



## Communities & Localism Select Committee minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Communities & Localism Select Committee held on Thursday 24 September 2020 in Via MS Teams, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 12.10 pm.

### Members present

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

### Apologies

T Hunter-Watts and P Kelly

### Agenda Item

#### **1 Apologies for absence/change in membership**

Apologies for absence were given by Mr Tom Hunter-Watts and Paul Kelly.

#### **2 Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **3 Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 June 2020 were agreed as a correct record with Ms L Smith included as present.

#### **4 Public questions**

There were no public questions.

#### **5 Chairman's Update**

With regard to issues raised at the last meeting on protected groups the Chairman provided a quick update. Community Boards were working on a Strategy and Communications Plan to ensure that Community Boards and Sub-Groups have a diverse membership and were well represented to ensure that all communities have a voice. Some Community Boards have developed a community cohesion sub group but many of the sub groups impact on all communities including sub groups on covid recovery plans.

During the pandemic a letter was sent to gypsy and traveller communities providing advice on how to contact the local area housing departments if there was a need for anybody self-isolating or if there were any problems with accommodation. The Housing Service would continue to offer Housing support and advice to travellers

who request assistance. A Member commented that it was important to address the negative stereotyping of travellers. She referred to the Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officer and the need to support their work including the need for Ward Councillors to raise any issues faced by Gypsy and Travellers at their local Community Board.

With regard to diversity training Members were offered the LGA's equality and diversity online training course and additional guidance has been added to the Members area on legislation and useful websites.

Another Member referred to the Equalities and Diversity training offered to Members and emphasised that this should be made mandatory as they were all Community Leaders. She also referred to the BAME Network that had been set up to help Buckinghamshire Council reach communities that never had a voice.

## **6 Update on the development of the Buckinghamshire Council Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Policy**

The Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services introduced the report and reported that Buckinghamshire was one of the largest taxi licensing authorities in the Country with 3,500 drivers and 2,500 vehicles. The Council's taxi and private hire licensing policy was an important document that demonstrated the Council's commitment to securing public safety, provided clarity for applicants and licence holders, assisted decision making, facilitated enforcement activities and helped safeguard against legal challenge. The creation of Buckinghamshire Council presented an opportunity to create a new policy that incorporated the new statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards, promoted the highest possible standards to secure public safety, supported the Council's key priorities of protecting the vulnerable and would help improve the environment and promote the local economy.

The Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services reported that a new draft policy document was being prepared, ready for consultation later this year, with a view to adoption next year which would have regard to the Department for Transport Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards which came out in July 2020. The aim of this document was to introduce consistency in the licensing system and reduce the risk of harm posed to children and vulnerable passengers. Councils must have regard to these new standards and it was expected that they would be adopted unless there was a compelling local reason not to.

The Chairman of the Licensing Committee informed Members of the Workshops that had been held to obtain the views of Licensing Committee Members to review, consider and discuss areas of policy harmonisation and the potential implications and impacts of decision making in particular policy areas. He also referred to pre-engagement consultation with external stakeholders which was taking place between 7 – 27<sup>th</sup> September in the form of an online survey Your Voice Bucks which was available on the Council website and had been publicised to the following stakeholders; public, school transport users and the taxi trade.

Lindsey Vallis, Transition Head of Licensing, Cemeteries and Crematoria informed

Members that the drafting of this policy was a Cabinet Member priority with wider benefits such as protecting the vulnerable, improving the environment and the local economy. Members noted the following points:-

- Each legacy Council had different licensing policies including fee structures, conditions and bye laws which continue to exist for each geographical area until a single policy was agreed. It was really important that decision making was consistent across the Council and that drivers, vehicles and operators were working with the same standards in place. They need to be working under the same fee levels and ensure parity and consistency for both the taxi licensing trade and travelling passengers.
- The work already undertaken had been a collaborative project with experienced licensing officers across the Council and a leading legal expert on licensing. Officers had also worked with other service areas in the Council such as home to school transport (particularly relating to children with special educational needs), safeguarding employment and the climate change team.
- Responses from Your Voice Bucks had been very positive so far with 498 responses, 58% of those were from residents, 35% taxi trade and the survey was being promoted further by the communications team before the deadline.
- The current projected timetable was that Licensing Committee would consider the draft policy on 14 October 2020 and if approved, an eight week public consultation would be carried out. Following consultation the response would be considered by the Licensing Committee and the Cabinet Member in February 2021 before finally being approved by full Council.
- Reference was made to the Department of Transport standards which had been put in place mainly because of historical exploitation cases. In Buckinghamshire the majority of these recommendations had already been adopted by each geographical area such as mandatory safeguarding training for drivers, English language testing and information sharing with the police. However, there are some additional requirements such as 6 monthly DBS checks and subscription of drivers to the DBS updater service, annual DBS checks for vehicle owners, local consultation on the use of CCTV in taxi vehicles to determine whether mandating its use would have a positive or adverse impact on safety.

