

Questions on Notice for Council Meeting

9 December 2020

Question(s) to the Leader (Councillor Martin Tett)

Question 1 from Councillor Darren Hayday:

When it comes to returning back to 'business as normal' regarding mass Covid vaccinations, etc will Councillors be able to have the choice of attending meetings digitally as we have currently been doing while working from home? As I prefer to attend these virtual meetings as it means a lot less traveling to attend the meetings in person, the technology has shown to work as well.

Question 1 from Councillor Rafiq Raja:

Following the announcement of the second Lockdown the Cabinet informally considered the implications for the Budget and decided to give up on developing the usual four-year Revenue Budget, because of the uncertainty caused by the current Covid emergency. What are the potential down sides to not knowing what the next three or four years may be like?

Question 1 from Councillor Khalil Ahmed

With regard to the operation of the Community Boards I am concerned that:

- funds spent by the CBs are accountable and audited
- the allocation of funding to the CBs accords with best practice and the law and is not politically influenced
- appropriate declarations of interests are made by Councillors on the CBs
- that decision making on the use of funds by CBs accords with best practice and the law

Can the Leader confirm that he is satisfied that there is appropriate governance in place to ensure that CBs are functioning correctly?

Question(s) to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care (Councillor Angela Macpherson)

Question 1 from Councillor Mohammed Hanif:

Unpaid carers are providing additional care for loved ones with increasing needs while experiencing reduced support services, according to a survey by charity Carers UK. The pandemic has further highlighted the incredibly valuable role played by unpaid carers and the difficult circumstances they face. Can the Cabinet Member tell

us that Buckinghamshire Council will ensure that unpaid carers in our community are valued, assessed and supported?

Question 1 from Councillor Andrea Baughan:

During the first Covid-19 lockdown, as I am sure we are all aware it was very difficult for families to visit older or vulnerable family members in care homes. This caused great distress to all concerned. It is accepted that safety and infection control must be paramount in all settings. Some innovative and online solutions have been successful. Clearly, all care homes differ in size and design and a careful balance must be maintained. In light of recent Government guidance, what steps are being taken by the Council to support care homes to facilitate visits from relatives whilst preventing the spread of Covid 19?

Olympic Lodge was transformed into a 240 bedded unit for vulnerable adults in April 2020. This was in response to the pressures that might emerge during the Covid 19 pandemic. Can you update us about the current and potential future plans for the use of this unit, and whether costs to date are prohibitive of any further plans.

Question 1 from Councillor Alan Bacon

It is reported that some care homes in Britain are facing a financial crisis as a result of Covid. Is this the case in Buckinghamshire, and if so, what steps are being or have been taken to support them?

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

Question 1 from Councillor Mohammed Hanif:

As EU laws begin to be reviewed because of the transition period on first January 2021. There is however the opportunity, to reform the procurement rules for future years while still ensuring that they stay true to their core purpose of, delivering full value for public money in a fair and transparent way. Can the Cabinet Member tell us that Buckinghamshire Council will have an efficient public regime that ensures the best value for public money, respects local decision making and allows stronger support for local economies and jobs?

Question 1 from Councillor Mohammed Asif:

What was the total budget of the council including earmarked reserves from the five local authorities at vesting day A of the Buckinghamshire authority and what are the current finances of the council presently as we run up & prepare for precept, & lastly

what is the total amount of money which has been handed to the local authority i.e. been given to Buckinghamshire Council during the Covid pandemic broken down into areas of support at this present time, and what element of the additional funding from government remains available?

Question 1 from Councillor Rafiq Raja

It seems that despite declaring a Climate Emergency, Buckinghamshire Council continues to act as if there is no rush to do anything about it. The latest example relates to the pension fund, which rather than divesting from fossil fuel investments (Shell, BP) is preferring the far less active approach of 'seeking engagement'.

As you might be aware there is a campaign amongst more environmentally minded members of the pension fund to get the council pension fund to change its approach. Would Cllr Wood urgently ask (the Trustees meet on 6 December) about the rationale for this inactivity and how can they reconcile the decision to engage, (not divest) with their fiduciary duties to the members including the duty to maximise the value of the pension holdings?

