



Buckinghamshire Council

Communities & Localism Select Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES & LOCALISM SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2020 IN VIRTUAL MEETING VIA MS TEAMS, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.07 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

Mark Ormerod

Agenda Item

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/ CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP

There were no apologies for absence.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Members declared an interest under item 7 :-

- Cllr Peter Cooper declared a personal interest as Chairman of Queens Park Arts Centre.
- Cllr Graham Peart declared a personal interest as Trustee of One Can Trust.
- Cllr Mimi Harker declared a personal interest as Chairman of Community Impact Bucks and Patron and Vice Patron of various charities.
- Cllr Paul Irwin declared a personal interest as Chairman of Trustees of Bernwode Community Bus and Waddesdon Cricket Club.

Under item 7 and 8 :-

- Cllr Linda Smith declared a personal interest as Chairman of Chalfont St Peter Parish Council and Chairman of the Village Action Group.
- Cllr Tom Hunter-Watts declared a personal interest as a Member of Aylesbury Town Council and a Board Member of the Mid Thames and Buckinghamshire Relate

3 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

5 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

The Chairman provided the following update:-

- A public consultation had been launched on proposed new rules for taxi licensing which would run from 10 November to 21 December. A summary of the policy and the full draft document was available online at yourvoicebucks.citizenspace.com. At the meeting in September a Member had flagged up advertising and this would be a good opportunity for views such as this to be put forward.
- Following on from the last meeting and discussion about community buses if Members were interested in having a future item on this please could they let the Scrutiny Officer aware - Members could be invited who have already set up community buses.

6 COVID UPDATE - VERBAL UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND PUBLIC HEALTH

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health provided the following update on covid-19:-

- Multiple meetings were being held with key partners such as the health sector, police, fire and the voluntary and community sector to ensure a co-ordinated response.
- The website was regularly updated <https://covid-dashboard.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/>. Weekly rate of confirmed cases per 100,000 was 161 in Buckinghamshire compared to 272 in England, which was still relatively low, but there was no room for complacency (Aylesbury 133 Chiltern 124 High Wycombe 194 South Bucks 214). There were no ICU admissions at this time. Walk through testing sites were open 7 days a week included the Gateway Centre car park in Aylesbury and the new Buckinghamshire New University Campus in High Wycombe. The mobile testing sites were Marlow, Buckingham, Gerrards Cross and High Wycombe. These could be booked by calling 119.
- Vaccinations – the Covid-19 vaccine approved for use in the UK was Pfizer/BioNTech and the Council were working closely with NHS providers on the logistics of administering the vaccination.
- Information and support for businesses was available on <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/coronavirus/coronavirus-business-support-hub/>. A number of business grants were available to help with local restrictions.
- Residents were encouraged to sign up to the Leaders newsletter for further information <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/coronavirus/>
- The Council was taking on some responsibility for tracing as residents called with a local number were more likely to respond.
- There was infrastructure support for the 20,000 clinically vulnerable, including more slots for supermarket delivery and support from the voluntary and community sector. The <https://directory.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/> online directory provided links to 400 local organisations willing to help. If residents did not have access to a computer they should ring 01296 395000 for further support.

During discussion :-

- The Cabinet Member responded to a question on support for residents with learning disabilities during the pandemic and said that he had just taken part in an all parliamentary briefing talking about mental health and people with learning disabilities. Support groups were being kept open to help residents in addition to support from adult and children's services.
- A recent article referred to a data error in the Chiltern area with student figures being included on their parents' home addresses. The Cabinet Member reported that the Public health team had been aware of this issue for a month and reassured Members that the statistical impact was 10% and would not impact on tiering.
- Vaccinations were being led locally by Richard Barker Corporate Director for Communities. There were three layers of vaccinations; hospital sites for health care staff, mobile teams for nursing and care homes and for resident's primary care networks. The Council was sourcing venues for mass vaccinations.

7 VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY STRATEGY (VCS) UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health reported that one of the areas that the Covid 19 pandemic had highlighted was the impressive partnership collaboration with the voluntary and community sector. The response from the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) from the very first week of lockdown had been phenomenal. Buckinghamshire had a population of 550,000 with a diverse spread of needs. 1800 volunteers stepped forward through the Clare Foundation and Community Impact Bucks. The partnership had been working together through key disciplines such as financial insecurity, providing food to those in need and supporting mental health issues.

The partnership already had strong foundations before the pandemic and have worked together as a VCS Strategic Group for the last three years. The Cabinet Member commented that the Strategic Funding Group worked together to co-ordinate funding across Buckinghamshire and with the Covid-19 pandemic was more enmeshed with the Council than it was before. They were represented on the Strategic Partners Board, Health and Wellbeing Board, Children's Partnerships and the Corporate Plan.

