

Questions for Council Meeting

9 December 2020

Question(s) to the Cabinet Member for 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 digitality 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.

Response:

The Council will act within the legislation applicable at the time. It will also be for the new council elected in May 2021 to determine, within the law, how it wishes to operate its meetings. Should Councillor Hayday be a member of that council he will of course have the ability to participate in this decision.

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 having a clue as to what the next three or four years may be like?

Response:

Given the major uncertainties surrounding the impact of the Covid pandemic on the council's finances and what Government funding would be available it was agreed that the most sensible approach was to only undertake a one-year Revenue budget. This had the major advantage of providing focus around the immediate future and the actions that needed to be taken to remain financially secure. A four-year Capital Budget has been retained as this is the area in which forward financial planning is most important. Given the high degree of uncertainty concerning both income and expenditure there are few if any down sides to the approach adopted.

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?

Response:

We have a robust funding application and approval process to ensure community board funding is allocated to projects that supports the council and community board priorities to meet local need. This process has been developed using best practice models from the former five councils alongside learning from similar models across the country. Due diligence is carried out by officers on applications to ensure the projects meet the funding criteria and each application is assessed on a case by case basis. There is also a clear process for declarations of interest for Buckinghamshire Councillors and all members of the boards, these are made within the funding reports and at the meetings when funding is discussed. Our Community Boards are a new and exciting development as part of the new council's commitment to engaging local residents in local decision making and we are constantly reviewing and reflecting on these processes to ensure they are effective and rigorous.

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 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?

Response:

The Shadow Authority approved the budget for Buckinghamshire Council in February 2020. This showed a gross revenue budget of just under £1.2bn and a 3-year capital budget of just over £500m. Earmarked revenue reserves brought forward from the five legacy authorities were circa £130m and unallocated reserves (General Fund reserves) amounted to circa £47m. The Quarter 2 financial position for the current year was reported to Cabinet on the 10th November. This showed a forecast revenue overspend position of £4.9m, which was due to a combination of the impact of Covid-19 as well as Business as Usual activities. Every effort is being made to bring net spend back into line with the approved budget.

The details of the additional expenditure / lost income linked to the pandemic, together with the funding received from government is highlighted within the Cabinet report. In total the directorate pressures are forecast to be £41.8m with confirmed funding of £39.6m, leaving a shortfall of £2.2m as at the end of September. The Council continues to lobby government for full recovery of all financial pressures as a result of the pandemic. New announcements continue to be made following the most recent lockdown and the tiered system that we are now in. Spending pressures and funding are continually being monitored in line with all the new announcements.

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?

Response:

The Council is very aware of the critical contribution of unpaid carers.

We have ensured during the Covid period that services to Carers are adjusted to be able to continue during this challenging time. We did this by Adult Social Care contacting vulnerable residents and their carers to understand if they needed extra support. Where centres were shut, alternative offers of support were discussed with carers. Some of these were in the family home, some were within a community setting.

Carer's assessments are also a way that the council supports unpaid carers. The assessment is a chance for people to discuss their caring responsibilities to understand whether they are willing and able to continue in their caring role, to understand the impact on their wellbeing and identify any support they need to continue to work, have time away from their caring responsibilities and to socialise with others who are important to them.

For adult carers, Carers Bucks have continued to deliver carer support groups via Zoom and are will continue to review the options for face-to-face support as Government guidance allows. A survey was sent to all adult carers to inform future approaches and learning and information sessions, such as Emergency First Aid, Emergency Planning and Infection Detection, are planned before the end of the year.

Support Workers in the Adult Carers Support Team have continued to telephone carers to check on their wellbeing and are responding to an increase in the need for

emotional support as many carers are struggling with effects of the pandemic. Carers Bucks have used their wellbeing fund to purchase therapies to help with carers' own health and wellbeing and Carers Bucks have been able to action this in a timely manner.

For Young Adult Carers (YAC's), Carers Bucks have been able to offer advice and signposting to assist carers in their role. They have sent weekly emails to all YAC's informing them about other organisations that they can get extra support from and things that they may find useful such as free courses etc. they also continued to offer zoom session to all young adult carers.

