

Questions on Notice for Council Meeting

21 October 2020

Question(s) to the Leader Councillor Martin Tett

Question 1 from Councillor Majid Hussain:

In the light of some regrettable twitter postings by a member of this council, saying that it was a waste of time to have discussions about Black history or unconscious discrimination, would the Leader agree with me that it is important that council members are not only fully compliant with the law of the land but supportive of diversity training so that we can serve all our constituents?

Response:

Thank you. This question gives me the opportunity to clearly state my policy towards equality for all residents of Buckinghamshire.

I have always been very clear about my commitment to the key principles of: equality of opportunity; and equal treatment and consideration under the law regardless of gender, ethnicity, faith or sexual orientation. As a historian by background, I also welcome the exploration and representation of the history of all of those who have chosen to make Buckinghamshire their home as long as that history is factually accurate, balanced and contextualised. I regret that I was not able to attend the recent launch of 'Black History Month' due to a previous appointment but look forward to doing so next year.

It is also worth adding that repeated surveys have shown that over 80% of Buckinghamshire residents have a strong sense of belonging to their local area. Within Buckinghamshire this council wishes to see the strong, positive relationships between people of all backgrounds and ethnicities maintained and strengthened. This council therefore looks forward to developing and strengthening these relationships and building upon the 'Strengthening Our Communities' theme in our Corporate Plan. I have asked Arif Hussain, Shade Adoh and Dev Dhillon to help lead the development of this approach, along with Mark Shaw as Cabinet Diversity Champion.

As part of this council's response to COVID we have recognised that certain people have an extra vulnerability to Covid. These include people who are over 80 years of age, males, and those with caring occupations. It also includes many of our BAME communities of all faiths and none. As part of our joint working with other partners, including the Buckinghamshire National Health Service, we have worked jointly on a

strategy for our BAME community which aims to identify the clinical, occupational and social causes of their higher propensity to contract Covid and put in place actions to mitigate this. Buckinghamshire Council's Cabinet has been supporting the NHS in developing their proposals and reviews progress via the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Finally, we have established the BAME Covid Members' Group, which has been invaluable in helping to give focus and direction to the council's communications with BAME communities and tailoring messages accordingly. I welcome the cross-Party nature of this involvement.

Question 1 from Councillor Rafiq Raja:

Can the Leader provide reassurance that a proper 'risk assessment' has been undertaken to ensure that Buckinghamshire is not disadvantaged as a result of withdrawing from the Oxford to Cambridge 'ARC Leaders group'?

Response:

I can assure the Labour Leader that I have fully considered the pros and cons of remaining a member of the ARC Leaders Group and, as he knows, discussed these with him prior to the decision. Whilst it is always possible that the ARC might receive some Government funding at some point in the future, I believe that this is outweighed by the major loss of sovereignty that would be entailed in both submitting to a Regional Spatial Strategy, where Buckinghamshire Council would have one vote out of twenty six, and also the prioritisation methodology of where any funding might be allocated, which again is unlikely to favour Buckinghamshire.

The opportunity outside of the ARC Leaders Group is to pursue a policy under our control that is dedicated to Buckinghamshire's best interests. I would welcome the Labour Leader's confirmation that he supports this too.

Question(s) to the Cabinet Member for Resources Councillor Katrina Wood

Question 1 from Councillor Mohammed Hanif:

Local governments graduate development programme is bringing new talent into councils to help them improve local communities.

It's a vital scheme that provides a gateway for graduates to carve out a career in local government. It also ensures that the views of the younger generation are represented at every level within the council.

Councils have until end of March 2021 to express an interest for next year's intake.

What practical steps will the Buckinghamshire Council take in order to recruit students who will truly represent the local communities?

Response:

Buckinghamshire Council plans to recruit its next cohort of graduate trainees to start in October 2021 under the National Graduate Development Programme (NGDP) run by the Local Government Association (LGA).

This programme is co-ordinated locally by HR&OD, we take on 3 graduates bi-annually, to follow an internal programme lasting 2 years. Training involves a rotation of three placements lasting 8 months across the Council to deliver insight and experience across a range of council services.

Our recruitment plans from Autumn 2020 will be to work with the LGA and our recruitment, social media and employment branding team, to actively promote and draw attention to the scheme locally, so that the opportunities reach a diverse range of young people in Buckinghamshire. Promotions are likely to start from the end of 2020 and the timetable for local recruitment is likely to be from March 2021.