During discussion the following responses were given to Member questions:-

- A Member asked if they could be assured that the changes were in line with Council policy and in line with taxi and private hire service legislation 2014 and government statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards published in July 2020. In addition, whether the family information service had been involved in assuring that the special education needs interest have been considered in line with the changes in March 2019 with regard to safety of young children and in addition the Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee report recommendations to the Cabinet on 11 January 2016 on preventing child sexual exploitation. The Transition Head of Licensing

reported that they had been working very closely with the Council's Client Transport Team and with the Safeguarding Employment Team and they would be giving a presentation to the two Safeguarding Boards in the next few weeks.

- A Member emphasised that the policy would be part of a wider transport service as currently there were no cycle ways in place and the bus service needed to be supplemented by other forms of transport such as taxis. The Cabinet Member reported that aside from public safety the other main aim of this policy was the maintenance and development of a professional and respected hackney carriage and private hire trade and to enable access to a local efficient and effective transport service and support tourists and the local environment. The Member suggested that the final policy should look like a transport document. The Transition Head of Licensing commented that this document would be used daily by officers and the taxi trade as it set out the standards, the requirements for entrants into the taxi trade, vehicle requirements and their maintenance. She referred to the survey which asked a question about the location of taxi ranks and whether they were in the right place for the public and how they work in town centres and villages. They would like to gauge opinion from the public and the trade whether there were enough and in the right place and feed that back to town centre colleagues in order to look at this as a whole policy rather than just licensing. In addition officers had been liaising with climate change colleagues and had asked questions as part of the pre-engagement work around whether to incentivise the use of electric and hybrid vehicles and move towards a more environmentally friendly form of transport for the future.
- A Member referred to issues with unregistered and cross border taxis and emphasised that it was important to be connected to other authorities. He also referred to the idea of a taxi bus which would cut the cost to individuals also making it affordable to groups. The Chairman referred to community transport. Another Member suggested contacting Community Impact Bucks who had undertaken a project in this area and had some good examples of providing community transport which was being led by residents and supported by partners. With regard to the taxi bus this would be outside the remit of the draft licensing policy but was an interesting idea which should be shared with colleagues dealing with community transport. Currently with Covid-19 regulations there was a limit on the number of passengers (6) in a taxi.
- The Transition Head of Licensing referred to cross border work and commented that a single policy for Buckinghamshire would put the Council in a much better position to work with neighbouring authorities. There were examples of local area enforcement protocols in place already e.g. Aylesbury Vale has a protocol with Milton Keynes Council which enabled them to stop and address any issues on vehicles which were licensed in Aylesbury Vale if they were seen operating in their area. The Deregulation Act opened up the market for taxis and it was entirely legal for them to operate outside their local authority area therefore it was an ongoing challenge to ensure appropriate mechanisms were in place to undertake enforcement in other

areas and having a single policy would enable officers to build on that framework with other protocols e.g. Slough.

