



Buckinghamshire Council

Communities & Localism Select Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES & LOCALISM SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 18 JUNE 2020 IN VIRTUAL MEETING - MS TEAMS, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.33 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

N Brown, P Cooper, E Culverhouse, M Harker OBE, M Hashmi, T Hunter-Watts, P Irwin, P Kelly, G Peart, B Russel, L Smith BEM, L Sullivan, A Waite, L Walsh and J Wassell

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Cole

Agenda Item

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That Mr P Irwin be elected Chairman of the Communities and Localism Select Committee for the ensuing year.

2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED

That Mrs L Walsh be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Communities and Localism Select Committee for the ensuing year.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies for absence were given by Ms L Smith.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following personal interests were declared :-

Noel Brown
Chesham Youth Council

Peter Cooper
Member of The Queens Park Arts Centre, Aylesbury, Community First Responder South Central

Ambulance Service

Emily Culverhouse

Chiltern Voice Radio – Management Team, The Theatre Shed – Management Team
Chesham Youth Council

Mimi Harker

Chairman of Community Impact Bucks, Patron of South Bucks Community Hospice
Vice – Patron of Oasis Partnership, Wycombe Sound Radio

Abdullah Hashmi

Member of a Self-Help Bereavement Society in Wycombe

Paul Irwin

Chairman of Waddesdon Cricket Club, Chairman of Trustees – Bernwode Community Bus, Food Bank and Pantry

Paul Kelly

Councillor at Slough Borough Council – Deputy Chairman of Scrutiny Neighbourhood Panel

Graham Peart

Chairman of One Can Trust, Heart of Bucks – Member of Audit Committee

Luisa Sullivan

Victims First Specialist Counselling Hub (Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner)

Ashley Waite

Bernwode Community Bus, Waddesdon Cricket Club

Julia Wassell

British Association Social Workers – Ambassador, MIND – High Wycombe
Totteridge Community Centre – Member

5 COVID-19 UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health introduced the report. Before he did so the Chairman thanked the volunteers on behalf of everyone for the huge amount of work they had undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic which had been an absolute lifeline to the health and wellbeing of residents in Buckinghamshire.

Local Support Hubs

On 23 March, the Council established eight local support hubs to support those individuals with serious underlying health conditions who were advised to shield. The hubs were envisaged as local collection/distribution/volunteer coordination points. At the outset, a senior manager was allocated as a manager for each hub, with support from local library managers. With support from mutual aid, these managers have drawn in 132 staff from across the council to support them. Each day, data is received from Minister of Housing Communities and Local Government about individuals needing support; this is analysed and passed to hubs. 17,991 were on the shielding list and out of that number 4,052 required assistance which was increased to 6,215 where other vulnerable people had been identified through Adult Services. Hundreds of people have also been provided with emergency food supplies and 659 residents have required regular follow up calls due to their vulnerability.

A website was also set up to help manage the Covid-19 crisis which linked in with 370 different community groups. A volunteer form on the website attracted 1850 people who put their names forward to help. This initial contact work is currently being transferring to the customer services centre, as the Council looks to reduce the work of the hubs. Customer Services dealt with 8,894 contact queries during this period.

A strategic group of charity leaders formed to help the council prepare a coordinated response. This involved Community Impact Bucks and the Clare Foundation hosting the management of over 1800 volunteers, weekly dial in's with the Cabinet Member (which has now moved fortnightly looking at the Recovery Plan) for shared intelligence on emerging trends, issues within the crisis and consideration of both the sector and vulnerable residents in the recovery phases. This included a weekly cross organisational funding group exploring maximising funding coming into and being distributed around the county e.g. Rothschild, Heart of Bucks, LEAP, National Lottery and the Clare Foundation.

The Volunteering and Voluntary Sector cell was quickly formed. Area coordinators were quickly redeployed to the cell to develop links with local C-19 voluntary groups, fulfilling the support needs of local vulnerable people. The locality working arrangements helped forge close relationships with parish councils as they were key in setting up community responses in their area and sharing local data to target the vulnerable. The Cabinet Member also chaired weekly strategic discussion with BMKALC (the Bucks and Milton Keynes Local Association for Town and Parish Councils); gathering shared intelligence on town and parish council needs and sharing best practice.

Councillor Crisis Fund

The fund was £250k of Public Health money, earmarked for Community Boards, which aimed at supporting the excellent emergency work local members and community groups had been doing in their areas. Following the successful collaborative work of the funding group, the Rothschild Foundation has donated a further £50k to the fund. Local members have been actively involved up and down the county in supporting their communities and residents in responding to the emergency. A total of £115,000 had now been spent.