Recruitment into the NGPD graduate training programme is part of a range of initiatives to attract and retain new talent and develop future leaders within local government. It supports our strategy for local skills development and employment opportunities for young people at various entry levels - including work experience, apprenticeships, and graduate training programmes. This links to other broader initiatives to help address the economic and social impact of covid-19 in our locality and particularly for our 16-24 age group. A new internal Workforce and Skills Board is being established to monitor and drive BC skills activity and ensure it maps into the wider Buckinghamshire Skills Strategy.

Question(s) to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change: Councillor Bill Chapple OBE

Question 1 from Councillor Chris Whitehead:

Could members be advised as to whether the revenue received from the recently introduced charges for the disposal of non-household waste more than covers the increased costs associated with the collection and disposal of fly tipping that may have resulted from those unwilling to pay the charges?

Response:

The introduction of charges for non-household waste has been successful since its introduction at reducing the costs of the service but still offering residents a way to dispose of hardcore, soil etc.

As a service the introduction of charges for non-household waste has seen two key benefits:

1. Income received to offset the costs of disposing of expensive non-household waste. This comes from the charges residents pay when they bring the waste to the Household Recycling centres.
2. Reduced waste disposal costs in general as less commercial waste has been brought to the sites. Despite the permit scheme and staff vigilance it was difficult to stop traders and/or commercial waste coming on to the site and being deposited for free as household waste. All commercial waste should be paid for if brought to the sites. Since charges were introduced however, less waste has been brought to sites and fewer reports of traders attempting to deposit waste without paying for it.

In terms of recent fly tipping trends, there was no increase in flytipping after the charges were introduced. In Autumn 2018 the fly tipping enforcement team launched the successful SCRAP flytipping campaign which saw incidents drop markedly in the months afterwards. In September 2019 incidents started to increase again, largely as a return to national trends of flytipping increases. It is important to note that our enforcement cases show that more than half of waste fly-tipped in Buckinghamshire has been brought into the county from elsewhere. They also show that more than 60% has been dumped by commercial waste carriers, often called 'trade waste'. Surveillance cameras targeting fly-tipping were operating throughout Lockdown and over 40 offences were detected including traceable vehicle details during Lockdown itself. Of those vehicles only 5 belonged to Buckinghamshire residents.

So there is no clear link to the introduction of charges at Household Recycling Centres and rises in flytipping. This reflects the experiences of other local authorities.

The savings made from introducing charges for disposing of non-household waste are significantly more than the total annual cost of all fly tipping clearances. Recent increases happened more than six months after charges were introduced and appear to be a return to national trends after a successful SCRAP fly tipping campaign, not as a result of changes at HRCs.

Question 1 from Councillor Mohammed Hanif:

Transport is now the biggest emitter of carbon of any sector in the UK. Last year, the LGA, declared a climate emergency that has been looking at the decarbonisation of transport.

The Covid 19 pandemic has forced us all to reevaluate how our transport networks operates but they have not altered our commitment to reach net zero recovery.

What practical set of actions does Buckinghamshire Councils have to work towards our net-zero goal?

Response:

We fully recognise the importance of addressing climate change and the significant contribution of transportation related emissions, both UK wide and in Buckinghamshire. The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly led to significant change in the transportation habits of many, although there is uncertainty regarding

the long term impact. We agree that the impact of the pandemic does not alter our commitment to reach net zero, both for the Council and also the whole of Buckinghamshire, as was agreed at Council on 15 July 2020, but also recognise that our response will need to consider what the long term impact of the pandemic is.

However we continue to take action to reduce emissions from transportation as many of these continue to be the right steps, regardless of the impact of the pandemic. Current examples include:

1. When we lease vehicles to schools, day centres and others we always seek quotes for an electric equivalent vehicle for the customer to consider. We expect to order plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEV) for the latest vehicle replacement at one of our special schools.
2. Our school transport routes are reviewed and optimised to ensure that the most efficient use is made of resources and vehicle miles are reduced as far as possible. We also sell spare seats on contract services to students not entitled to free transport which fills up vehicles and reduces private car mileage.
3. We continue to invest to reduce traffic in town centres and encourage walking, cycling, and public transport use.
4. We are improving connectivity for walkers and cyclists in smaller towns, to support local housing growth.
5. We continue to work with Buckinghamshire LEP to expand superfast, ultrafast and gigabit digital infrastructure to reduce the need to travel, such as the Buckinghamshire Rural Business Broadband project which will see £2.1m invested in broadband in Buckinghamshire.

We are also currently developing our Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy which addresses transportation and will bring forward new actions to help further reduce emissions.

Question(s) to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills: Councillor Anita Cranmer

Question 1 from Councillor Mark Bateman:

Is there any evidence to suggest that the desired progress towards narrowing of the gap for disadvantaged children has been achieved over the last 12 months?