Carers Bucks engaged with YACS's to understand what they needed from support services and as a result, Carers Bucks has included meeting small groups of YACs outside whilst maintaining social distancing. Carers Bucks have carried out assessments and one to one sessions with YAC's in year 12 or 13. This has enabled Carers Bucks support workers to have meaningful interactions and carry out specific pieces of work around the caring role and have delivered one to one sessions and assessments in YAC's gardens or local parks if appropriate, which has made a real impact.

As with adult carers, for some young adult carers there has been increased anxiety and Bucks Adult Learning have provided free remote weekly sessions during September to work on YAC wellbeing and anxiety and work has been undertaken to re-integrated YAC's who became socially isolated back into society after lockdown.

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?

Response:

The most recent government guidance on visiting in Care homes was released on 2nd December 2020 and visiting in Care homes is actively supported where the visit can happen safely. The government are planning to introduce lateral flow testing, in addition to existing measures, to all care homes to support the facilitation of visits and reduce the risk of spreading infection.

Due to differences across different care settings, providers must undertake their own risk assessments to identify if and how safe visiting can be enabled. The Council is supporting this by signposting providers to sources of support, sharing good practice, delivering webinars on infection prevention control and practice sessions on risk assessment. The Director of Public Health is also in communication with care homes

to advise levels of Covid in the local community and any impact of this on arrangements for visiting locally.

Local care homes have received funding from the national Infection Control Grant and this funding can be used to support safe visiting through actions such as dedicated staff to support and facilitate visits, additional cleaning in between visits, and capital-based alterations to allow safe visiting such as altering a dedicated space.

During the pandemic Standards in care settings have continued to be monitored, whilst several routine visits to care homes have not taken place to reduce the risk of spreading infection, essential visits have continued. This includes visits from social workers to undertake statutory assessments and reviews, and from staff in the safeguarding team or Commissioning Service to undertake essential monitoring.

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.

There are no current or potential future plans for re-using Olympic Lodge.

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?

Response:

Responding to Covid is creating challenges for local care homes. Two types of financial support have been made available to care homes. The Council implemented a Covid claims process during the first emergency period (April – September). This was resourced by funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and all social care providers, including care homes, were able to access additional funding for a range of Covid related costs including PPE and additional staff. In addition, the Government has also provided Infection Control Funding. It was mandatory to provide an element of this funding to care homes based on the number of beds registered with the CQC and including those who are not commissioned by the Council. This grant has been distributed to Care Homes promptly. The Council is also supporting care homes to access other forms of support available to them, such as access to free PPE via a national portal. There is ongoing engagement with local care homes to understand who may be experiencing particular difficulties and we have been approached by a number of providers for differing levels of support. The Council has developed a provider support matrix to help to assess any cases coming forwards.

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?

Response:

As and when the procurement laws (Public Contracts Regulations 2015) are amended by Parliament, they will be adopted into the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. Any changes to procurement laws will be communicated to officers and they will be provided with procurement training on how to operate within the boundaries of these laws.

Once the Council is aware of what these changes entail, our internal rules will follow our current efficient procurement regime that strives for continuous improvement, transparency and best value for residents as well as the local economy.

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?

Joint response with the Chairman of the Pension Fund Committee, Councillor Tim Butcher:

Pension Funds have a primary responsibility to ensure that the investment returns are sufficient to pay the pensions of the members of the pension fund. Pension Funds are long term investors as liabilities will cover a period of at least 50 years, or in some cases longer.

Buckinghamshire Pension fund is in the process of transferring its investments to the Brunel Pension Partnership as required by legislation. The Pension Fund's portfolio is managed by the Brunel Partnership who are one of the leading fund managers in prioritising ESG (environmental, social and governance).

Brunel has a strategy to challenge the active managers they appoint to think carefully and critically about the companies and other entities they invest in, and to justify their investments in those companies with higher greenhouse gas emissions. Responsible investors have a duty to influence energy companies through their stock holding to adapt their businesses to mitigate climate change impacts.