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

Question 1 from Councillor Mohammed Hanif:

The amount of household recycling collected during the Covid-19 pandemic has soared by as much as 100% in some council areas, with eight in 10 seeing an increase, hiking up costs to keep services running. The Covid-19 outbreak has interrupted progress of the Government's waste and recycling reforms due to be implemented from 2023. Can the Cabinet Member tell us how Buckinghamshire Council will deal with current disruptions to ensure the proposed reforms will be implemented as per plan?

Question 1 from Councillor Rafiq Raja

I understand that the Local Authority Delivery scheme, (designed to raise the energy efficiency of low-income and low EPC rated homes and to provide funding to help those in fuel poverty to improve their homes so that they are warm comfortable and cheap to heat), has been extended to December 2021. Can we be told if Buckinghamshire Council has applied for funding under this scheme and if not then would the Cabinet member give urgent consideration to such an application?

Question(s) to the Cabinet Member for Property and Assets (Councillor John Chilver)

Question 1 from Councillor Mark Bateman:

The Council will naturally undertake periodic reviews of its Capital Assets and give consideration towards Capital disposal. Is it the intention that prior to any decisions regarding Council Asset disposal, local Community Boards will be given prior notice and the opportunity to discuss the importance/value of the individual asset to the local community? Would recognising that this might slow down the capital disposal programme, would this not enhance the significance of Community Boards for local communities, and provide opportunities for local people to be further engaged in the decision making process?

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

Question 1 from Councillor Robin Stuchbury:

After reviewing the educational standards report, considered by the Education Select Committee on 5 November 2020, and the 2020/21 Internal Audit Plan (updated), considered by the Audit and Governance Committee on 18 November 2020, none of the concerns around special educational needs complaints were brought to the attention of the Select Committee.

Firstly, can I have the number of complaints currently being investigated within Buckinghamshire council education department?

Secondly, can I have a description of the nature of those complaints and what they are about, and the breakdown of the number of those complaints into the individual areas concerned within the local authority educational department?

Thank you for providing this information to enable me to better understand and be assured what actions are being undertaken to address complaints from parents on behalf of their dependants/children to the education department of Buckinghamshire Council.

Question 2 from Councillor Robin Stuchbury:

I understand that it is common practice for Schools to provide figures for educational attainment with comparisons with the attainment for SEN boys and girls. At the Children's & Education Select Committee, held on 5 November 2020, it was made evident within the Education Standards report that Buckinghamshire Council no longer records attainment by gender, and instead only records this by other classifications, such as diversity and geographical groups, within the council's area of responsibility. If Buckinghamshire Council is no longer recording education attainment, including SEN, by gender please can you demonstrate to me how we are

monitoring and scrutinising gender attainment trends within Buckinghamshire to ensure that improvements can be made where required.

Question 1 from Councillor Mark Bateman:

In my written question to Council at its meeting on 21st October 2020 it was acknowledged that the Council does have a role in supporting the 13 Grammar schools in the 11+ process. It has a contractual agreement to do so.

As the 11+ is a test undertaken within Buckinghamshire and has a significant effect on the educational opportunities provided for children and families residing within the County. Is it not appropriate that the Council has an obligation and a duty to its residents to discuss the continuing appropriateness of this test?

Question 1 from Councillor Mohammed Hanif:

The Covid 19 pandemic has had an immeasurable impact on all of us, and the councils have been at the forefront of local responses since day one. That has included keeping children safe, working with schools to ensure access to education and providing practical support for the most vulnerable. Despite much effort, the main challenges for children's services are yet to come. Is the Cabinet member confident that Buckinghamshire Council has properly funded local safety nets and early help services and that they are easily accessed by children and families who need them?

Question 1 from Councillor Rafiq Raja:

Has the Education Standards Report for the Education Select Committee given any new insights into the educational attainment gap between the socio economically well-off children and those from recognisably poorer backgrounds?