Response:

In the last 12 months we have not had any public examinations which can show us data which would demonstrate a change in the gap between disadvantaged children and others. There has been work carried out by schools across the county to ensure that the gap is addressed. We have asked groups of schools to work together on projects that would best support their children, the projects are focussed on output data for local areas and are designed to address areas of lower performance. One

example of this includes the targeted work we are doing with schools in the Buckingham and Winslow area to improve maths outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. In addition, there has been work carried out and supported on a county -wide level:

- Support all Early Years providers with assessment through advice, guidance and training to increase the accuracy of assessment and tracking of children's progress. Support practitioners to identify gaps in children's development at an early stage and act to close these. Use information to support children that may be below age related expectations.
- Early Years - Focus support visits on settings with the most vulnerable children (SEND, FSM, BME, EAL) so that settings will be better able to identify those at risk of falling behind so they can provide timely interventions. Significant additional work has been focussed on settings in areas that have a high level of disadvantaged children.
- In the academic year 2019/20 a conference focussed on raising attainment for disadvantaged pupils and curriculum design which was open to all schools. Follow up workshops focussed on schools in need of support to further enhance curriculum provision.
- A collaborative Disadvantaged and Vulnerable Pupils Project Team, established in academic year 2019/20, will continue to develop and share strategies to raise achievement and narrow the attainment gap across Buckinghamshire in academic year 2020/21. The project is establishing specific webpages with resources to support raising attainment, and a conference will be held in November 2020
- Best practice in raising achievement of disadvantaged pupils is a regular agenda item in School Liaison Groups (twice termly) and Headteacher Collaboration meetings (termly).

The Virtual School who support the education of looked after children (LAC), have also carried out work in this area:

- During lockdown they sent out maths books and resources, games and practical activities to all children in care.
- Liaison teachers use Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings to positively promote numeracy targets in practical and accessible ways at primary schools for LAC
- Using Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) to purchase maths games and activities to create a lending library of maths resources for LAC.
- The Virtual School work closely with social care colleagues to ensure education is an equal priority when choosing placement. The headteacher of the Virtual School sits on the Childrens Resource Panel.
- They have a classroom facility, using their own teachers and tutors to support pupils outside of school.

Question 2 from Councillor Mark Bateman:

What measures have been applied in Buckinghamshire to mitigate for those children who have not received a continuous education over the last 12 months?

Response:

In March, when schools were closed to all but vulnerable children and the children of key workers, the focus was identified by the DfE to provide childcare for those groups. Schools did also work to provide home learning during the remainder of the school year. This varied significantly between schools, from emailed activities sent home (especially for younger children) through to fully live streamed lessons from some schools. Head teachers judged the most appropriate form of interaction with their pupils during this time taking into account the age of their pupils and the access to technology that those families had at home.

In order to support families who have had restricted access to technology there have been three waves of DfE funded computer allocations to students which Buckinghamshire have managed:

- for students who had an allocated social worker and did not have internet access at home
- for pupils in Year 10 last year (now Year 11) who were eligible for pupil premium and did not have access to a device during lockdown
- for pupils this term who do not have access to a device and are eligible for pupil premium, but are required to work from home due to a positive test themselves or due to a full or partial closure of their school

To date there have been over 850 devices sent to pupils through these schemes.

There has been recognition from central government that support is needed to ensure that children catch up with their learning and a number of grants have been allocated to schools to allow this to happen:

- a one-off universal catch-up premium for the 2020 to 2021 academic year to ensure that schools have the support they need to help all pupils make up for lost teaching time.
- a [5 to 16 programme](#) that will make high-quality tuition available to 5 to 16-year olds in state-funded primary and secondary schools from the second half of autumn term 2020
- a [16 to 19 fund](#) for school sixth forms, colleges and all other 16 to 19 providers to provide small group tutoring activity for disadvantaged 16 to 19 students whose studies have been disrupted as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19)
- a [reception year early language programme](#) that will make training and resources available at no-cost to schools where additional targeted support for oral language would be particularly beneficial

Head teachers have the discretion to apply these grants themselves and as such they will be used in ways that best meet the needs of pupils in each individual school.

In addition to this work, there has been recognition of the fact that many children and young people, as well as some school staff will be struggling with the return to full time schooling, extensive work has been planned and delivery has started to support wellbeing and mental health across the sector.

- Training and ongoing support for each school to support staff in managing the wellbeing of both pupils and adults as part of the return to full time education
- Seminars and development of support networks for school leaders in managing the challenges of the return to full time schooling
- Outreach work in schools to ensure pupils who most need additional support are able to receive it directly from trained professionals

All of this work is being delivered by Aspire – the secondary Pupil Referral Unit – and whilst the first item is funded by a DfE grant, the cost of the remaining activity has been met by the Council.

