet Member for Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services, advised Members that following a competitive process the Council had been awarded grants to bring forward housing as part of the Aylesbury Garden communities and to support the delivery of housing through the land release fund. Typically, activity started on site within one year of the funding being awarded.

Clive Harriss, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, reported that the Aqua Vale Swimming and Fitness Centre had recently suffered from a burst pipe that had caused the control room to be flooded and necessitated the whole facility having to be shut down. Staff were thanked for their diligence in promptly evacuating the building when alarms had been triggered. The facility was now back in operation apart from the water flume.

Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services, informed Members that the Council was continuing to do its utmost for all children in Buckinghamshire including for those that were in care.

The Leader provided an update on the Covid 19 position in Buckinghamshire, as at 2 **June 2021**. The following statistics were highlighted, with the figure three weeks ago then bracketed:

- The infection rate across the whole area was 20.6 cases per 100,000 people (10.5 / 100,000).
- Aylesbury Vale area figure was 20.7 / 100,000 (12.8 / 100,000).

- Chiltern area figure was 19.8 / 100,000 (6.2 / 100,000).
- South Bucks area figure was 12.8 / 100,000 (9.9 / 100,000).
- Wycombe area figure was 24.1 / 100,000 (10.3 / 100,000).
- 328,000 (72%) of people had received their first Covid vaccination, with 220,000 (49%) of people having received both Covid vaccinations. This was in line with vaccination rates nationally.

It was mentioned that the majority of new infections were in the under 60 age bracket and that it only took a small number of infections to see an increase in infection rates (e.g. Chiltern had seen an increase in 13 infections from 6 to 19, and Wycombe had seen an increase in 26 infections from 18 to 42).

5 Question Time

Question from Councillor Robin Stuchbury to Councillor Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services

“Where do you believe Buckinghamshire children who receive support for special educational needs & disabilities are placed against national statistics/criteria? What steps are being put in place to ensure the well-being of children with special education needs and disabilities and who are the responsibility of the Buckinghamshire Council?”

Councillor Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services, summarised her response to Councillor Stuchbury. The full text of the response to the question was as follows:-

“Buckinghamshire children who receive support for special educational needs & disabilities (SEND) achieve as well or better than their peers nationally when looking at average attainment across core subjects. This is true at both primary and secondary levels. Due to COVID -19 the last full set of attainment data is from 2019.

In looking at the key stage two tests at the end of the primary years, 12.1% of primary students with EHCPs achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, 3% higher than the national average. The percentage of primary students receiving SEN support achieving the expected standard was slightly higher than the national average at 26% as opposed to 25.4% nationally.

In the same time period, GCSE students in Buckinghamshire performed 3.2% better than the national average for students with EHCPs (16.9% compared to 13.7% nationally) and 10.6% better than the national average for those with SEN support (43.2% compared to 32.6%).

Looking beyond attainment data, in Buckinghamshire students are also being assessed more effectively for their SEND with 74.7% of EHC plans issued within 20 weeks during 2020 compared to the national average of 58%. Our figures have increased from 40% in 2019 and currently stand at 85% in 2021 with figures to the end of April.

Permanent exclusions within Buckinghamshire have fallen between 2016/17 and 2018/19 from 13 to 8 students excluded across Buckinghamshire with EHC plans and from 41 to 21 students excluded on SEN support across all settings during the same period. The exclusion rate in Buckinghamshire is below the national average for secondary pupils with SEN needs for those with and without plans. However, despite the recent reduction, exclusion rates for SEN students in primary and special schools remains above the national average and continues to be an area of focus for the service. Although the rate is high for special schools, because this is a small cohort, the exclusion of just three children has caused this rise.

In terms of the steps that are in place to ensure the well-being of the children and young people with SEND who are the responsibility of Buckinghamshire Council, the focus on this group as a key priority is highlighted within the Council's Education and Skills Strategy (2018-2022) – which positions SEND as one of its six 'pillars'. The stated aim is to enable excellent outcomes for all children and young people with SEND, not only in terms of their academic achievements but also for their personal and social well-being. Workstreams resulting from this strategic document have led to the introduction of systems and processes that have facilitated the positive progress in SEND provision demonstrated by the statistics above.

Furthermore, the ongoing drive of the Council in meeting the educational and well-being needs of children with SEND is captured in the Council's SEND and Inclusion Strategy (2021-2023), with details against the identified objectives given in the associated SEND Improvement Plan (2021-2023). These core documents were collaboratively produced with key partnership organisations and representatives of the voluntary and community sector. The SEND Improvement Plan identifies eight key priorities:

- SEN Support.
- Sufficiency – Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH).
- Preparation for Adulthood (PfA).
- Joint Commissioning.
- Statutory Performance.
- Quality Assurance.
- Local Offer Advisory.
- Voluntary and Community Sector.

For each of these areas, strategic multi-agency 'Impact Groups' have been established, which oversee the required development and offer accountability for achieving the desired outcomes.

Within the Council's Integrated SEND Service, professionals are tasked with directly supporting the well-being of children with the most significant levels of SEND, as well as providing indirect support through consultation, advice, guidance and training for school staff. As an example, the iSEND Service's Educational Psychology Team run the Nurture Group Network and Emotional Literacy Support Assistant

programmes, which promote the well-being of children with a range of SEND by upskilling members of school staff who can then work closely and consistently with the appropriate pupils in their settings.