Mark Ormerod (Chairman of the VCS Recovery Partnership Board and Director of Leap) reported that this year had seen the fastest period of change in the voluntary and community sector with the covid-19 pandemic with groups and individuals coming together to help support their communities. The response nationally and in Buckinghamshire had been incredible with unification against this common threat. There were 4,700 community organisations and 2,500 charities in Buckinghamshire. The funding partners have invested £1.6million in assisting communities. The Board was at an evolutionary stage and he commented that it was important to keep the momentum going and to recognise the vulnerability of the voluntary sector and to monitor resilience as it would be difficult to replace if it was lost. Many charities were dipping into their reserves. In terms of charity donors and corporate responsibility they were looking at a 'cliff edge' in the next 12-14 months as many individuals and companies were feeling the squeeze from the pandemic.

It was important to ensure that there was cohesion and connection into the Community Boards with the VCS sector and at the micro level that there was granular insight and solutions to fixing problems locally. Through issues like food poverty, homelessness etc. they were connected at a local level and you could get a number of organisations tackling this issue but not working together as well as they could be.

The Service Director for Localities and Strategic Partnerships reported that the VCS were critical partners and that they have been connected into every part of the discussion and if any decisions were required, the Council could go to the VCS Recovery Board who acted as a sounding board. A Workshop was held on 25 August hosted by the Clare Foundation to look at co-designing the VCS Strategy.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- A Member welcomed the approach and the information provided on the work on the draft Strategy. She expressed concern about the resilience of the voluntary and community sector, particularly as some organisations were dipping into their reserves. It had also been difficult to fund raise during the pandemic. Everyone needed to be supporting charities, voluntary organisations and groups including businesses in their local areas to make communities more resilient.
- Another Member also expressed concern about this and that the impact some organisations had on local communities was not always understood. He gave an example of Queens Park Art Centre in Aylesbury. If there wasn't any support not only would this organisation be difficult to be replaced but there would be financial implications for the Council, including additional support required for resident's mental health. Funding for these organisations was key and whilst the community boards could help support local community groups consideration needed to be given to groups that covered a wider area.
- A further comment was made that there was a huge industry involved with the VCS and looking at charities that have an income under £1million make up 82% of the income in the charitable sector. The smaller charities were based in the rural areas, addressing BME issues and less likely to have access to reserves. There was a perception that charities who had above £1million income had an advantage in bidding for contracts in the public sector. Smaller organisations were unlikely to have full time fundraisers. It would be very difficult to map the VCS in Buckinghamshire. She would rely on the Community Boards to protect the smaller organisations and she commented that some organisations may not be aware of funding available from these Boards. The Chairman reported that his Community Board were looking at having a small grants panel to look after these smaller organisations who found it difficult making bid applications.
- Reference was made to legacy Councils who had supported some unique charities. In Chiltern there were the Revitalisation Groups who had funding secured for this year but for future years had been told to work with Community Boards. An example was given of the Misbourne Midsomer location trail which had been set up to support local businesses. It had received some traction through a walking festival but because of the pandemic many businesses had been closed temporarily.
- In response to the points made above the Cabinet Member reported that the Council had limited resources and would not be able to support all community groups in Buckinghamshire but it was important to be smart about how funding was utilised. Some larger charities had also approached the Council expressing concern about their funding as they would not be able to apply to Community Boards. The Council did have a central grants co-ordinating role. He gave an example of the Citizens Advice Bureau who had previously been supported by legacy councils and provided a critical role for residents. They would be supported through the central grants system which included a grants policy. In terms of mapping out organisations having 16 Community Boards would help provide a clearer picture of organisations covering Buckinghamshire. The Cabinet Member reported that he felt that the Council had a good process in place with the central grants system being supported by Community Boards. Mark Ormerod reported

that as part of the VCS Recovery Board one of their main aims was to access national funding and lever that into Buckinghamshire. One of the issues was that Buckinghamshire was perceived as an affluent County and officers needed to provide granular insight into the needs of local communities. Individual organisations should play to their own strengths locally with an awareness of the system they were operating in linking in with Community Boards and the wider centralised funding streams.