Question 3 from Councillor Mark Bateman:

Can you provide me with attendance figures in Buckinghamshire since the children have returned to school by year group?

Response:

Due to the nature of the data that is collected for schools, we are currently unable to establish a full picture of attendance on a year group basis.

The DfE ask for a daily return to be made to them, this is voluntary and records only the total number of pupils in school. For Buckinghamshire, the figure is currently at 94% (7th Oct) of pupils attending school which has risen from a figure of 92% (9th Sept) at the start of the academic year. This compares to a national figure of 90% (1st Oct) now and 87% (9th Sept) in September.

Schools submit attendance information to the council on a regular basis; however, this is only mandatory for maintained schools, and as such we have less reliable real time information for parts of the sector that contain a high percentage of academies – this predominately affects secondary schools in Buckinghamshire.

Full and detailed figures for all schools will be released by the DfE as part of the January school census return. We will be able to give a full picture and national comparators after we have received this information from them in the spring term.

We are recording the effect of covid-19 on schools in Buckinghamshire through information sent to us regularly by PHE and schools self-reporting. This shows us that at the time of writing (8th October) 599 pupils (0.69% of the school population) were unable to attend school due to a need to self-isolate. Of these there were 21 positive cases (0.024% of the school population). Since the start of September the total number of pupils affected and unable to attend school for a period of time has been 1965 (2.27% of the school population) of which 83 were positive cases (0.96% of the school population). There are currently 86,588 pupils attending state funded schools in Buckinghamshire. These cases have affected 61 out of the 235 schools in the LA.

Question 4 (part 1) from Councillor Mark Bateman:

Given that the motion below was deemed inappropriate to be discussed by Buckinghamshire Councillors at the Full Council meeting on 21st October. Could the Cabinet member for Education tell me who the 11+ testing system in

Buckinghamshire is accountable to, as it is clearly not the Buckinghamshire Council?

Response:

The 13 grammar schools are all academies and as such are not under the control or direct responsibility of the council. Academies are independent state schools and are established by sponsors from business, faith or voluntary groups, or as a result of schools converting in line with Government legislation as is the case with the Buckinghamshire grammar schools. Places are offered on behalf of the governing body or trust, which sets and applies the admission rules. The grammar schools are therefore responsible for their own admission arrangements and chosen to work together to keep a cohesive testing process for all the grammar schools in the county so that children are not required to sit multiple tests or reach different levels of qualification. The council's role is to support the grammar schools by undertaking the administration of the testing process so there is one test that a child sits that applies to all schools and one level of qualification. This is our only role in respect of the testing process and it is one that we undertake as a result of a contractual arrangement. Academies are accountable to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)

Question 4 (part 2) from Councillor Mark Bateman:

Could the Cabinet member tell me how much the expenditure was for the Buckinghamshire Council in 2019 to administer the allocation of secondary school places within the County?

Response:

The allocation of secondary school places is only part of the role of the admissions and transport team which manages the entry of children to schools at primary, junior secondary and late entry processes as well as providing a coordinated in-year admissions process and eligibility decisions for home to school transport. The overall cost of the team is £836,000. The Admissions Team is funded through central grant funding from the government. The contractual work undertaken regarding the administration of the secondary transfer test, which falls outside the scope of the grant funding, is paid for from the grammar schools themselves at a value of £139,000. This fully covers the cost of the work and as such there is no direct cost to the council.

Question 4 (part 3) from Councillor Mark Bateman:

Could the Cabinet member tell me how many grammar school places were provided for children residing outside of Buckinghamshire following the 2019 tests?

Response:

<https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/media/4513287/11plus-allocations-analysis-september-2019-spring-short-28-feb-2019-updated-1.pdf>

2270 grammar school places were allocated on 2/3/19 in line with the schools admission arrangements which give priority to children resident in the school catchment areas. Of these 1747 were allocated to children resident in the county and 523 to children resident in neighbouring council areas. For perspective, 152 out area children were allocated places in Buckinghamshire upper schools and 271 pupils from Buckinghamshire in the same period were allocated schools outside of the county borders.

Question 4 (part 4) from Councillor Mark Bateman:

- ***This Council recognises the difficulties that the Coronavirus epidemic has caused in providing Buckinghamshire children with their education in 2020. It wishes to ensure that no child is disadvantaged with regard to 11+ testing. It has therefore decided that it would not be appropriate for children to sit the 11+ examination in 2020.***
- ***The Council will secure an appropriate method of allocating secondary school places for September 2021 without children undertaking the 11+ examination.***

Response:

It is not the decision of the council to alter the method of allocation for secondary school children to academies, this action can only be taken by the schools themselves as they are their own admission authorities. Other allocation methods have been considered, but they would provide greater uncertainty for pupils and families at an already stressful time. Any method of allocation that does not involve the agreed standardised testing process brings with it the possibility of significant legal challenge. The DfE has provided guidance on this topic Coronavirus (COVID19): assessment processes for selective school admissions.