Brunel has committed to review their approach and to evaluate whether companies are taking steps to manage climate risks and to enable our overall alignment with the Paris Agreement to address climate change. Brunel set out clear expectations for the asset managers it appoints on the Buckinghamshire Fund's behalf with a deadline of 2022 for undertaking a climate stock take. The criteria to evaluate companies and managers is being developed with their clients. It will take into account different investment mandates and starting points, but always with reference to Paris alignment.

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?

Response:

The extra waste produced as a result of the pandemic has affected most local authorities albeit to different degrees depending on how services were affected locally.

Compared to the same period last year, general rubbish has increased by about 14%, recycling has also increased by 12%, but other streams have reduced, largely due to service disruption, such as garden waste and food waste. This will reduce the overall recycling rate across the County, but at the halfway stage in such a turbulent year, it is very difficult to predict by exactly how much.

Whilst the increase in recycling and other waste streams has stretched services and increased costs it isn't expected to affect how Buckinghamshire Council prepares for upcoming changes when the Resources and Waste Strategy is introduced. Staff on the frontline have dealt with the increased workloads brilliantly and I want to thank

them all for their hard work, from collection crews to street cleansing, household recycling centre staff and all other frontline Waste Services staff. Christmas always produces more waste, so we are in for another busy period and we would ask all residents to visit the website to check collection days, opening days for household recycling centres and to check what you can recycle.

Buckinghamshire Council has actively responded to consultations and fed into workshops to help formulate the Resources and Waste Strategy work. The Council is ready to continue this work with central government as more details are released. Buckinghamshire already offers a comprehensive recycling service and performs well nationally, and we are confident that we are well placed to respond positively to any changes that the Resources and Waste Strategy introduces.

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?

Response:

Buckinghamshire Council is proposing to take part in a consortium bid lead by Watford Borough Council. The bid is for £2m (across the consortium area) to deliver a grant project managed by partners at the National Energy Foundation, installing insulation and low carbon heating measures targeted at low income households in EPC E, F or G rated properties.

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?

Response:

The Council is committed to ensuring that local Members are consulted on any proposals for asset disposals, lettings and acquisitions. Their views are important in informing decisions on these matters. Depending on the particular asset and its significance, it may also be appropriate to consult the community board. This will be determined in consultation with local members on a case by case basis.

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.

Response:

Thank you for your question Councillor Stuchbury. At the time of writing (26 November 2020), there are 11 complaints open within the Education Service. 7 of these complaints are at stage 1 of the process and the remaining 4 are at stage 2. As requested, please see the breakdown by theme below:

Special Educational Needs and Disability - 7

Admissions - 3

Home to school transport - 1

Please be assured that when we receive an expression of dissatisfaction, the complaint is fully investigated and we do our utmost to provide a full response within the shortest time possible. The service welcomes feedback and we want to ensure that we hear the views and experiences of those children, young people and families we support. Where we can, we learn from complaints and use them to improve our services and ways of working.

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.

Response:

The council analyses educational outcomes based on a wide range of pupil and school characteristics. This includes information recorded for each pupil on the school census (gender, ethnicity, first language, SEN status, area where the pupil lives, etc) and information about the school a pupil attends, for example, whether the school is maintained or an academy, selective or non-selective or the area where the school is located.

The Education Standards Report provided an overview of the outcomes for children and young people in Buckinghamshire. It was designed as a summary report, and as such did not try to cover all the detail available from our analysis. The report instead aimed to highlight key themes and pupil/school groupings, and focused on areas where there were particular differences to national benchmarks or changes in trends. Overall, the analysis of outcomes by gender did not show significant differences or trends and if necessary, a summary of outcomes by gender at each key stage can be made available upon request.

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?

Response:

Thank you for your question regarding the Secondary School Selection Test and grammar school system within Buckinghamshire. In looking at overall secondary attainment in Buckinghamshire, the 2019 data shows that our attainment has risen for the last three years and that outcomes overall were higher than both national and statistical neighbour comparators. Our attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and the national average for non-disadvantaged pupils has been smaller (and therefore better) than national, and statistical neighbour figures for the last two years. When reviewing our non-selective schools, they outperformed similar schools in

other highly selective areas and were close to the average of all schools nationally. Therefore, from national data, it is clear that students across all types of secondary school in Buckinghamshire are achieving above national figures.