- A question was asked about what metrics the Council would be using to measure the success of the Strategy and the key indicators used to do this. The Council was living through unprecedented times and it was important that the voice of the VCS was heard particularly those organisations that did not have access to social media or internet connection. The Cabinet Member reported that the Strategy would be organic and it would need to be flexible and responsive to ensure that the VCS groups were part of collaborative and partnership working which was key to the Strategy being successful. He referred to the Working Together examples in the slides such as the Partnership Capacity Fund which was a collaboration of Heart of Bucks, the Rothschild and the Clare Foundation and encouraged applications which helped address key areas such as physical activity and health and helped marginalised groups. Particular reference was made to a £73k grant being awarded to the consortium led by The Oasis Partnership for their project Listen Learn Adapt which was intended to work closely with BAME communities to support community engagement. It was important to protect the VCS and vital information provided by Public Health was used to direct resources. There was a trend of social prescribing by Primary Care Networks and services needed to continue so that referrals could be made to a range of local, non-clinical services to address people's needs in a holistic way. A measure would be the need to protect all parts of the VCS and marginalised groups. There were 5349 responses to the health impact survey which could also be used as a measure of success. Mark Ormerod referred to escalation reporting with key reporting from sector specialists and logging issues, profiling them in terms of impact and then address them accordingly. There were also national data logs which had been shared with Community Impact Bucks and as the emerging voluntary framework was developed it was important to have the right metrics which were shared jointly where each partner could hold each other to account. There was some good data from the business intelligence unit regarding social determinants on how fair and equitable Buckinghamshire was to live and work in which could be applied as the framework was developed. There were good metrics already of the investments that had been made in food, health and wellbeing and debt management. The Service Director reported that the VCS Recovery Board worked well strategically on sharing intelligence and could pick up early warning signs. The Delivery Plan would be crucial and the VCS Recovery Board would drive this forward using engagement sessions across Community Boards.
- A Member commented that a few charities were operating at capacity particularly during the pandemic. For example, food banks were operating at 2.5 times their normal activity and in the future there would be an issue of funding, volunteers and space. In the future there would be pressure of debt and it was important that they were supported in their work.
- A recommendation was suggested that with changing times and the new unitary authority it was important that all grants were co-ordinated across Buckinghamshire by a director of charitable funds who could raise awareness for all small, medium and large charities on what funding was available. Grants were currently supplied from a number of areas such as the Strategic Funding Group, Community Boards and High Wycombe Town Committee and it was important to provide clear information to community groups on funding opportunities.
- In connection with the comment made above a Member stated that it was important to

send out early communications to charities and voluntary organisations to provide a clear understanding on what funding would be available next year and longer term so that organisations could plan. Another Member commented that Community Impact Bucks sent out a list of available grants with a link on how to obtain funding. She commented that a small grant went along way and Member support was really important.

- Particular concern was raised about youth club support especially helping young people during covid and the need for increased funding and support e.g. training youth workers. The Cabinet Member reported that there were some interesting innovative projects being undertaken through the devolution offer to help increase provision. Mark Ormerod commented that as the Stoke Mandeville event for young people was cancelled they had used the £20,000 funding to purchase and distribute bags of equipment - 600 families had been helped through the pandemic and the project had been co-ordinated and funded through children centres, Latimer Trust (who delivered bags along with food parcels), Rothschild and Clare Foundations and Heart of Bucks.
- It was noted that the Councillor Crisis Fund was used during the summer whilst Community Boards were being set up and for this process approval was required from three councillors. This had now been replaced by applying for funding through Community Boards. A recent example was given in Amersham where a £2 million state of art development had been given £25,000 infrastructure funding from a Community Board. There were set criteria. The Director of Leap reported that there was information on micro grants on all funding websites with links available to other sources of funding. He commented that they had discussed developing a flowchart to help signpost local organisations to funding opportunities through geography and size of funding.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member, Chairman of the VCS Recovery Partnership Board and Service Director for their excellent update on their work.

8 TOWN AND PARISH COUNCIL CHARTER

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health introduced the report and stated that the Charter was still under development given the time lost due to coronavirus, but a lot of preparation work and focus on building collaborative cultures had been done. The Service area had focused on developing key relationships and many of the operational aspects, such as regular liaison arrangements with BMKALC (Bucks & MK Association of Local Councils), clerks and communications, were in place.

The charter would act as a framework (memorandum of understanding) to support partnership working and inform Buckinghamshire Council's approach to liaison with local councils. It would set out the relationship between the new Buckinghamshire Council and the 169 town and parish councils in Buckinghamshire, including how to harness the opportunities to strengthen partnership working and improve services for residents. It set out the joint principles and respective roles, responsibilities and expectations, and it would be a live document which would be refreshed regularly in consultation with town and parish councils.