- With regard to safeguarding, a Member asked that any data kept on vulnerable adults and children would be subject to GDPR and that any data sharing by taxi companies would result in loss of licence. The Transition Head of Licensing reported that their service does not hold any information on vulnerable adults or children and if they were working with the Client Transport Team, this Team would manage that information about their service users with the Licensing Team supporting them on licensing objectives. The only time they may hold information was a result of a direct complaint or intelligence from the police and they would act within the GDPR and have privacy notices in place which clarified where data was shared and for what purpose. Where there was potential criminal activity there was a requirement to share information with partners e.g. police. As part of putting the new policy in place GDPR and privacy statements would be reviewed to ensure that there was a single approach going forward. In terms of taxi companies managing the data that they hold the Licensing Team Leader reported that operators must comply with ICO requirements including GDPR. In terms of losing licenses each case had to be considered on its own merits. A Member asked whether operators had unique information on vulnerable children and adults and the Licensing Team Leader confirmed that operators do have access to a large amount of sensitive information so it was vital that this information was kept secure.
- A question was asked on whether advertising on vehicles would be consistent across Buckinghamshire and was there any restriction on taxi vehicles parking in residential areas. The Licensing Team Leader reported that the parking issue was controversial and they received a number of complaints about operators sometimes not parking in a considerate way. The issue was that if they were legally parked and the operator lived in that road they should be treated as any other resident. There were conditions for operators to not cause a nuisance in the way they operate their vehicles and if there were a cluster of vehicles parked inconsiderately they would raise this with the drivers and the operator. In terms of advertising, taxi and private hire vehicles should be clearly identified so that the public know they are getting into a licensed vehicle. It was felt that other forms of commercial advertising were not appropriate other than advertising their own company. A Member commented that it would be helpful to allow some modest advertising which could also help with public service announcements. If agreed, the draft policy would have an 8-week consultation and if there were strong views about advertising this would be taken into account in the final policy.
- A Member asked about the legacy policies of the former District Councils and whether they differed a lot and in drafting the new policy whether the 'best bits' had been used from each policy or whether officers were starting from scratch having regard to the new DfT standards. In addition, whether the new policy would have budget implications and whether the licensing fees would cover any extra costs. The Cabinet Member responded by saying that

the previous policies had differed quite significantly which was quite a challenge but best practice had been taken out of each policy. In terms of the budget the DfT standards had imposed additional responsibilities but new digital systems were being considered to minimise that cost impact.

- A Member referred to taxi companies being used for illegal activities such as delivering drugs and child trafficking. The taxi company would be asked to pick up young people who would then deliver the drugs and money. The protocol was that if the taxi driver was aware of this to continue the journey but report it to the police afterwards who would have information on the addresses. If all taxi drivers did report this criminal activity, it could help close this down. He hoped that the new draft policy would encourage drivers to report. The Transition Head of Licensing reported on the mandatory training given to drivers which included County Lines and ensuring that drivers worked with the Team to protect vulnerable children and adults. The Team also work very closely with the police and if they receive any intelligence this would be actively followed up and where required robust action would be taken against any drivers or operators involved if there was fault on their side. If a member of the public complained then the Team would work with the police to take enforcement action, when required. The Principal Licensing Officer also reported that drivers could report directly to the police and the safeguarding team rather than go through the operator and were given information cards with contact details.
- With regard to CCTV the standards advocate local consultation to determine whether CCTV would have a net positive or adverse impact on safety which could protect both the driver and the passenger. In Buckinghamshire CCTV was not currently mandated but some of the trade had been contacting the Licensing Team for some time to put CCTV in their taxis as a deterrent to the high risk activities they undertake, particularly late at night and the Team had ensured that ICO guidance was given. It was also beneficial to the Team in terms of enforcement where complaints had been received. There was a cost associated with this at £400 per vehicle.
- A question was asked about how the driver was protected, particularly if they had unknowingly been involved in a criminal activity which they then reported. The Licensing Team Leader reported that they have a duty of care to protect any information that was reported to them and when the police carry out any investigations they have to bear this in mind to protect the driver and were used to protecting sensitive information. Information would never be supplied on a complainant's details, unless required for investigation by the police.
- Reference was made to the company 'Uber' and whether they were currently operating in Buckinghamshire. The Transition Head of Licensing reported that Uber were required to operate under the same standards so they would need to have an operator base in the area which took the bookings. Uber had been licensed in the Aylesbury and Wycombe area, however both those licenses had lapsed. Many taxi operators however were using similar technology so residents can book a taxi online via an app.

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

## **7 Safer Buckinghamshire Plan**

The Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health introduced the report and stated that the Safer Buckinghamshire Plan was a rolling three-year plan which had been developed by the Safer Buckinghamshire Board; Buckinghamshire Council, Thames Valley Police, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service, Clinical Commissioning Group, National Probation Service, Thames Valley Community Rehabilitation Company and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. A public community safety survey was conducted in early 2020 with 2,379 respondents (including 76 councillors), the results of which were used to shape the Plan's five key priorities which have been agreed as follows:-

- Helping communities to become more resilient
- Protecting vulnerable adults and children
- Addressing the impact of drugs, alcohol and poor mental health
- Tackling domestic violence and abuse
- Dealing with offending.