The grammar schools communicated with and sought advice on this and other councils facing similar issues, the DfE, lawyers and their primary colleagues before coming to this year's arrangements for testing. The agreed solution was:

- Test window for in county pupils in the first week after half term allowing schools a choice of testing dates for maintained primary schools and Partner schools.
- Test window and arrangements for out of county pupils to be held during half term in empty grammar schools, with a doubling of the number of sessions allowing children to be tested in smaller groups
- Modifications to school preferences allowed up to 10 December
- All testing in COVID-secure school settings, ensuring that where possible children are tested with other children from the same school so they are with others in the same primary school bubble
- Assurances to parents that testing will take place later if a child cannot be tested due illness or issues on the date of the scheduled test.

These actions represent the best possible solution given the expected scenario at the point the decision was made. By delaying the test to the latest possible date the grammar schools have allowed as much time as possible for children to settle back into their primary schools and pick up their education before sitting the test. The adjustment to preferences ensures parents can adjust their application after results have been received to better reflect the schools that their child is eligible for. We have supported all our school leaders to come to the best decisions they can in the complex circumstances of this pandemic. No one has control over the course of the pandemic but there is a clear wish for schools to stay open and all Buckinghamshire Council educated children will be enabled to take the test in their own primary schools this term.

Question 1 from Councillor Rafiq Raja:

It is now recognised that children especially from lower socio economic backgrounds have lost a considerable amount of learning time due to the Pandemic. Is the Council monitoring the levels of missed education especially for this year's year 6 pupils and what are the Council's plans to ensure that such children are not on course to lose a significant part of their learning time and suffer a further disadvantage in realising their full potential?

Response:

In March, when schools were closed to all but vulnerable children and the children of key workers, the focus was identified by the DfE to provide childcare for those groups. Schools did also work to provide home learning during the remainder of the school year. This varied significantly between schools, from emailed activities sent home (especially for younger children) through to fully live streamed lessons from some schools. Head teachers judged the most appropriate form of interaction with their pupils during this time taking into account the age of their pupils and the access to technology that those families had at home. In order to support families who have had restricted access to technology there have been three waves of DfE funded computer allocations provided to vulnerable students. To date there have been over 850 devices sent to pupils through these schemes.

There has been recognition from central government that support is needed to ensure that children catch up with their learning and a number of grants have been allocated to schools to allow this to happen. Head teachers have the discretion to apply these grants themselves and as such they will be used in ways that best meet the needs of pupils in each individual school. In addition, it is acknowledged that many children and young people, as well as some school staff will be struggling with the return to full time schooling, extensive work has been planned and delivery has started to support wellbeing and mental health across the sector.

- Training and ongoing support for each school to support staff in managing the wellbeing of both pupils and adults as part of the return to full time education
- Seminars and development of support networks for school leaders in managing the challenges of the return to full time schooling

- Outreach work in schools to ensure pupils who most need additional support are able to receive it directly from trained professionals

All of this work is being delivered by Aspire – the secondary Pupil Referral Unit – and whilst the first item is funded by a DfE grant, the cost of the remaining activity has been met by the Council.

Question 2 from Councillor Rafiq Raja:

Buckinghamshire was identified as one of a select handful of local authorities where the educational attainment gap was the widest between children from well to do backgrounds and those from poorer households. During the time of the coalition government Bucks was heavily criticised by the Education Ministers for failing our disadvantaged children. A consultation was organised under the chairmanship of Professor Strand, which looked at the reasons for this disparity and yet nothing changed in any recognisable way. Can we be informed as to what action has been taken regarding the recommendations in the Strand Report and has 'educational attainment gap' narrowed in the last 5 years?

Response:

In the last 12 months we have not had any public examinations which can show us data which would demonstrate a change in the gap between disadvantaged children and others. There has been work carried out by schools across the county to ensure that the gap is addressed. We have asked groups of schools to work together on projects that would best support their children, the projects are focussed on output data for local areas and are designed to address areas of lower performance. One example of this includes the targeted work we are doing with schools in the Buckingham and Winslow area to improve maths outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. In addition, there has been work carried out and supported on a county-wide level.