More immediately, Buckinghamshire Council has used the Department for Education's Wellbeing for Education Return funding to support a range of programmes targeting positive mental health and well-being for all students, including those with SEND. A further tranche of Wellbeing for Education Return funding has recently been announced, which will enable the continuation of these programmes as well as the initiation/expansion of others. It is anticipated this will include establishing a network of "well-being champions" amongst Buckinghamshire schools, as part of supporting the promotion of best practice across the county."

6 Forward Plan (28 Day Notice)

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

It was commented that as Cabinet Members became more familiar with their portfolios that further items were likely to be added to the Forward Plan.

RESOLVED –

That the Cabinet Forward Plan be noted.

7 Budget Monitoring Outturn 2020/21

Tim Butcher, Deputy Cabinet Member for Resources and HR, introduced the report which set out the overview of the financial Revenue and Capital outturn position for Buckinghamshire Council for the financial year 2020/21. The report took into account the pressures relating to Covid-19 and also the business as usual activity. The outturn would be subject to external audit and to continued pre-audit quality checks.

The Revenue outturn was an underspend of £0.4m, that was an improvement of £0.5m over the forecast reported for Quarter3 and had been achieved through additional Covid-19 funding and active management of overspends. This comprised an adverse directorate variance of £47.6m, offset by a favourable corporate position of £48.0m.

Members were informed that the Council's first year had been exceptionally challenging for financial management. The challenges of bringing together the different systems, policies and practices of the legacy councils continued and had been exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic on ways of working. Appendix 2 provided an indication of the scale of the Council's response to the pandemic itself and the management and maximisation of the multiple associated funding streams continued to provide a challenge.

The revenue budget outturn was detailed in Appendix 1 which also explained the key Directorate variances. The outturn variances were split between Business as Usual and those relating to the Covid-19 response.

While many Councils nationally had struggled with their financial positions over the last year, both as a result of existing pressures, and exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19, the Buckinghamshire Council had delivered against both of these and as a result of Covid-19 continued to hold circa £47m of General Fund Reserves. Given the unpredictability of many of the Council's demand led services it was essential that a reasonable level of reserves was maintained. This reserve constituted just over 10% when compared to our net operating budget of £459m. It was anticipated that the Council would be able to drive out further efficiency savings as a direct result of becoming a unitary authority over the next few years and these would be considered as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

In relation to the impact of the pandemic increased service costs and lost income had meant a directorate overspend of £46.6m. However, this has been completely offset through un-ringfenced government grant meaning a neutral overall impact in relation to Covid. A breakdown of pressures arising from Covid were at Appendix 2.

In terms of Business as Usual activities there was a **£1.0m** Directorate overspend, which had been more than offset through a corporate underspend of **£1.4m** in relation to un-ringfenced grants and unreleased contingencies. The most significant movements in Directorate outturn positions since Q3 had been:

- the allocation of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) to fund equipment spend in Adults;
- an increase in expenditure on Home to School Transport within Children's Services;
- the impact of COVID 19 on Waste costs within Communities Directorate; and
- the increased use of COVID grants to fund pressures.

Full details of these movements were contained in Appendix 1, which also had performance information relating to Late Payments and Sundry Debts.

Capital Budget Outturn

The capital programme outturn position was £169.5m, with underspend/slippage of **£34.4m** (16.9%). This represented an increase of £6.7m from Quarter 3. Over 75% of the slippage related to expenditure on budgets which have not been released. This was primarily due to delays caused by the impact of COVID-19 and the five legacy councils becoming a Unitary Council.

Significant slippage / underspends had been reported in:

- Children's Services (£1.2m).
- Communities (£10.5m).
- Planning, Growth & Sustainability (£22.3m)

The Children's Services slippage related to the Secondary School Places programme, where restricted site access had delayed progress. However, it had proved possible to accelerate spend on Primary School Places, thus mitigating some of the impact reported in Q3. The Communities slippage related to Culture, Sport & Leisure of £3.8m, Highways & Technical Services of £4.9m and Neighbourhood Services of £1.8m. The impact of COVID and severe weather had increased slippage since the Q3 forecast. Planning, Growth and Sustainability slippage largely comprised re-profiling of schemes with unrealistic expenditure profiles inherited from the legacy councils. Detail of the projects could be found in **Appendix 1**.

A key risk for the Council to manage moving forward would be to respond to income levels as business returned to normal, e.g. income from car parking and Council owned properties, which could be impacted if the 21 June date for re-opening the economy was delayed. The Council would also need to be responsive to anticipated demand that had arisen due to Covid but had not yet been identified.

With regards to the financial positions of leisure providers, Members were informed that while Centres were open many classes were still not running to full capacity due to the need to have social distancing measures in place. It was anticipated that leisure providers income streams would rebound quickly when they were able to open without restrictions. Financial planning for 2021-22 had taken into account that the Council might not receive all management fees due from leisure providers.

The Leader drew to everyone's attention Table 1 (Summary of Council Revenue budget outturn) at page 25 of the agenda pack, which provided a good summary of corporate expenditure during the year and funding provided from the Government and other sources that had resulted in the final revenue outturn position that was an underspend of £0.4m.

RESOLVED –

That the current forecast outturn for the financial year 2020/21 and the latest estimates of impacts and funding related to Covid-19 be noted.

9 Confidential Minutes from the Cabinet Meeting held on 30 March 2021

Confidential Minute – Support to provider market as a result of Covid 19

It was commented that paragraphs 3 and 4 at the above confidential minute were the same. It was agreed that paragraph 3 should be deleted.

RESOLVED –

That the confidential minutes from the meeting held on 30 March 2021 be approved as a correct record, subject to the above-mentioned deletion.

10 Date of next meeting

Tuesday 29 June 2021 at 10am