Currently the structure of secondary schools across Buckinghamshire is a picture where the vast majority of the schools are academies, this includes all of the grammar schools. Academies are publicly funded, independent schools, held accountable to the DfE through a legally binding 'funding agreement' and they are required to set their admission processes and procedures in line with their academy contract, which for a grammar school permits them to continue to select their entire intake. Within the framework for each grammar school's admission policy, it is clear that these schools have a selection process that is linked to pupil ability. As a Local Authority we would have no remit to change the admission policies of these academies, regardless of any view expressed by the council. Academies report to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) rather than the Local Authority.

A direct consequence of the academisation of the grammar schools in Buckinghamshire could be that they would all administer their own entrance test. The grammar schools across Buckinghamshire have chosen to deliver one test and one selection grade for all, and to manage a single admissions process for all, with the administrative support of the Local Authority. This significantly simplifies the process of taking the secondary transfer test for all Buckinghamshire residents and ensures that there is parity for pupils with the same standardised score being applied across the county. Without this co-ordination, students could potentially have to take a different test for each school that they wish to apply to. This, along with the fact that it would be an 'opt in' rather than an 'opt out' process would mean that disadvantaged pupils would be less likely to engage in the process.

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?

Response:

Buckinghamshire Council has an early help model which works in partnership with a range of agencies and seeks to promote the prevention and early identification of emerging need, so that appropriate support can be offered. This ranges from access to a wide range of information, advice and guidance via the Buckinghamshire Family Information Service website (www.bucksfamilyinfo.org), telephone support and guidance to help families in need of additional help to navigate to appropriate providers, health clinics and face to face meetings at Family Centres and direct support provided to young people and families who have complex or enduring

challenges. Within Children's Services, the Family Support Service continues to provide face to face support to families, coordinating the efforts different agencies to ensure families get the support they need at the right time. Working closely with schools, health and colleagues in children's services the Family Support Service has the skills and capacity required to meet the current and projected demands being placed on the service.

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?

Response:

Thank you for your enquiry. From the perspective of the School Improvement Team, the Education Standards Report is a summary document of data that was released in provisional form several months earlier, as such the report itself provides members with a concise breakdown of the data. The school improvement team use more granular information to support their work and have been doing so in this area since the provisional data was released. As a result, we have started to deliver a series of events supporting this agenda focussing on specific themes that the data has led us to. The initial interrogation of the data led us to focus on key demographic and geographic groups these are:

1. Pakistani pupils
2. Black African Caribbean pupils
3. Pupils attending rural schools (where the proportion of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium Grant is smaller)

Whilst the work with schools that we are undertaking aims to address the needs of all pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium Grant, these groups remain a focus which runs through all of our activity.

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?

Response:

In September 2019 the new integrated Family Support Service was launched following the County Council Cabinet decision of 4th March 2019. The new service structure incorporates the role and responsibilities of the former Youth Service but has retained the role of Youth Practitioner as part of the three, multi-skilled area teams. Youth practitioners provide direct support to families as part of the core service offer and also continue to deliver a range of youth work including:

One-One Support- A series of weekly one to one sessions with a young person that are targeted to address specific, identified needs.

Targeted Group Work- A small group work programme of six to eight weeks for young people around specific topics/needs. These topics include:

- Confidence and Self-esteem
- Stress, Anxiety and Low Mood
- Transitions (to secondary school)
- School Engagement
- Employability
- Risk Taking behaviours

Weekly Drop Ins- available in each locality area where young people can access information, advice and guidance on a variety of issues.

School Link Worker Support- Each Secondary School has a Youth Worker who attends the school 1 morning a fortnight to offer information, guidance and signposting for young people and teachers.

The paper to Select Committee referenced the support provided to community-led youth provision, stating; “The establishment of FSS brought the previously commissioned support to community youth clubs back in house. This has enabled closer links to be created with these centres and enabling youth practitioners to support VCS youth workers through a newly established on-line practice forum”.