The Cabinet Member reported that the work for the new Plan was undertaken before the covid-19 pandemic therefore they would be close monitoring of the Plan to understand the impact of covid-19 and steps would be taken to reduce its impact on crime and the causes of crime. The Safer Buckinghamshire Board would review the implementation plan and impact at its regular meetings. The main impacts of covid-19 have been increases in anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, radicalisation and speeding. Burglary had decreased. The Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner had devolved a considerable budget of £440,000 which helped support some of the projects sitting under the agreed priorities along with Council and partnership funding.

The Communities Engagement and Safety Manager reported that detailed Delivery Plans sat under the Strategic Plan and she co-chaired with Thames Valley Police the Safer Buckinghamshire Co-ordinating Group, the operational arm of the Board which reviewed the detailed delivery on a regular basis. The Safer Buckinghamshire Board maintained oversight of the work and provided a check on performance on a quarterly basis. They were developing a dashboard which would provide some contextual information so Members could see the trends in Buckinghamshire and also specific measures which relate directly to the priorities.

In terms of next steps officers were developing Community Safety Profiles for Community Boards as many Boards had Community Safety Sub Groups and this information would provide an evidence base and highlight more pervasive issues which Boards may be concerned about. There was also a legislative requirement for an annual community safety Strategic Assessment to identify emerging trends and issues; and public engagement. This was completed at the end of last year and formed the basis of the new Safer Buckinghamshire Plan. This work would be

continued this year and the Board would like more detailed work carried out on:-

- Mental health – developing greater insight into its links with being a victim/offender; and risk management
- Those with housing need – more likely to be victims
- Victim suspect duality; and repeat victimisation

The Communities Engagement and Safety Manager reported that the next public community safety survey would be undertaken in January 2021 and they would be linking in with Community Boards to access local information.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- A Member commented that in his local area they had an excellent community centre called the Hive in Arnison Avenue, High Wycombe but unfortunately there had been some anti-social behaviour including a stabbing. They had applied for a fence to be put up near the car park to prevent this. He also referred to the shopping parade nearby where the shopkeepers were also concerned about anti-social behaviour and had asked about installing CCTV to act as a deterrent. The Cabinet Member referred to areas that had been targeted for anti-social behaviour with great success and suggested that he follow this up outside the meeting with the Community Safety Team. He particularly referred to anti-social behaviour at Dorney Lake which had required a multi-agency response and also Hervines Park, Amersham. Some of these incidents were a result of lockdown and young people letting off steam where as others were persistent offenders. It was important to involve Community Safety Teams so they could identify whether criminal activity was taking place or whether it required street wardens.
- A Member asked for further information on the work of Community Boards; some of them had set up Community Safety Sub Groups but not all and it was important to get a consistent approach across Buckinghamshire. She had also attended a Community Forum meeting where it had been discussed that there was a mismatch between the Safer Buckinghamshire Plan priorities and resident priorities and also how they fitted into the Structure. The Cabinet Member reported that they were working with the police, Community Boards and Forums to get a system in place. He particularly referred to the Chiltern Community Forum which was seen as a good model by the police and helped provide accountability for neighbourhood policing and interaction with communities. The Council main interaction would be through Community Boards which included devolved funding and it made practical sense to have the public facing survey and response aligned with Community Boards areas which was made easier where the Local Police Area reflects these boundaries. He further commented that Chiltern and South Bucks had seven Community Boards and whilst he would not want to reduce any public engagement it would help to have a single set of priorities for that area which were agreed by the Board Chairmen and Thames Valley Police. He would like to use a similar model to that of Chiltern and South Bucks for

Aylesbury and Wycombe and the LPA Commanders so that these bodies could provide an input on the focus for neighbourhood policing. There would still be a focus on resident concerns regarding issues that had arisen as a result of covid-19 such as anti-social behaviour and speeding.

- A Member had several questions which she put to the meeting:-
  - She referred to the Community Forum meeting as well, particularly in relation to concerns raised by the Asian community who were being targeted because of perceived wealth.
  - She expressed concern about vulnerable children and adults being exploited and how they were being helped to prevent further exploitation and in addition to that how many children were missing in Buckinghamshire. She commented that this linked in with the importance of statutory training on diversity and equality.
  - She also referred to domestic abuse where it was not reported because it was seen as normal behaviour in some communities; she was working with some of these communities so would be happy to talk to Members and officers regarding this area.
  - Raising awareness of hate crime so that this did not just relate to BAME communities but other areas such as mental health etc.
  - Educating people on the effects of drug and alcohol on their families, which had become even more relevant during the covid-19 pandemic.
  - Working with offenders and how organisations would work with them to stop them reoffending e.g. education programme.

