

Questions for Council Meeting 15th July 2020

Question to the Cabinet Member for EDUCATION AND SKILLS from Cllr Abdullah Hashmi:

Q1 Would the Cabinet Member tell us the number of children in junior schools in the catchment area of the Bourne End Academy, who do not put BEA as their 1st choice?

692 pupils out of a total of 737 in the catchment area for Bourne End Academy did not list it as a first choice. It should be noted that 220 children in the catchment identified a grammar school as their first preference.

Question to the Cabinet Member for EDUCATION AND SKILLS from Cllr Robin Stuchbury:

Q2 Have Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools made a decision as to if and when the 11+ exam will take place? Will the uncertainty around this have consequences for Buckinghamshire Council in planning future resources in the Secondary sector, particularly with regard to delivering appropriate school places?

At this point, The Buckinghamshire Grammar Schools (TBGS) have announced their preference for the test date for the secondary selection paper to be the first week back after the October half term (week commencing 2nd November). TBGS are awaiting guidance to be released from the Department for Education before confirming these arrangements.

Question to the Cabinet Member for LOGISTICS from Cllr Rafiq Raja:

Q2 Traffic congestion is a big problem, not only for its emissions as engines idle, witness the dramatic reduction in air pollution due to the lockdown, but it would appear to be the biggest obstacle, for new start-ups and businesses considering relocation in Buckinghamshire. The “School Run” is a major contribution to traffic congestion and inefficient use of carbon-based fuels, when there are alternatives available. In the circumstances would the Cabinet Member not agree that it makes no economic or environmental sense to force parents to pay the full market rate for school bus transport?

The Council is fully committed to supporting parents to transporting children to school. In 2019/20 the Council spent over £8 million on school bus transport. The Council is legally responsible for ensuring that all children who are entitled to free school transport (because of low income, distance to school or the special needs of the child) receive it. In addition, the Council operates a spare seat scheme to enable parents who are not entitled to transport to purchase a seat on a Council run school bus, where spare seats are available. The Council is also supporting other active travel initiatives.

Question to the Cabinet Member for ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE from Cllr Rafiq Raja:

Q1 Will the relevant Cabinet member let us know when Buckinghamshire Council will be publishing a net zero carbon strategy and an implementation action plan?

The Council will be producing its Climate Change Strategy this financial year which will set out how we will progress towards a net-zero carbon position and the actions involved in achieving this.

An important aspect of this is to agree what the target and scope of the Climate Change Strategy will be; the related motion tabled at Council today sets this out and upon this being adopted we can begin the development process.

However work to reduce emissions and address climate change continues regardless. All predecessor Councils were working on climate change across the various functions of the authorities, and this hasn't changed due to the formation of the new Council.

Question to the Cabinet Member for COMMUNITIES from Cllr Robin Stuchbury:

Q1 Please can the Cabinet Member explain how he intends to set a 'baseline' which will enable a meaningful evaluation of the effectiveness of the new Community Boards in their first five years of operation?

The Community Boards are a new initiative for the new unitary authority; this is the start of our journey. As part of ongoing development of community boards we continue to understand best practice and lessons learnt. The Chairman and newly recruited coordinators are getting to understand their areas well and key needs in the community, which has been supported by the new Public Health profiles. There is a communication strategy being implemented as it is important that we clearly communicate the vision of the boards with members, key stakeholders and partners so there is a cohesive understanding of how the boards will operate, allowing us to maximise positive impacts on our communities. With each community board area being unique we are keen to continue to learn from best practice not just from our peers but also from our own 16 boards as they develop. We will look to implement a model of self-assessment and ensure boards are self-senescent to support reflection and the journey they will take.

Question to the Cabinet Member for ADULT SOCIAL CARE from Cllr Robin Stuchbury:

Q1 In light of the considerable pressure that care homes have been under during Covid-19, has the Council been in discussions with providers to ascertain their financial resilience and to ensure continued access and provision for Buckinghamshire's vulnerable adults into 2021 and beyond? What has been the outcome of these discussions?

The Council has established a Covid Provider Cell as part of the adult social care response to the pandemic, which has been in constant communication with care providers during the crisis. As part of the support to care providers, a process has been established which enables care providers to claim for additional costs associated with Covid, and the infection control fund provided by the Government is being distributed as per the grant conditions.

The Council have developed close working arrangements with providers and an email has been set up so that there is a quick route into commissioners who lead on contract management. Through email and ongoing telephone calls, we are having daily conversations with providers. They are telling us about some of their difficulties and challenges. Where this is financial, commissioners work through questions with the providers to help understand the problem in more detail and explore where we can help if we can. Examples of where we have done this is enabling providers to claim for additional staffing costs to cover people being off sick, helping with costs linked to PPE and offering to pay differently to ensure the provider has better cash flow.