In practice there are a variety of youth groups, forums and activities in the local community that are accessible to young people in Bucks. These are predominantly delivered by charities or voluntary groups but BC Family Support Service work in partnership and provide support. There are 16 Youth Clubs that are still operating within BC buildings under lease terms and have a Service Level Agreement in place with BC which identifies Key Performance Indicators. In addition, support is provided to the 16 community-led youth centres as detailed in the report to Select Committee. The 2 Youth Centres that are still managed and operated directly by BC Family Support Service to enable direct service provision also to provide a youth offer in partnership with VCS colleagues.

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?

Response:

The Buckinghamshire Council Definitive Map team is aware of the 2026 cut-off date and has been receiving and continues to receive numerous applications from members of the public, including those from key user groups (for example, British Horse Society, Open Spaces Society, Carriage Riders Association), claiming routes that are not currently recorded on the legal records i.e. the Definitive Map and Statement. As the Council is the decision maker, we must act impartially and cannot be promoting or encouraging applications which could ultimately put a public highway on private land. However, Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum, which is a statutory independent group, has raised the profile of the "Restoring the Records" national project, which has resulted in several applications to date. The key user groups are most certainly aware of the potential risk to unrecorded routes and have been running their own national campaigns. With regards to publishing the Definitive Map – it is freely accessible to members of the public who can arrange to view it at the Walton Street Office and the GIS dataset is available for free download under an OS Opendata licence. A working copy of the map can also be viewed on our website as an interactive map (<https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/environment/public-rights-of-way/public-rights-of-way-map/>). Extracts can also be purchased by private individuals, and free copies can be provided to some user groups and all Parish Councils.

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.

Joint response with the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change, Councillor Bill Chapple OBE:

At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which in turn places weight on promoting sustainable transport, such as walking and cycling. This applies to both plan-making - which would be largely led by the Council's Transport Strategy team, and development proposals – which would be led by the Highways Development Management (HDM) team. An HDM Guidance document (adopted by the former Buckinghamshire County Council) provides an initial steer to ensure that developers address cycling infrastructure in their development proposals.

Local transport policy further enables the HDM Team to secure support for sustainable transport schemes. Policy 13 of Buckinghamshire Local Transport Plan 4 (adopted by the former County Council) includes specific support for encouraging cycling “through a combination of new infrastructure, maintenance and guidance”.

Currently, Local Transport Strategies within Buckinghamshire are aligned to the former two-tier Council structure, although these will be reviewed following the Unitary merger earlier this year. Aylesbury Garden Town Masterplan is an example of how the Council is placing sustainable travel high on its agenda; the subject is highly topical given its strong link to climate change and the ambitions of Government to reduce congestion and emissions, improving air quality and public health. The Wycombe Local Plan adopted in 2019 also includes provision for strategic cycling routes to neighbouring rural areas. Additionally, Buckinghamshire Council has recently conducted surveys among residents and businesses to inform a county-wide Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy, currently under development, which will help to drive decarbonisation of transport. Whilst local policy is in the process of being updated, I can assure you that the Council is committed to delivering sustainable growth and working positively with developers to achieve this wherever possible.

Funding for several different cycling schemes have been secured by Buckinghamshire's Transport Strategy team. Priority strategic walking and cycling links are being progressed across the county, and over £7m has been spent on new infrastructure in the last five years alone.

Planning conditions and obligations are used to secure mitigation schemes such as cycle infrastructure to improve the sustainability of development proposals. In some circumstances mitigation will be delivered by the developer themselves through the S278 process. In line with Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations, obligations must be necessary in planning terms, directly-related to the development and proportionate in scale. It is the responsibility of the HDM team to secure appropriate funding, which may be the developer providing full funding of a transport

scheme, or a proportional contribution towards a wider scheme through the S106 process. A scheme may also be provided through the CIL fund.

Opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport are therefore required to be pursued by national policy, and the planning system should actively manage growth in support of these objectives. Nevertheless, the NPPF states that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision-making, and this is taken into consideration by the HDM team's responses to development proposals.

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?