Detailed information on the attainment gap in Buckinghamshire will be published as part of the Education Standards Report for the Education Select Committee on the 5th November. Whilst there is still a gap for each stage of education in Buckinghamshire, the positive news is that by the time students complete their GCSEs, the gap is narrower than the gap nationally and has been for the last two years of published data. Whilst this provides some reassurance, there is clearly still much work to do and some of this has been described above.

Question(s) to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness Councillor Isobel Darby

Question 1 from Councillor Robin Stuchbury:

Currently under the Bucks Home Choice Allocation Policy the historical Aylesbury Vale area has a sub allocation policy which the Buckinghamshire Council has inherited, whereby 50% of New build and 25% of relets are allocated to people within one of the four set allocation areas in which they live, in line with the agreed policy.

There are concerns that the Council is not following the agreed policy for the Aylesbury Vale area, which was agreed and voted for in September 2013. Will the Cabinet member confirm when the Council will be undertaking a full review of the Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy which will involve a full consultation with the residents about the sub allocation policy within the Aylesbury area?

Response:

I can assure you that the current Bucks Home Choice policy and any local lettings policies, including policies for allocating properties to local residents in sub group areas remain in place unchanged and the Aylesbury Housing teams continue to operate these policies in the same way as was the case, pre-unitary. Properties continue to be advertised on Bucks Home Choice under these arrangements. Where there are no bids from applicants with a local sub group connection, the property will then be offered to those with a broader connection within Aylesbury Vale and then potentially to other eligible Council applicants, as has always been the case.

The transition orders for the new unitary authority allow Buckinghamshire Council a two year period after vesting day in which to develop and adopt a new single housing allocations policy for Buckinghamshire. Development work has now started on our new allocations policy and as it progresses, it will be subject to proper consultation, governance procedures and of course, due process. We anticipate that the new policy will be ready for consideration for adoption in summer 2021, before the end of the two year period allowed.

Question 1 from Councillor Rafiq Raja:

Before the dissolution of District Councils, each District Council had a housing target in its local plan. Is the Cabinet member for Housing able to reassure us that the Council is on target to achieve the number of affordable and Social housing identified in each district councils' local plan and where exactly are we with the Housing targets?

Response:

Thank you for your question Councillor Raja.

The housing targets in the adopted Local Plans for the legacy authorities were carried forward into Buckinghamshire Council and form part of the current policy framework for the authority. In terms of the latest position on housing targets in the latest round of Local Plans, the position varies in relation to the different areas:

- For the former Aylesbury Vale area, the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP) is currently being examined by the independent planning inspector, various modifications have been proposed and consulted on but the Inspector is yet to issue his final report. As such the housing target, is a draft target, subject to the Inspector's findings. The VALP sets an overall housing target for the period 2013-33 of 28,600 homes, of which 4,200 should be affordable homes
- For the former Chiltern/South Bucks area, the draft Local Plan was submitted for its independent examination in September 2019. However, a report elsewhere within these agenda papers seeks a decision from the Council on whether or not the Local Plan should be withdrawn. As such it is possible that the housing target in the draft Local Plan of 9,535¹ net additional new homes for the period 2016-36 (477 homes per year of which 217 per year should be affordable homes) will not be taken forward.
- For the former Wycombe area, the Local Plan was adopted in August 2019. This sets a housing target of 10,925 homes for the period 2013-33, of which around 3,100 should be affordable homes.

Each local plan sets out detailed and robust policies to secure affordable housing from new developments whilst ensuring that development remains financially viable overall.

I can assure you that good progress is being made in delivering affordable homes in the different areas.

- In the VALP area, 2,115 affordable homes have been delivered between April 2013 and March 2020
- In the Chiltern/South Bucks area, 172 net additional new affordable homes have been delivered in Chiltern between April 2013 and March 2019 and 86 net additional new affordable homes in South Bucks over the same period.
- In the Wycombe area, 727 affordable homes have been delivered in the period April 2013 to March 2020.

The adoption of the Wycombe Local Plan and the completion of the VALP during 2021 provide greater certainty enabling newly allocated housing sites to come forward and delivery of affordable housing to continue.

¹ Because the VALP is contributing 286 new homes per year (5,725 in total) towards the housing needed in the Chiltern/South Bucks area which would otherwise be unmet, the housing target for the plan area is 477 per year or 9,535 for the period 2016-36, reducing the total requirement from the 763 per year (15,260). These

figures are set out in a schedule of proposed plan modifications which has been submitted to the examination.

Question(s) to the Cabinet Member for Sport and Leisure: Councillor Clive Harriss

Question 1 from Councillor Mohammed Hanif:

Sports and physical activity have a key role to play in supporting and leading communities through Covid 19. The pandemic has a major impact on providers with more than two-thirds saying their future is insecure and facilities are at risk. One in four community clubs report they may close. With more than half of those most at risk are located in deprived areas.