A written response would be provided.

- A Member referred to Community Boards and the police working together to agree community safety priorities and commented that in her area there were two Neighbourhood Action Groups and two different policing teams. She also mentioned that it would be difficult for the police to attend various meetings with their limited resources. The Cabinet Member referred to the earlier comment that he was hoping that there would be a single set of priorities, he referred to the survey that would be undertaken and that each Board which have an idea of local priorities. The police did not have the resource to deal with seven different sets of local neighbourhood policing priorities. Regular meetings would be set up with the Chief Constable, LPA Commanders and the Community Board Chairman which was seen as the most effective use of police resources rather than attending individual community board meetings.
- A Member commented that the police had aligned their LPA area to match the boundary of their Community Board and enable proactive collaboration. He then referred to his role as a Community First Responder for South Central Ambulance Service where he had to deal with a number of people who had drug and alcohol problems who had collapsed or been injured through fights who went through a revolving circle of abuse. He asked how this could be picked up through prevention work as once the person had been to hospital they were discharged without any further action. The

Cabinet Member reported that he had regular meetings with the Chairman of Hospital Trusts where they had discussions about not dealing with patients/ residents in silo's where responsibility was discharged without any further action. It was important to take a multi-agency approach to this issue and put the patient first and to signpost residents to appropriate services following any incidents e.g. there were social workers in hospitals who were looking at older people who had suffered a fall and may need some support at home. However, he would check whether the SCAS were invited to these regular meetings with partners to ensure that there weren't any gaps in providing a co-ordinated approach to services.

- A Member referred to anti-social behaviour in town centres and referred to an example in Wycombe where young men were becoming a nuisance during the day time. He also referred to young people begging who he was aware were not homeless and could often make £500 per week to support a drug habit. He commented that the police because of limited resource would use their resources more at the weekend or at night. However, three street wardens were appointed who patrolled the streets in the day time which had an extremely positive effect. The beggars were referred to One Recovery Bucks where appropriate. He commended the use of street wardens to improve the ambience of town centres. The Cabinet Member referred to the recruitment of street wardens and said they had worked well and could also help signpost residents to appropriate services. He also referred to expanding the role of traffic wardens to help provide support for community safety. Community Board profiles and their allocated funding could be used to target resources.

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

## **8 Draft Inquiry Scoping paper**

At the last meeting Members agreed that they would like to have an Inquiry Group on the effectiveness of community grants during the covid-19 pandemic. A draft scoping paper was attached to the agenda for comment. The Inquiry Group should have cross party representation from 6-8 Members with two days of evidence gathering. The aim was to examine that resources were being used effectively and efficiently providing value for money for all residents through good partnership working, that there were no gaps or duplicate services and that benefits were provided which may have a long term impact on communities. Members who had volunteered were Paul Irwin, Graham Peart, Mimi Harker, Ashley Waite and Peter Cooper.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- A Member asked if the scope could include Community Impact Bucks and other organisations that have provided funding.
- It would be helpful if all Members send in an email on their experiences during the covid-19 pandemic and interaction with community groups.

- A comment was made that the Council was commended for the work on this area however as it was a new situation some historical community groups were competing with pop up community groups for resources e.g. food. Established charities should be contacted as part of the review. There should also be a check on how the money was used and its impact.
- Reference was made to those groups who held the funding and how decisions were made on its allocation.

The draft scoping paper was agreed by the Committee.

## **9 Draft Work programme**

The Scrutiny Officer referred to the draft Work Programme which was attached to the agenda. Members noted that the Work Programme was not set in stone and once this had been agreed further changes could be made during the year, particularly as projects got off the ground. A Member asked if the domestic violence item in March 2021 could be referred to as domestic abuse as it covered coercive control and it would be useful to focus on one particular area of domestic abuse. Following the elections next year a more detailed piece of work could be undertaken. A Member suggested whether it would be helpful to have an update on this area at the November meeting and following that Members agreed that contact numbers should be circulated so that they could raise public awareness.

Members agreed the draft Programme.

## **10 Date of Next Meeting**

19 November 2020 at 10am