Response:

Carriageway widening and the provision of a pedestrian crossing on Micklefield Road was not within the scope of the NPIF project because it required third party land and could not be delivered within the timescales of the project funding agreements. The project did carry out some investigation into the land required for a future scheme and high level design work which will ensure that any future widening of the road would be compatible with the changes the NPIF scheme has already implemented. Colleagues in the Council's Development Management team are aware of the desire to widen the road and improve pedestrian crossing facilities as a potential scheme for future reserve site funding.

The Local Transport Body funding of £6.2m announced in 2014 was originally allocated to offset the impact of the reserve housing sites in High Wycombe but before it was understood what highway schemes might be needed. Since that funding was announced the Council was successful with its bid for corridor improvements to the A40, so only some of the LTB funding was needed to complete the corridor improvements with a total investment of £6.64m. The remaining LTB funding has been allocated to other schemes.

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?

The flooding at Pinions Road is impacted by leaves on the gully grates from the trees which form part of the screen between Pinions Road and the A40. Removing the leaves from the gully grate allows the water to disperse. Removal of the trees which create the issue is not an option, so regular, annual cleansing of the gullies here, with additional attendance from TfB if and when required will mitigate the issue.

Additional wider gully cleansing, vegetation and ditch clearance on both sides of the road will be completed by the end of next week which will also help the situation. This work is subject to getting permissions for access from the relevant landowners which is underway. Previous similar works done in this location did alleviate the problem. Further gully cleansing and checks will be done now on a more regular basis.

At the Harlow Road junction, the highway drainage system outfalls to the River Wye and the vegetation growth and any high water levels in the river can impede the free flowing of the road drainage into the river. TfB have contacted the Environment Agency to ask for vegetation to be cleared but it is low on their priority list. TfB are following this up with the Environment Agency and Chiltern Rangers, who have previously done similar vegetation clearance works in the River Wye, to see if something can be arranged.

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?

Response:

I can confirm that Councillor Pearce and local members were notified directly via email of the Crest Road Virtual Public Consultation on at least two occasions and would therefore have had the opportunity to comment on the proposals. A press release was issued on 24th July to a total of 635 recipients and a consultation email was then sent on 7th August. On a further two occasions, local members would have had the opportunity to see the article in the Bucks Free Press and the post on the Council website:

- Bucks Free Press reported it on 25 July - <https://www.bucksfreepress.co.uk/news/18606575.cressex-island-overhaul-plans-move-forward---council-wants-install-traffic-lights/>
- PR posted on Council website 24 July - <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/news/virtual-first-crest-road-junction-plans/>

The Crest Road Signalisation and John Hall Way Cycleway is a proposed highway junction improvement to enable the proposed developments at Cressex Island, High Wycombe, for vehicles aiming to access the A4010 John Hall Way/Crest Road area of Wycombe and the associated businesses. The current development proposals are expected to yield a significant land sale receipt and ongoing rental income to Buckinghamshire Council; both require the junction to be delivered by the Council as a contractual commitment. The return on development will significantly outweigh the costs involved in delivering the junction improvement, and will create much needed employment space and new job opportunities - and so I can confirm that the works offer very good value for money to the Council.

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

Response:

Thank you for your question Councillor Gaffney. Chairmen already have the discretion you propose. I do however acknowledge that the operation of this has not been particularly clear. As you will appreciate, the Council has introduced new rules but at the same time carried over some of the procedures of the legacy councils which has unfortunately resulted in discrepancies arising. As this has now been highlighted the notices to Councillors is being updated to make it clear that Ward Councillors should seek the consent of the Chairman to speak and all other Councillors need to register. This will also be highlighted to appropriate officers to ensure consistency across the Council. In addition, the Council has already started the process to review the Constitution and as well as considering the operation of the procedure rules in full, strengthening the references to discretion will be specifically reviewed. It is also proposed to consider a specific speaking slot in relation to a call-in (where applicable). Any specific comments you have in this regard or on speaking generally will be appreciated.

The rules on speaking arrangements at planning committees, are set out in the Constitution. The rules require speakers (including councillors) to formally register to speak. However, Chairmen have been given some discretion within the procedure rules as per paragraph 3.11:

"In all matters of procedure and interpretation of these rules, the Chairman's decision will be final."