Question(s) to the Cabinet Member for Youth Provision (Councillor Tony Green)

Question 1 from Councillor Sebert Graham:

After watching the most recent Children's and Education Select Committee, the family support service and youth centres were mentioned in a report, in which it inferred that youth centres are being brought back in-house under the FSS umbrella. When these matters were raised in that meeting, clarity was sought on what bringing back into house meant and answers given appeared to contradict the wording in the report which suggested something quite different. It wasn't made clear what/why/how this helps Bucks teenagers. I am now confused about the current responsibilities of

the service and in the future when seeing these matters questioned at meetings. I am unclear what part Buckinghamshire Council presently plays supporting youth centres. Please could the Cabinet Member confirm the areas of responsibility currently within his portfolio and how that relates to youth centres?

Question(s) to the Cabinet Member for Transport (Councillor Nick Naylor)

Question 1 from Councillor Robin Stuchbury:

Buckinghamshire has over 400 miles of footpath which are viable amenities for the public to use. It is common knowledge not all public rights of way were registered when local authorities drew up their records in the 1950-60s. If these unregistered footpaths aren't registered before 1 January 2026 the public will lose legal right of access from that date.

As it is important that the public do not lose access to any unregistered public rights of way, which are so beneficial for residents and organisations, what steps or publicity is Buckinghamshire Council taking to ensure that members of the public and interested parties e.g. Parish Councils and The Ramblers are aware that they need to register any footpath, not already on the definitive map, by 1 January 2026, and will Buckinghamshire Council publish and publicise the definitive map of known rights of ways and footpaths to ensure that the unregistered rights of ways & footpaths within our green Buckinghamshire are retained post 2026 and remain a public amenity for generations to come?

Question 1 from Councillor Majid Hussain:

What is the council policy on green infrastructure and planning to provide safe cycleways routes between villages and schools? Would this be something that could be built into the business case within planning new developments especially developments within villages to build up a sustainable fund for core funding of cycle routes throughout Buckinghamshire which would assist reducing the carbon footprint in Buckinghamshire and facilitate green journeys from rural areas to the urban catchment and economic centres and key towns within Buckinghamshire.

Question 1 from Councillor Matt Knight:

Earlier this year a meeting was held by my colleague Councillor Julia Wassell over the lack of progress in taking forward plans to widen Micklefield Road at the junction of the A40, and provide a much needed pedestrian crossing. She was informed by officers that the plans could not be carried forward until further funding was identified. In December 2014 it was announced by the then Buckinghamshire County Council that £6.2 million to provide infrastructure improvements for High Wycombe, particularly on the east side of High Wycombe. At the same meeting Cllr Wassell was told that only just over £3.2 million of that funding had been spent in

High Wycombe. Why cannot a portion of the remaining £3 million be spent on bringing forward this scheme that will increase the capacity of the junction and considerably improve pedestrian safety?

A £4.5m Government grant is being spent on the A40 London Road in High Wycombe to improve traffic flow. Yet we still have severe flooding near Pinions Road and Harlow Road every time it rains. This disrupts traffic and causes pedestrians and cyclists to be soaked by passing vehicles. Why has this still not been remedied and why is it so difficult to provide effective drainage when the road runs alongside the River Wye which should provide ample drainage?

Question 1 from Councillor Brian Pearce

I am concerned to note that I was not consulted or informed about the proposal to install traffic lights at the junction of John Hall Way and Crest Road which could interfere with traffic flow in this area. Can the Cabinet Member confirm why he thinks the £1.25 m is value for money for this scheme, particularly during a recession?

Question(s) to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Enforcement (Councillor Warren Whyte)

Question 1 from Councillor Ron Gaffney:

As you are well aware Hazlemere Planning matters for the Hazlemere Electorate are high on their Agenda, in fact I spend most of my Council time on these matters - visits to sites, discussions and meeting members of my electorate. Following a recent unfortunate large BFP article including my photograph we must do something to avoid this happening again. One major change I would like to suggest is that ALL Chairmen of Planning Cttees/Boards etc have the final say in who can and cannot attend Planning Meetings. We must be seen by the public that we take planning matters seriously. This recent unfortunate BFP article has created a stream of e-mails from a member of the public about this article in that I was not allowed to attend the meeting, even though I called the matter in". In my opinion this would help considerably and prevent such articles in the Press. I hereby propose

Question 1 from Councillor Brian Pearce:

The proposal to site a drive through restaurant and supermarket on Cressex Island has been made public in the local press. I was not informed or consulted about this as one of the local Councillors.