What actions does the Buckinghamshire Council intend to take to ensure that these centres are supported in difficult times?

Response:

We have worked closely with our leisure operators to support them to reopen our leisure centres safely and enable our local clubs to return, in recognition of the importance of sports and physical activity for the health and wellbeing of our local residents. Clearly the numbers of people that can be safely accommodated continues to be limited due to the necessary Covid restrictions, with associated financial challenges. We will continue to closely monitor the situation in light of the Council's financial position, which is clearly under significant pressure, and will be developing a countywide leisure facilities strategy to support accessible provision for residents and financial sustainability over the longer term.

Leap, the county's Active Partnership, have also played a vital role in securing extra funding from Sport England for local community organisations/clubs who support sport and physical activity opportunities for priority audiences, including communities in areas of deprivation, BAME communities, people with disabilities and those with long-term conditions. Leap are working through Heart of Bucks to distribute these 'Moving our Community' grants; details of how to apply, as well as information on a range of other funding opportunities, can be found on their website: <https://www.leapwithus.org.uk/funding-and-grants-for-deliverers-and-clubs-in-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

We would also encourage local clubs and community organisations to engage with their local Community Board.

Question(s) to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor Mark Shaw

Question 1 from Councillor Mark Bateman:

Risks have been identified in the Children's Social Care Budgets which could increase expenditure considerably as the Covid Pandemic continues,

including Home to School Transport. Could these risks be outlined in full along with any mitigating actions planned to reduce this expenditure?

Response:

At the end of the first quarter, Children's Services budgets are projected to be £6.139m overspent, of which £4.420m (72%) relates to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. A further £2m risk across Children's Social Care budgets has also been identified but is not included in the forecast overspend because mitigating actions have and continue to be put into place to reduce expenditure. The key areas of risk across Children's Services are:

1. Home to school transport
2. Placement costs for Looked After Children and Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs)
3. Accommodation costs for young people aged over 18
4. Costs of support packages for children and young people with disabilities

All of these areas of the service are experiencing pressures both directly as a result of the covid-19 pandemic and due to the costs of increased demand and complexity of need.

Home to School Transport

Impact of covid-19 (£1.377m): the direct costs associated with covid-19 on the home to school transport budget has been the payment of refunds to parents for tickets in the summer term and thereby a loss of income to the Council. The loss of income associated with covid-19 is expected to have a one off impact in the current year.

The estimated costs associated with Covid-19 at the end of the first quarter also include the cost of support to commercial school coach operators, and delays to savings due to rescheduling of the tendering process.

Business As Usual (£1.541m): the main risks to the transport budget going forwards continue to be increased demand for SEND transport and increased complexity of need of those pupils eligible for free transport.

Mitigating Actions: Mitigating actions to reduce costs of increased demand will be through establishing personal travel budgets, including the payment of mileage, as an alternative to the need for taxi provision, as well as greater efficiencies from a contract re-tendering exercise next year.

Placement Costs

Impact of Covid-19 (£470k): This includes extensions to some high cost placements as children could not be moved to a different setting during lockdown, as well as additional costs for providers, such as PPE and supplies for young people in semi-independent accommodation.

The impact of covid-19 on the children's placement budget in the current year and future years is difficult to predict. The full impact will not be known until the pattern of referrals and needs is clearer over the next few months. We have already seen an increase of difficult to place young people.

Business As Usual: At the end of Q1 placement budgets and SGO budgets are projected to break even however these budgets remain under pressure as a result of the numbers of children who have required external placements with high levels of support.

Mitigating Actions: Actions to reduce placement costs include

1. Clear arrangements in place for the agreeing and monitoring of all placements.
2. Work to explore alternatives to external residential care where possible and to enable step down arrangements from high cost placements where safe and appropriate to do so. However, it is important to state that high level of complexity, need and risk of the young people who need care often mean there are not immediate good enough alternatives.

Accommodation Costs for Young People aged Over 18

Impact of Covid-19 (£1.691m): Extensions to placements for young people aged over 18. DfE guidance is for local authorities not to move care leavers into new accommodation where they could become isolated. The estimate reflects the likelihood that there will be a shortage of supply of suitable housing once the guidance changes meaning some placements will be extended further.

Business As Usual: Risks of up to £950k have been identified associated with delays in young people being able to take up tenancies and with the costs of former Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) for whom the cost of accommodation exceeds the grant funding from the government. These costs are not yet included in the forecast overspend as mitigating actions are being put into place.

Mitigating Actions: the key focus of mitigating actions for this group of young people is to work closely with colleagues in Housing to identify landlords who are willing to work with the Council to enable young people to take up tenancies without prejudicing their local authority housing status.