Community Boards

Community Boards have not met yet as the focus from Area Co-ordinators had been on helping the vulnerable but the Boards were expected to start meeting in July.

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health again paid tribute to the huge amount of work undertaken in such a short period of time which had received national and regional recognition. For example the Bernwode Bus was mentioned during Prime Ministers Question Time; an article in the Economist featured a vulnerable person in Buckinghamshire praising community spirit and the Local Government Association had published an early learning Covid recovery plan which mentioned Buckinghamshire twice.

Buckinghamshire libraries have been closed since 24 March in line with the government's instructions. Those library staff not redeployed had focused on expanding and marketing online library services, with immediate and significant results.

During discussion the following points were noted.

- Concern was expressed about the impact of Covid 19 on the Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic communities and a question was asked about the Council's approach to dealing with inequality and deprivation and how much funding had been allocated to Wycombe during

this crisis. The Cabinet Member referred to a recent British Medical Association report which stated that 90% of doctors who had died from Covid were from a BAME background. National research was being undertaken in this area. Death certificates did not have any information on ethnicity so no data could be obtained in this area. The Community Boards and their co-ordinators would lead in engagement with local communities moving forward. They had eight times the budget (£3.9 million) of the previously set up Local Area Forums (£450,000) and would undertake a key role in local recovery plans. In addition this work would be supported by the Health and Wellbeing Board who looked at public health profiles. The Cabinet Member had asked for a report back from the co-ordinators on how they were engaging with their communities to ensure maximum effectiveness.

- A Member referred to the excellent work carried out by the council and the voluntary sector and how this momentum could be built upon and carried forward with recovery plans. The Cabinet Member reported that he was looking at providing training for volunteers on mental health first aid so that they felt equipped to deal with any health concerns in the community. Many of the Area Co-ordinators who had worked in the Local Support Hubs were now working as the Board Co-ordinators so they had a good understanding of each local support network. Previous reference had been made to the Community Boards funding and Emma Denley was also acting as Head of Support Hubs to move forward to business as usual. In recognition of the important role of the voluntary and community sector the Cabinet Member had also suggested that two charities should be included on the Health and Wellbeing Board to represent the Voluntary and Community Sector.
- Support to the community required skills and expertise when dealing with the vulnerable and an example was given of a volunteer being asked to make an assessment of a resident during the Covid-19 crisis. Volunteers needed support from a number of areas including IT, safeguarding and data protection. The Cabinet Member reported that they had a contractual relationship with Community Impact Bucks who allocated roles to volunteers and that any community groups had been asked to sign up to the Council's safeguarding protocol. He also emphasised that many Community Groups and volunteers were completely new and that going forward it was important to ensure that they were trained effectively as mentioned earlier on mental health. This was another area where Community Boards could provide assistance.
- It was agreed that the Cabinet Member would provide information on the break down of all hubs and funding assistance given. Whilst it was important to get the funding out quickly to groups there were a series of checks and balances on the most appropriate way to provide services and whether requests were viable.
- In relation to a question on free school meals, Members noted that this related to the Children and Education Select Committee although there were active projects to provide fresh food for example in Marlow and Chesham Community Fridge. Another question was asked about the location of hubs. Concerns had been raised from Burnham residents that their nearest hub was Beaconsfield and whether those 25,000 residents had been looked after. The Cabinet Member reported that the hubs reached across a number of local areas and that Beaconsfield was the second largest hub in terms of activity (the first being Aylesbury) which should have included support to the residents of Burnham. It was important to clarify whether there had been any issues with delivery, rather than raise concerns that particular local buildings had not been utilised. This could be looked at further through the Committee's Work Programme.
- A Member made reference to those residents who had been furloughed and concerns about future unemployment and the impact on communities, with particular reference to the hospitality industry and theatres. He was aware that this linked across a number of portfolios but it was important that the Council looked at this in a holistic way rather than in silos. As an example Queens Park Art Centre in Aylesbury had a footfall of 60,000 and was a lifeline to some residents. The Council needed to understand this when they made funding decisions.

The Chairman advised that this could be looked at through the Work Programme.

- Social isolation had been a key issue during lockdown and it was important that going forward people did not feel isolated. The Cabinet Member reported that social isolation was a cross partnership theme which had been the main priority of the Health and Wellbeing Board. They had delivered a workshop for 50 organisations who had agreed to run pilots on this area and these would be resumed following lockdown. The Street Associations would also be expanded and other initiatives such as providing funding for ipads for older people who were isolated.
- With regard to anti-social behaviour, Members agreed that it was important to take a sensitive approach as large gatherings of teenagers were not always responsible for anti-social behaviour. The Community Safety Team had been working closely with the police in dealing with ASB and an example of this was an incident in Dorney Lake which was moving into criminal behaviour.