It is expected that Chairmen will apply procedure and interpretation to ensure both fairness and transparency. The Planning Protocol, whilst not part of the Constitution is an aid to good practice. Paragraph 13.3 states that:

Ward councillors who are not members of the Planning Committee can make representations on planning applications in their Ward and may attend meetings of the Planning Committee and, with the Chairman of Planning Committee's agreement, can address the Planning Committee on such applications in accordance with the protocol on public speaking at Planning Committee meetings. Any representations or address should relate to the planning merits of a planning application. This will not apply if the councillor is also a Parish/Town Councillor and the Parish/Town Council is the applicant.

This paragraph makes it clear that notwithstanding the Planning Committee Procedure Rules a Chairman has discretion to allow a Ward Councillor who has not registered to speak at a planning committee. This would be particularly appropriate for example where a Ward Councillor was not aware of a need to speak on behalf of one or more resident's until after the deadline to register.

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?

Joint response with the Cabinet member for Property and Assets, Councillor John Chilver:

The site was openly marketed back in 2018, on behalf of the former Wycombe District Council and a proposed occupier/developer was selected competitively. A public consultation was held in August 2020 and the developers are now proceeding with a planning application. It is for the erection of a retail unit for use as a supermarket and erection of restaurant/takeaway unit with drive thru, with associated access, car parking and hard/soft landscaping and has only recently been received and validated by the Development Management team (23rd November). Local councillors should be notified by email in the next Members Weekly List and will have 28 days to make any representations.

The Council recently held a public consultation on Crest Road junction improvements, to enable the development of Cressex Island. This consultation made reference to the development proposals. Other issues raised by Councillor Pearce in his question such as appropriateness of the uses proposed and air quality will be

part of the consideration of this planning application. Local residents now have a further the opportunity to make any representations they wish regarding the proposal.

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?

Response:

Local contact tracing systems are an important adjunct to the national test and trace system and Buckinghamshire Council launched its service on 30 November. To respond to this question it is important to understand the different roles of the 2 services.

Local authority services take on the contacting of an infected person (or a "case") where the national system is unable to get in touch with the person within 24 hours, the local service tries to reach the infected person by phone or, if this fails, by a home visit to deliver a letter. The purpose is to reinforce the importance of self-isolation, to offer sources of support for this, and to ascertain the details of their relevant close "contacts". The details of the close contacts are then passed back to the national test and trace service for them to deal with. Local council services are not involved in calling an infected person's close contacts.

For Buckinghamshire residents, the national system has been able to get in touch with infected people (cases) in about 80% of cases in the first 24 hours and, since 30 November, the remainder are being passed to us. It is too early to determine the effect that we are having but we will be monitoring our own performance.

We do not have data on the success rate of the national team for getting in touch with close contacts of infected people.

It is likely that our local service will be required until the majority of people have been immunised against Covid-19 and infection rates have become sustainably low.

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?

Response:

The 2020 Director of Public Health Annual Report makes recommendations for improving health outcomes for all residents and addressing the needs of key groups that are at increased risk of poorer health. One or more unhealthy behaviours are found in virtually all groups in Buckinghamshire so addressing unhealthy behaviours will improve health for the majority of our residents. The report highlights the needs to address the wider societal factors that increase the risk of unhealthy behaviours as well as individual interventions to support people, such as stopping smoking or treating people with alcohol misuse.

The recommendations in the report are for the council and wider partners including the NHS and will need action by all partners if we are to succeed. The 2021-2025 Buckinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy will set out an action plan to improve and protect our residents health and will have a specific section on health behaviours. Progress will be monitored through the Health and Well-being Board and other multiagency partner groups already working on specific health behaviours.

We have systems in place to monitor the success of efforts to promote healthy behaviour in several ways including monitoring the proportion of people smoking, being physically active and eating healthily through various national surveys and programmes such as the childhood measurement programme which identifies what proportion of children are a healthy weight. We also directly measure the success of the services we put in place such as smoking cessation and substance misuse services and weight management services. We monitor outcomes by key demographic groups, such as deprivation or ethnicity, where appropriate.

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 learned from lockdown one? 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?