Costs of Packages of Support for Children with Disabilities

Impact of Covid-19: no specific costs associated with Covid-19 are included in the forecast.

Business As Usual: Risks of up to £980k have been identified for support packages for children with disabilities, including the costs of Domiciliary Care packages and Direct Payments. Demand has increased in recent years both in terms of additional numbers of children and increased complexity of need.

Mitigating Actions:

1. All packages are being reviewed to ensure they meet need and represent value for money.
2. Any new requests for packages are signed off at Head of Service level.

Question 1 from Councillor Robin Stuchbury:

In light of the impact of COVID-19 on the health and wellbeing of the young population within Buckinghamshire and in addition to the portfolios responsibility to support Prevent, by interacting and engaging with our young people in Buckinghamshire to ensure they aren't radicalised, has the council

got enough financial resilience to meet the above responsibilities within the portfolio for youth provision going forward into 2021/22?

Buckinghamshire County Council cut funding to youth services radically in 2010/11 with a decade of budget restraints, pressures and cuts. Does the evidence suggest that this is now time for the New Buckinghamshire Council to look at investing again in youth provision to mitigate against known negatives and risks to our young people growing up in Buckinghamshire? National and local press articles in the past decade have expressed concern about a decade of cuts in youth funding with a recent article calling for the reinstatement and ring fencing of youth services funding to 2010/11 levels to provide targeted support for all young people. Services such as youth centres and youth work make a real difference to young people's lives.

Joint response from the Cabinet Member for Youth Provision (Councillor Tony Green); Communities and Public Health (Councillor Gareth Williams) and Children's Services (Councillor Mark Shaw)

Prevent and youth services are not the sole responsibility of the council. Protecting vulnerable Children is one of the priorities for the Community Safety Partnership and the Prevent work is a part of this. All partners are working together and are committed to protecting young people from being exposed to potentially harmful situations. We are confident our youth offer is sufficient to meet the needs of our young people including those services offered by our colleagues in the voluntary sector.

Question(s) to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health Councillor Gareth Williams

Question 1 from Councillor Mohammed Hanif:

The corona virus pandemic is the worst tragedy most people have suffered in their lifetime. It has devastated families and communities, and changed the way we live, perhaps for ever. Loved ones have been taken away before their time.

Essential workers, such as doctors, nurses, care workers and even shop assistants have given their lives protecting and, serving the public.

I think the least we can do is make sure those who have tragically died from virus are never forgotten. Can Buckinghamshire Council help to put some permanent memorials in our towns which I'm sure the idea will have widespread public support as a fitting and respectful way to remember all these who have so tragically lost their lives?

Response:

The Council extends our deepest sympathies to all those affected by the virus. At present our focus continues to be on working extensively to support our local residents and communities through the pandemic, in conjunction with all our valued

local partners. As a result, we would recommend that this is an issue which is brought back for consideration by and with our local communities at a later stage

Question 1 from Councillor Rafiq Raja:

We welcome the setting up of the Community boards, which have generated a lot of activity and I must say that we are encouraged by the range of small scale projects being considered by the HWCB. However, would the relevant Cabinet member reassure us that the CBs will not just be ‘talking shops’ but adequate funds will be made available for small and worthwhile projects identified by the Community Boards in general and those by the HWCB, so that these projects can start and finish (where possible) by the end of March 2021?

Response:

It's really pleasing to hear that the High Wycombe Community Board has got off to such an encouraging start which is largely thanks to the hard work and positivity of the members. The community boards are certainly not just talking shops. Community boards are focused on finding out what matters most to their communities and bringing the right people together to explore and find solutions together, so very much focused on taking action on local needs and priorities. This could include anything from small pop up projects to projects that run over a longer period of time. To support this and make it possible for these projects to happen, there is a budget of £3.9m behind the boards which will enable them to fund many small and worthwhile projects across the county that will make a real difference to the lives of residents.

The High Wycombe Community Board itself has a significant budget, which is available for the board to allocate right now. This consists of a community area priorities fund, a health and wellbeing fund and a local infrastructure fund. There are defined criteria, as you would expect and to help ensure that funds are used to meet agreed local priorities and that outcomes are monitored closely to achieve maximum impact. The board have so far set up five sub groups: Infrastructure, Community Cohesion, Community and Mental Health, Covid-19 Recovery / Town Centre Regeneration and Environment and Climate Change. More information can be found on our community board webpages <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/community-and-safety/improving-your-local-community/apply-community-board-funding/>

If you have an idea for a project or would like to get involved any of the current working groups then please don't hesitate to get in contact with your community board coordinator and chairmen who will be able to guide you through the process.