The public have raised concerns with me about this proposal due to possible traffic congestion and duplication of facilities as we already have numerous supermarkets and takeaways nearby. Another issue in that area is the air quality. Please can you

inform me how this development has come about and why there has been no consultation about what local residents need?

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

Question 1 from Councillor Mohammed Hanif:

Test and trace statistics published weekly have shown that local health protection teams are reaching about 94.8% of contacts assigned to them who were asked to self-isolate.

By comparison for those cases handled by online or call centres, only 57.6% of close contacts were reached. If we are to prevent this second wave from escalating further, we need the system to meet the recommended 80% benchmark if it is to have any chance of success.

Can the Cabinet Member tell us what Buckinghamshire Council is doing to ensure that test and trace is local so to have better success rate, cost effective, improve accountability and transparency?

Question 1 from Councillor Alan Bacon:

The Annual Report from the Director of Public Health identifies inequality as the most important issue in improving public health in Buckinghamshire. What systems will be set up to measure and monitor success in tackling the health behaviours which are listed as key to reducing health inequality in Bucks: smoking, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet and alcohol misuse?

Question 1 from Councillor Khalil Ahmed

It is understood that local support groups play only a signposting role and actually do not provide any assistance by way of food or other help, is this fair on voluntary groups and what lessons have been learnt from the first lockdown? It is further understood that the previously available Councillor Crisis Fund is not available in the same format and is left in the hands of Community Boards to administer and manage. Are you able to explain how this differs from the original Councillor Crisis Fund by way of money being made available for councillors to bid for on behalf of voluntary groups, the same voluntary groups that we depend on to provide all the statutory services we should be providing as the principal local authority?

Question(s) to the Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services (Councillor Fred Wilson)

Question 1 from Councillor Mark Bateman:

The RSPCA believes the law is failing as it does not prevent or sufficiently reduce the risk of fireworks causing distress, injury or anxiety to people, as well as death, injury or distress to animals.

Further research is needed to properly understand the impact of noise on animals and a number of things can be done to improve the situation for animals and people by:

- introducing a limit on the public use of fireworks on or close to specific dates and times
- tightening restrictions on the sale of fireworks in the run up to Bonfire night
- reducing the maximum noise level of fireworks sold to the public, ensuring they are labelled accurately
- licensing all public firework displays – and ensuring displays are better advertised to the public.

Could the Council provide comment on this issue and suggest how the concerns of the RSPCA can be addressed in Buckinghamshire?

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

Question 1 from Councillor Rafiq Raja

Is the Council able to account for the S 106 receipts and what percentage of these monies have been used for their designated purpose, being mindful of the fact that Section 106 payments are received from developers as part of their provision of affordable housing to the requisite proportion in their developments.

Would the Cabinet member say if there is a register where all the S106 agreements are listed, including details of how the money has to be spent or has been spent?

Question 1 from Councillor Ashley Waite

My question is in regard to the current ban on evictions which has been in place since March 2020 and is currently due to run until the end of Jan 2021.

Assuming there is not another extension to this ban before Jan 2021, At some point next year, there will be a huge amount of evictions going through the courts under Section 21, which I believe will lead to a number of issues in the area.

- 1) - we could have to deal with unprecedented amounts of people who have been building up debt under a current tenancy who may have a difficulty to get rehoused.
- 2) - Which could have an impact on the levels of homelessness in the area

3) - and finally the amount of housing stock held by private landlords will reduce as landlords look to sell up and move out of the marketplace as a result of the difficulties faced this year which will lead to less housing stock available in the area.

What level of preparation is the council looking to put in place in order to deal with this increased level of housing evictions when it finally occurs?

Question(s) to the Cabinet Member for Logistics (Councillor David Martin)

Question 1 from Councillor David Pepler

With my attention having been drawn to the differing charges that are levied in the car parks in the Southern part of the County I have been informed that there is quite a variation in the amounts charged in the old District Council Areas.

In the South Bucks Area the charge for 1 hour averages at £1.27, in Wycombe it is 73p and in Chiltern it is 70p at Amersham and free at Chalfont. This shows that South Bucks is subsidising the rest of the County. What future plans are there if any to correct this imbalance?