Cabinet Member for Leisure and Sport

- The council's leisure centres, swimming pools and other sports facilities closed on 20 March as part of the national shutdown. For all leisure operators, the closure meant an immediate loss of income, whilst retaining significant ongoing expenditure for essential maintenance. The Council is working closely with all leisure operators to identify opportunities for financial support and to promote financial sustainability.
- Local parks have remained open throughout lockdown to enable people to exercise, albeit with some facilities such as play areas closed in line with Government directives. Following the recent relaxation of restrictions around outdoor exercise, some outdoor facilities have been reopened. Park runs have been cancelled.
- The country parks reopened on 13 May following the relaxation of government restrictions on travel to exercise. Inconsiderate parking has been a real issue during the lock down which the Council has been addressing.

During discussion the following points were noted:-

- With regard to a question asked about Lawn Tennis and when the Academy in Micklefield could be opened, the Cabinet Member referred them to the Leap organisation, County Active Partnership, who provided guidance and support to clubs and coaches. At the moment groups of six people were allowed which included the coach but further information could be found in the following links <https://www.leapwithus.org.uk/https://www.lta.org.uk/about-us/tennis-news/news-and-opinion/general-news/2020/march/coronavirus-covid-19---latest-advice/>
- While public access to the physical archives remains closed, the service has undertaken regular monitoring of the strong rooms. Locally, the Council is working within the Buckinghamshire Cultural Partnership on approaches to support the recovery of the cultural sector across Buckinghamshire, including meetings with the Arts Council and other key partners. Officers have also supported the Cultural Partnership in launching two online projects to contribute to wider delivery of the Buckinghamshire Cultural Strategy, whilst being specifically tailored as a response to COVID-19: Lockdown Stories, in partnership with University of Buckingham and 'Bucks in 100 Objects', both of which received good engagement; and supported the development of a bid with National Paralympic Heritage Trust to Esmee Fairbairn Foundation for a project to sustain engagement with collections, which if successful will benefit 10 museums and heritage centres across Bucks with development of virtual, accessible tours.

Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services

- Cemeteries and Crematoria experienced an increased demand for burials and cremations

across the sector, and there was a requirement for daily monitoring and forecasting to maintain service capacity. Trained staff from across the Council had volunteered to help this service providing a supervisory role for burials, chapel assistants and administration as some key members of staff were recovering from Covid. Cessation of services by neighbouring crematoria had led to an increase out of area demand.

- Major changes were made to operational delivery of licensing services, with almost all staff working remotely. The services reacted agilely to applicants and licensees. In house MOT and taxi testing were now operating and the service was working on a backlog of applications to process including taxi plates and badges.
- Environmental Health & Trading Standards have been working collaboratively with the Police regarding interpretation of changes to the coronavirus regulations and enforcement of those regulations. COVID19 scams which have increased by 40% are a growing problem but are being tackled head on by Trading Standards teams who are providing general advice and messages via social media platforms, website and email newsletters. Pressure is starting to grow regarding a backlog of complaints and inspections, particularly relating to issues such as noise and odour. Sensitivities have been heightened by lockdown, and these matters will be prioritized as part of recovery planning

The Committee thanked the Cabinet Members for their updates and the work carried out during the Covid -19 crisis.

6 KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2020/21

The Cabinet Members outlined their priorities for the year as set out in the presentation attached to the agenda. During the meeting they made the following additional points :-

Cabinet Member for Sports and Leisure

The main priority was to get all sport facilities open but there are a number of issues to address to promote social distancing and the safety of customers and staff. Close contact sports such as rugby could not be played at present but other sports such as cricket are likely to return soon.

Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services

- Crematoria Service had built up resilience in case there was a second wave.
- Licensing – the high street, leisure services and hospitality were dependent on this service which needed to be fast and flexible to help open businesses so they could use open spaces or start up take away services. A piece of work was being undertaken on taxi licensing policies bringing disparate policies together for all areas. It was important this was undertaken sensitively with the impact on the industry from covid and helping them all back to business.
- Environmental health services – work needs to be carried out on harmonising policies in addition to air quality strategies and how environmental policies could best support these. Pest control charges would need to be harmonised as well.