Buckinghamshire Council, is like other local authorities across the Country. We are worried that not all providers will survive the impact of Covid. Sadly we won't be able to save all providers. Safeguarding vulnerable adults has to be our priority and we are undertaking a review to ensure we can meet need across the County and across different types of support e.g. people with learning difficulties, older people, dementia etc. In this work, we are also looking at trends to identify future demand to ensure sustainable services into 2021 and beyond. Once we look at the data and analysis, the next step is to discuss this with providers to ensure we align our priorities together. We have spoken to some providers already about this work, who are very much on board and excited about the opportunity to work with us to support vulnerable residents in the best way we can.

Question to the Cabinet Member for YOUTH PROVISION from Cllr Robin Stuchbury:

Q1 Given the challenging and unprecedented times we have been living through, how has the Council sought to support Young Carers? Has respite care been available for them during lockdown and what work has been undertaken with partner organisations across the County to protect the mental health and wellbeing of this vulnerable group of young people?

I thank Cllr Stuchbury for his question.

Carers Bucks are the commissioned provider who deliver support for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers. The initial phase of support during the pandemic was to contact carers registered with the service via email and telephone to check on their wellbeing. Appropriate support was then put into place in response to these enquiries. Support included:

- Links into food banks.
- Liaison with schools.
- Provision of further regular ongoing contact.
- Communication with colleagues/champions in schools has helped access support for vulnerable young carers in the community and to access school placements.
- Letters were also written as evidence to confirm young carer's roles so that they would be permitted to help the person they care for on shopping trips etc.

Further emails have been sent reminding families that we are still working and available to provide support. The contact details of all support workers were included in this communication to make it as easy as possible for young carers to make contact. Websites have been continually updated with pertinent information and links as well as a wealth of resources and activities. These have also been circulated via Facebook. Carers have been invited to a wide range of activities via Zoom groups. The purpose of these sessions have been to maintain contact with carers during this difficult time, provide opportunities to raise concerns, allow respite from caring and to simply have fun. Both young carers and young adult carers have loved the chance to see their friends for a chat and staff have told us that at times they really have not felt needed. No physical respite has been provided during this period due to social distancing regulations.

Question to the Cabinet Member for SPORT AND LEISURE from Cllr Robin Stuchbury:

Q1 Buckinghamshire Council owns a portfolio of leisure assets and has contracts with a number of different providers who run and manage these services for Buckinghamshire residents. In light of the recent lockdown and the fact that leisure centres still remain closed, can the Cabinet Member please outline the discussions he has had with these providers about their financial resilience and the impact of the loss of income to both the providers and the Council as a result of Covid-19?

The Council's contracts are with three of the largest providers in the industry, all of whom have maintained positive and open dialogue with the Council throughout this period. Clearly the pandemic has brought significant financial challenges to the leisure sector, therefore the Government's announcement on 9 July that indoor gyms and swimming pools in England can prepare to begin reopening from 25 July is extremely welcome news.

Factors which will impact on future income, such as the necessary operational changes to promote social distancing and the take-up of leisure facilities, obviously remain uncertain at this stage. However, using the best information currently available, operators have shared anticipated levels of expenditure and income across the Council's leisure centres for 2020/21, which is being assessed and scrutinised in detail by officers, with input from industry expert advisors through support made available from Sport England. It is expected to take time for leisure services to recover and the situation will be kept under close review,

including potential measures to reduce costs and mitigate loss of income over the coming period.

Leisure is one of a number of areas where the Council faces loss of income/increased costs due to Covid; more widely across the sector there is continuing dialogue with Government around the further support that is needed to address the significant pressures that councils are facing.

Question to the Cabinet Member for TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION from Cllr Sebert Graham:

Q1 Would the Cabinet Member responsible for town centre regeneration update us on what the new Council's plans are for the regeneration of the neglected High Wycombe High Street and market so that they are fit for purpose?

At the request of High Wycombe town centre ward members (High Wycombe Town Committee) a meeting took place between councillors and officers to discuss the market at the end of October last year. Following this a specialist firm (Quarterbridge) was commissioned and undertook a review of the market, including a survey of members of the public, in order to produce a series of recommendations for its improvement and revitalisation.

As part of this work, two engagement sessions for councillors were held at the start of March at High Wycombe Council offices. A consultation with market traders has not been possible due to Covid 19 so the finalisation of the review and resulting report has been delayed. Elements of the review are commercially sensitive but a summary of its conclusions will be made available to councillors once it is complete.

In parallel with the work on the market, the Council is making a bid to central government for the Future High Streets Fund for High Wycombe (the only town in Buckinghamshire to get through to the application stage). The bid includes projects relating to the High Street and will be submitted at the end of July. Announcement of successful bids is expected in the Autumn.

The Council continues to work closely with High Wycombe BIDCo and support the development of activations and animations to bring footfall and life back to this part of the town centre