A working group of clerks had been established ahead of vesting day, their expertise and shared vision was helping the charter evolve. There was appetite from local councils to not simply produce a product that sits on the shelf but instead took time to co-design a charter so the dynamic end product added value. The group had met again since the pandemic started to ease to check on progress and consider how a 'launch' might now work given social distancing measures and a parish conference no longer appropriate. They were currently reviewing a second draft ahead of sharing this wider across all town and parish councils.

In particular the Cabinet Member referred to the following:-

- The Town and Parish newsletter was continuing as clerks found it extremely useful.
- The nature of the relationship with all Councils was key - it was important that the charter was relevant for larger and smaller councils across Buckinghamshire.
- The partnership working had been good – undertaking planning, working with Community Boards, looking at new ways of working including the devolution offer which had attracted attention.
- Localities and Strategic Partnerships were a new service and critical relationships were being developed with the Council, clerks and the new Community Board Co-ordinators to understand each other's roles.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- A Member commented that the Charter was very aspirational and asked whether enough resources would be provided to deliver the Charter. She commented that some Parish and Town Councillors did not have capacity to take on any further work. The Cabinet Member reported that the draft Charter would be sent out for consultation and that everyone who wanted to participate could do but that no resource implications would be imposed from the centre. The Charter would be a strategic framework working relationship document which would set the tone for a good working relationship and would not go into operational detail. The Chairman commented that it was also important to consult Members of Parish meetings in rural areas.
- Reference was made to the fact that High Wycombe was unparished and it was important that the level of consultation with this community was the same as other areas including any resources for social cohesion and uplift. The Cabinet Member reported that they would consult Members and clerks on the document including informing Community Board Co-ordinators. In terms of additional resources officer support was provided by the Service Area including weekly calls between the Deputy Chief Executive and Parish and Town Council representatives since the start of covid-19. In terms of devolution some councils want all services devolved including property and services whilst other did not. Devolution was not a priority at the moment but some pilots were going ahead.
- Another Member expressed concern about the democratic deficit in High Wycombe and was reassured that the town would not lose out in any way. The Cabinet Member reported that the High Wycombe Community Board was one of the most proactive Boards and were the first Board to develop a recovery strategy for covid-19.
- A Member who was also a Town Councillor welcomed the charter and asked about timescales for devolution. In response it was noted that apart from the pilots, devolution would not be taken forward until 2022. Any short term resource implications would be communicated early to Councils. The Team working on devolution were aware of budgeting processes for town and parish councils.

The Cabinet Member and officers were thanked for attending the Committee and for providing an excellent update on their work.

9 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health gave an update of recent and planned activity regarding Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) as follows:-

- The Service were monitoring demand for DVA services during lockdown as this was a difficult time for victims.

- DVA was a strategic priority in the Safer Buckinghamshire Plan for 2020-2023 and had a detailed delivery plan – key actions had been included in the report.
- A communications strategy had been produced around White Ribbon Day 2020 and there would be a whole week of promotion for this campaign week beginning 23 November 2020. Each day would focus on different victims.
- Buckinghamshire had a network of 460 DVA champions who were able to signpost victims to local domestic abuse resources and support services.
- The Thames Valley BAMER Project - supported by the nine Local Authorities in Thames Valley and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) set out to identify the barriers experienced by women from ethnic minority communities and gypsies and travellers, who were subjected to abuse or violence when needing to access support, and to identify lessons for improving service responses.
- Safe Accommodation Project – the MHCLG have given £70k in funding for Buckinghamshire to help provide wrap around support for those with complex needs for the first six weeks up until placement in temporary accommodation and potentially for a few weeks after if required.
- 14 Domestic Homicide Reviews have been conducted in Buckinghamshire since their introduction in 2011. One of the Safer Buckinghamshire Plan actions was to hold regular DHR learning events.
- There was a lot of cross partnership working and particular reference was made to the Wycombe Women’s Aid Impact Report 2019/20 which included DVA statistics.