Cabinet Member for Culture

The Cultural strategy was a top priority. In the Council budget one third of one percent of the operating expenditure had been allocated to this area and nothing in capital expenditure. The Strategy therefore had to leverage that very small resource by activity and influence and seeking help from external funding. When the Cultural Strategy was developed there were four objectives;

1. A thriving economy and more high-quality jobs
2. Equality of access to cultural activities and opportunities
3. Improved health and wellbeing of the population
4. Re-vitalised heritage and transformed places.

An embryonic partnership was set up by the Council which will help to deliver the strategy. In November two co-chairs were appointed to the partnership and the Rothschild Foundation also one of the partners, has provided funding for an outreach worker. The Partnership Board held a meeting on 18 May and the agenda looked at how the Cultural Strategy could be taken forward. <https://buckinghamshireculture.wordpress.com/cultural-strategy/>

Three important areas of the Strategy are:-

- Identifying cultural assets and increasing the accessibility to those
- Embracing heritage and arts through communication and promotional events
- Valuing the beneficial and economic contribution of culture in our environment

The first of these areas is already underway with an exercise being undertaken by the cultural partnership which can foster accessibility and promotion. Culture is key to council business and touches many portfolios including communities, leisure, libraries, town centres, planning, environment.

The Community Boards will have a large role to play in bringing local cultural activity to the fore, supporting its infrastructure and offering funding. A toolkit is being developed for Community Boards. The existing heritage policy will also need reviewing. The beneficial cultural and social use of properties, visitor and tourism development will help improve physical and mental wellbeing, education, youth and adult services. The challenge this year is to ensure that the Strategy establishes a firm footing in the Council to move forward with the cultural partnership

Museums and Archive Accommodation – accessibility is a key factor in the use of public resources. Bucks County Museum and Wycombe Museum are looking at reopening their popular outdoor garden space whilst engaging people with online activities. Funding is currently being sought to cover virtual tours. Long term, the Council can start to review its inherited properties and the one public estate initiative to improve access for residents and enhance town centre revitalisation and potential for storing collections.

The Centre for Bucks Studies (archives) remains closed but is providing a digital service. Moves are underway to review accommodation, as well as recruitment for a new county archivist.

Theatres have been impacted by loss of income through Covid-19; Wycombe Swan and Waterside in Aylesbury are run by different commercial theatre groups. There are no plans to reopen currently but even with social distancing it would made events uneconomical. Theatres have been provided with some pandemic funding and also receive some subsidies as part of agreements. Theatre groups are part of a national debate with the government and the Council will be working with theatres in gaining support for external funding to ensure their survival through to more viable times.

Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health

- Setting up of the Strategic Partnership Group
- Town and Parish Charter – improving communications
- Creation of a voluntary and community strategy – doing something different with VCS

- partners to harness their enthusiasm that has been sown through the pandemic
- Localities is a brand new area for the Council and Teams need to redefine their roles to add value; it should not be legacy work.
- Community boards are a big initiative and investment for the Council and all the Chairman are very enthusiastic about their roles. Sub groups may be set up for local initiatives.
- Devolution– pilots would need to be undertaken with a good geographic spread.
- Prevention – further development work on street associations and partnership work on community safety work with the police. Other areas include work with the Health and Wellbeing Board and the stepping down of hubs
- Review of grants
- Recovery Plans relating to covid

A Councillor, Simon Cole, who was not a Member of this Committee attended the meeting to ask a question :-

Please could you include anti-discrimination as a key priority this year? A strategy to achieve this should in my own view include: 1) equality and diversity training for council members, 2) elucidation over what “institutional discrimination” is and how it can be managed, 3) identification of community groups who are granted protected status, and 4) how we might strive to protect “protected groups” and maintain their right to equality.

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health responded that:-

1. There would be training for Members. As Buckinghamshire had only become a new Council recently, Member Induction Training was being undertaken in phases so that members were not deluged with too much information in one go. Also with the pandemic the Council had to move quickly to offer this online. This was a very important part of the Induction Programme as councillors act as ambassadors for their communities. Further work would be undertaken on the new council approach to community cohesion integration and building on the work of the legacy councils and good practice.
2. The Councillor was raising an important issue, particularly in view of recent international events. There was a zero tolerance policy in the Council. The equalities policy was agreed as part of the Shadow Authority in March. The framework also includes the requirement to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment on service proposals. For example an EIA was undertaken for the decision on Community boards. When the consultation was carried out it was flagged up that the BAME groups weren't really interacting with the localised offering of the Council and this would be one of the tasks of the Co-ordinators to reach out more effectively. He was expecting a report back on this issue. There was also mandatory training and equality training for all staff and equality screening as part of the procurement process, the Council were Members of the Employers network for equality and inclusion. However, this was no substitute for engaging with residents and acting as Community Leaders.
3. Community Boards would be identifying community groups and reaching out to them. Work was also undertaken by the Equalities Officer at the Council.
4. As above – Community Boards

A Member commented that travellers were also protected by the Equalities Act and expressed the view that the Council should help these groups as much as possible.

