



# Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee held on Thursday 1 October 2020 [via MS Teams](#), commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 12.34 pm.

## Members present

Z Ahmed, D Barnes, D Carroll (chairman), S Chapple, M Knight, L Monger, G Moore, R Newcombe, C Poll, R Raja, B Roberts, C Rouse and M Winn (vice-chairman).

## Apologies

D Knights and N Marshall.

## Agenda Item

### 1 **Declarations of interest**

None.

### 2 **Minutes**

Councillor R Newcombe informed members that the planning guidance appended to the minutes of the meeting 25 June did not specify the time limits for councillors to call-in a planning application to committee and as the document was not a whole guide it could be misleading to parish councils.

The minutes of the meeting 25 June were agreed as correct record.

### 3 **Covid-19 and local economic recovery**

Members received an update presentation on covid-19 and local economic recovery from the Leader of the Council and guest presenters Ian Barham, Partnership Manager at Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership (Bucks LEP) and Philippa Batting, Managing Director at Buckinghamshire Business First (BFF). The following key points were highlighted:

- The Buckinghamshire economy was predominantly made up of small – medium enterprises (SMEs) and key sectors included the creative industries and sports.
- Buckinghamshire Council and key partners had worked hard throughout the

pandemic to provide support to businesses, including financial support and advice.

- Business grant funding amounting to £92m was made available to businesses in Buckinghamshire and £85m had been allocated by end of August 2020. In addition, discretionary grant awards totalled £4.45m.
- Whilst some town centres were struggling, with fewer residents commuting into London some towns had experienced improved vibrancy. This had been supported by the licensing of pavements to enable businesses to provide outdoor hospitality services.
- A local economic recovery plan would be delivered by the strong partnerships in Buckinghamshire. There were three phases of delivery to the plan: react, renew and rebound. It was estimated that the Bucks economy was in the latter half of the react phase.
- The Buckinghamshire Local Industrial Strategy was to be reviewed due to changing context. Green growth had also been incorporated into the strategy.
- New opportunities were arising in digital as people were adapting to new ways of working. Healthcare and education services have been able to be provided remotely.
- Trade mark applications had increased which could be a sign of economic recovery.
- An Innovation Centre was due to be opened at Westcott Venture Park.
- A project was being piloted to support the reskilling of residents who had previously worked in the aviation industry.
- BBF were the listening ears and helping hands for Bucks businesses, supporting all businesses including the self-employed who were especially at risk of unemployment at this time.
- When the pandemic hit, Buckinghamshire Council employees temporarily moved over to work in BBF to help support businesses.
- There had been incredible support from the Bucks business community when the pandemic hit, with businesses offering to make PPE.
- Businesses had spent large amounts of money making their businesses covid-19 safe, which proved difficult against government guidelines that were constantly changing.
- Some accommodation providers had experienced the best August they had ever had owing to UK holidaymaker 'staycations'.
- There were more start-ups registered in the county this year than previously, but it was unknown as to whether the figures included existing businesses that had changed their operating model.
- Cabinet member for town centre regeneration, Councillor Steve Bowles, provided an update on town centre recovery and expressed thanks to officers for their hard work during the pandemic and transition to a unitary council.

A number of key questions were raised:

- In response to a question raised as to the progress of implementing the High Wycombe Regeneration Strategy, members were advised that work was progressing and that the strategy was being reviewed in light of covid-19.
- In response to a question as to what support was being provided to young people experiencing unemployment, it was noted that BBF have enterprise advisors supporting young people with their careers options. Further, BBF run a programme to let young people know what jobs are available in Bucks.
- It was queried whether the £61,426 awarded in Resilience Fund grants safeguarding 10 jobs had been good value for money, and members were advised that the jobs supported four key sectors and would create a further significant number of jobs.
- A question was raised as to what support would be available to parents that had paid school transport costs in the event a another lockdown. Members noted that during the previous national lockdown period, the council credited parents funds paid for school transport, and that this could apply again in the event of another full lockdown. It was also noted that government policy going forward was that schools remain open.
- It was asked as to how broadband could be improved in certain areas. Members were informed that superfast broadband currently covered 96% of premises in Buckinghamshire, and that the Connected Counties programme (Bucks and Herts) was working to further improve connectivity. A £5bn central government programme 'Outside In' to improve connectivity had been announced but the detail for how the money would be spent in Bucks was unclear.

*Note 1: Councillor C Rouse left the meeting at 11.00.*

*Note 2: Councillor Matt Knight left the meeting at 11.33.*

#### **4 Housing allocations**

Julie Porter, Executive Director of Development at the Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust (VAHT) gave a presentation to committee on the work of the Aylesbury Vale Housing Trust. The following key points were highlighted:

- The trust was formed in 2006 and is a charity currently managing 7,661 homes.
- VAHT has various grant schemes including a coronavirus support fund with grants of up to £4000 for community group and voluntary organisations; £67,899 has been awarded to 26 applicants to date.
- VAHT's development programme expects to deliver 100 homes this year.
- The target was to provide 20% social rent for all new homes.
- Staff inspect the quality of homes and developments, and VAHT were looking to bring older homes to higher standards.

In response to questions, a number of key points were raised:

- In relation to the affordable rented tenure, it was noted that all rents were capped at the local housing allowance.
- VAHT would like to increase investment in social rent.
- Staff were assessing energy ratings of homes, and what heating provision could be provided in the future. VAHT were increasing the use of air source heat pumps in properties to reduce their carbon footprint.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness, Councillor Isobel Darby, provided an update to members on housing allocations. In response to questions, a number of key points were raised:

- The cabinet member would be looking at all models to provide affordable housing in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Property and Assets.
- Work had commenced to review the existing Bucks Home Choice Allocations Scheme and to develop and adopt a new Buckinghamshire Council Allocations Scheme. Existing processes support residents without internet access and these processes would be taken forward into the new scheme.
- Town and parish councils would be consulted on the new scheme.
- The cabinet member was committed to look at ways to provide key worker housing.

*Note 2: Councillor C Rouse re-joined the meeting at 11.54.*

*Note 3: Councillor D Barnes left the meeting at 12.27.*

## **5 Work programme**

### **Resolved:**

- To approve the draft growth, infrastructure and housing select committee work programme 2020 – 2021 at appendix 1.
- To note that the chairman, in consultation with the growth, infrastructure and housing select committee, may amend the work programme from time to time to account for any changes in the work and/ or priorities of the council 2020 - 2021.

## **6 Date of next meeting**

26 November 2020.