During discussion the following comments were made:-

- The Christmas present appeal had raised over £4,000 in over a week and families who were in refuges would benefit from this appeal.
- A Member referred to a recent announcement from the Government regarding a funding boost for victims of rape and domestic abuse because of the greater demand for services during lockdown. The Government was investing £80 million in a range of measures to reduce delays and deliver speedier justice for victims. There was £11 million to support victims and £7 million would be used for a range of innovative programmes mainly aimed at perpetrators designed to prevent domestic abuse. The Member commented on the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner research which had commented on the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes. The Member who was also a magistrate stated that a letter to the perpetrator from the police was not enough and that the behaviour of perpetrators, which could be linked to childhood experiences, should be addressed through an effective Programme. This was an important area to look at for their themed meeting in March. The Communities Project Manager reported that it was a great announcement yesterday but it was still unclear how much funding Buckinghamshire would receive. The funding would be distributed by the OPCC.
- A Member commented that this was such a serious issue that impacted on all families alike, regardless of their economic status and also he referred to diverse communities where there was even a greater concern because of accessibility of services due to their culture. The Chairman welcomed this comment and stated that in many communities there was an issue of stigma that needed to be addressed.
- In connection with this a Member referred to the BAMER network which she was part of and asked whether she could link in with the Communities Project Manager to start a dialogue about the best way to help support diverse communities. The Communities Project Manager reported that this link would be really helpful and could also help contribute to a Task and Finish Group being set up as a result of one of the recommendations of the Thames Valley BAMER report.

- Reference was made to Domestic Homicides and the importance during lockdown to raise awareness and to make sure victims were utilising the services available. A Member commented that she was pleased that reference had been to the gypsy and traveller communities as there was a high domestic violence rate in this community with the added pressures of lockdown. She asked how services were being advertised currently particularly support with anger management, which sometimes had to be funded by the perpetrators rather than being funded by the court. It was important to address concerns quickly before a homicide occurred. The Communities Project Manager reported that the gypsy and traveller communities was the subject of the next learning event which was taking place in June 2021 and they were in the process of booking a speaker from this community. She also commented that anger was not a cause of domestic abuse; it was a power and control issue and anger could often be used as an excuse. The Council were working with the OPCC on perpetrator programmes. The Cabinet Member commented that they were liaising with the gypsy and traveller community on DVA and also referred to work being undertaken by Christians against poverty on debt counselling. They had picked up cases and been able to offer early help including accommodation support where required. He recommended to Members to read the Thames Valley BAMER report which included a number of recommendations including on perpetrators [thames valley bamer report](#) The Council needed to work on this area as it was an important issue to address.
- Luisa Sullivan asked about the network of 460 DVA champions and whether it was appropriate for councillors to join. The Communities Project Manager said that it was important for councillors to be champions as well. The Cabinet Member referred to the White Ribbon campaign and asked Members if they could help raise awareness particularly with their specific communities. Further mention was made of the need to have male champions as well. Male victims according to the national data accounted for one third of people reporting however, most victim services were exclusively for women. A review was being undertaken this Autumn of the support required for male victims in Buckinghamshire. At a previous session of the DVA Champion's Network they had a male victim as a guest speaker and this was important to start breaking down barriers.
- Concern was expressed about voids with housing associations. Voids in housing terms was when a property was unoccupied for a period of time and the aim was to keep voids to a minimum. A Member emphasised the importance of getting victims of violence and abuse into safe accommodation as soon as possible. The Communities Project Manager said this was a priority for the service area, particularly with the new Domestic Abuse Bill which strengthened housing support for victims.
- Another part of the Bill was acknowledging children as victims in their own right. A Member commented that often children who were abused could become perpetrators. The Communities Project Manager reported that it was important that the child's voice was heard at the newly established Domestic Abuse Board.
- The Chairman asked what telephone number could be used by victims in the evening if they didn't want to phone the police and was referred to the National Domestic Abuse Helpline 0808 2000 247.

The Cabinet Member and Communities Project Manager were thanked for their excellent contribution to the meeting.

10 DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME AND UPDATE ON INQUIRY

In terms of the Inquiry Group which was looking at the effectiveness of the community grants

during the covid-19 pandemic Members were provided with the following update:-

- The suggested methodology for the Inquiry had been discussed with the Cabinet Member, the Service Director and the Inquiry Group for their comments.
- The Inquiry Group consists of the Chairman Paul Irwin, Ashley Waite, Graham Peart, Mimi Harker, Linda Smith and Peter Cooper.
- As part of the methodology two questionnaires had been drafted to go out to all Members and all Community Groups for feedback on the Councillor Crisis Fund. The questions were a balance of written and numerical responses to provide some rating on its success.
- A letter had been drafted to be sent to the Strategic Funding Group.
- The idea was to have four short informal sessions in the afternoon in December/January. The first two sessions would hopefully involve the Strategic Funding Group, Community Board Chairman and another Council who has undertaken a similar exercise.
- The second two sessions would include community groups who have benefitted from the grant and would be split into three areas food (including established groups and pop-ups), mental health and finance and technology.

If Members have any views about which community groups they would like to invite to an informal session please could they inform the Scrutiny Officer urgently including whether any Committee Members were interested in attending any of the sessions.

11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING
21 January 2021 at 10am.