During discussion on the Cabinet Member priorities the following points were made:-

A Member referred to art, media and design and made reference to the huge asset of community radio which had been invaluable during the covid crisis. Many stations were struggling to survive because they were not receiving any advertising revenue. The Cabinet Member for Culture said the culture was key in Buckinghamshire and he particularly referred to Pinewood Studios and the National Film and TV school. Many small organisations which also played a part in grass roots culture were struggling. Some organisations have received grants and others have been furloughed such as theatres. The Member commented that community radio had not received any funding and suggested some financial assistance could be offered through business rate relief or help with rent.

Another Member referred to financial support for small organisations who had received help from their legacy councils which would continue for the first year. However, organisations needed longer term financial certainty. There would be a review of grants. Reference was made to the Budget Scrutiny undertaken by the shadow council where it was mentioned that grants might be paid through community boards. Whilst local knowledge was important there could be some organisations who may suffer from this process as their organisation covered the whole County or a large part of the County. Members were informed that the Cultural Strategy supported arts to seek external funding as only a small amount of money was available for local organisations. The Member commented that Queens Park Art Centre only received a grant of 5% of their annual spend but it helped balance the budget. The Cultural Partnership should be able to help organisations with any recovery plans that were needed.

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health reported that a decision had been made to allow Community Boards to allocate funding because of their local knowledge and if an organisation covered a wider area then Boards could join together to help provide funding. In terms of funding certainty he referred to a number of organisations including the Council who only received funding for a year and had to plan on that basis e.g. Better Care Fund where services had to be procured. With the £250k funding during the pandemic there had been a large number of donations which covered a number of areas in Buckinghamshire e.g. Bucks Mind.

A question was asked about cycling bids. The Corporate Director for Communities reported that there was funding from the Department for Transport to help aid business and recovery by providing temporary cycling lanes to help people get to work safely and using social distancing. There was also funding for longer term projects for active travel across Buckinghamshire. Members had been asked to put forward possible schemes so that they could be prioritised. He would be happy to provide information for Members on this area.

A Member referred to all the good work being carried out by food banks but expressed concern that there was duplication and competition between local charities. For example, Wycombe food bank was well established and liaised with all 8 mosques in Wycombe and similar joint working was being undertaken in Aylesbury. However, as a result of Covid other local food banks were being organised and would take all the donated food from supermarkets so that there were no further donations for the larger food banks. It was important that these were carefully co-ordinated to ensure an equitable share of food supply. The Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health reported that this was something the Co-ordinators could address.

Cabinet Members were thanked for their reports.

7 WORK PROGRAMME DISCUSSION

Members of the committee discussed ideas for the work programme. A suggestion was made to

have two Inquiry Groups but it was noted that this would be dependent on resources available to support them.

- Two areas raised on previous items – Town and Parish Charter and Community Radio
- The covid report states that the relationship between the voluntary sector and the Council has been two way. These have worked well because the volunteers feel valued and that their voices will be heard because they are recognised by the Council. How will the Council build on this partnership working as without the voluntary and community sector our towns and villages would suffer ?” (email from a councillor who was unable to attend
- Recovery Plan following Covid – looking at the Council’s vision and where the Council will be next May and the longer term – making communities and the Council stronger as a result.
- Mapping of charities and key community groups across the County to ensure an efficient structure, no duplication (e.g food share groups) or gaps and incorporating the vision of the VCS and the Council in order to make communities stronger and more cohesive. This should incorporate looking at what the VCS does outside of the Council and further opportunities for joint working.
- Focussing on older and younger people – ensuring that they are supported in the community through leisure services, youth clubs and ensuring that those vulnerable adults who were supported through Covid continue to be supported.
- Resilience in local areas – supporting the local economy such as pubs and villages shops, the high street and organisations such as churches who have played a huge role during Covid and the impact of unemployment on local communities and increase in demand for council services
- Community Governance Review – it was noted that this issue was being discussed at the next Standards and General Purposes Committee

It was agreed that the Scrutiny Support Officer would draft the Work Programme which would be discussed with the Chairman and Vice Chairman and brought back to the next Committee for approval.

8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 24 September 2020 at 10am.