Response:

Local support groups have played a critical role in providing assistance to our most vulnerable residents throughout the pandemic and continue to do so. Whilst the council's support hub has coordinated support initially to the shielded population, and more recently to the 'clinically extremely vulnerable', the emphasis has been on signposting people to local groups or organisation. The direct support by the council has focused on supporting residents to set up online shopping accounts and making regular 'keeping in touch' calls to those who requested it, with direct support only provided in a crisis situation. The Bucks Online Directory, established in the first lockdown, has continued to develop as a source of information for people to find help themselves and we encourage local voluntary and community groups to register their support on this site.

As Community Boards were not set up during the first lockdown, we had to find a temporary way of making local funding available to groups and organisations springing into action to support their communities. The Cllr Crisis Fund was therefore set up to allow councillors to begin to access the Community Board budgets for that purpose. As the Community Boards are now up and running and responsible for their budgets, it is right that they determine which local projects and initiatives to support. Any Buckinghamshire Councillors can make an application to the Board and I am pleased to see so many of the Community Boards already supporting local initiatives which will provide vulnerable residents with essential support over the coming months. I would encourage you to get in touch with your local board Chair and Coordinator to discuss any projects you wish to support.

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?

Response:

The regulation of the sale and use of fireworks is achieved through national legislation. There is currently some debate around this, and Parliament considered the matter on 2nd November 2020.

Meanwhile, the Council would encourage the compliant and considerate use of fireworks, for both private and organised displays. Where possible through the Council's Safety Advisory Group role, officers may encourage the early advertising of large displays to allow residents time to make arrangements for vulnerable people and to take precautions in respect of pets and livestock.

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

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.

Response:

The Council can account for all s106 receipts. Where S 106 funding is allocated to affordable housing, it is used for this purpose alone. A reconciliation of s106 funds is undertaken yearly.

Financial obligations / contributions are secured for the provision of community facilities, education, transport, highways, affordable housing etc. Affordable Housing contributions are only required through a s106 where affordable housing cannot be delivered on site by the development. Section 106 obligations/contributions are collected, allocated and spent for the specific purposes detailed in each individual s106 agreement. S106 contributions cannot be used outside of its purpose, as such, 100% of contributions are used for their stated purpose.

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?

S106 contributions are held within s106 databases relevant to the service area to which they relate. The current systems and processes are as per those of the legacy authorities where they were held by the Planning teams. These databases are maintained detailing the contributions and the projects/purposes they are to be spent on.

Moving forward, the aim is to amalgamate the existing data into a single central database which would facilitate monitoring and reporting.

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?

Response:

The Council's housing teams are monitoring numbers of people presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness due to eviction. We have yet to see a big spike in evictions, or in numbers of those at risk of eviction, but the teams are well aware of the possibility of future difficulties and so are prepared and have been prepared for increases in demand throughout the pandemic crisis.

Supporting people threatened with the prospect of eviction or homelessness forms a key part of the work of Council housing teams, and there has been a legal duty for Councils to try to intervene and prevent homelessness, since the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction, Act 2017.

In preparation for any potential forthcoming surge in numbers, we have in place resilient teams with the right skills and knowledge to provide financial support and advice or help with sourcing alternative accommodation. In more practical terms, the council is currently building additional temporary accommodation units to increase capacity. Importantly, the housing teams have long standing and strong local partnerships in place to ensure that Buckinghamshire residents receive the right advice and assistance, quickly.

Finally, I appreciate that in the coming months, increasing numbers of Buckinghamshire residents may be in need of housing advice and support. I would encourage anyone facing the prospect of homelessness or eviction to approach their local housing team as soon as possible. The teams are well trained and through different types of early intervention may be able to avert what might feel like an unavoidable bad outcome.

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?

Response:

We acknowledge there are disparities across the County in respect of parking charges in the various towns and villages; these have transferred from the legacy councils and decisions that have been taken historically. These include a number of free parking schemes that are funded by Parish and Town Councils from precepts.

We recognise there is a need to review how parking supports local towns and villages, as well as the more commercialised town centres. Becoming one Council offers us a great deal of flexibility on how we can manage the parking supply and demand and to ensure consistency of charges, particularly across areas that are similar in size, economy, development opportunities and potential growth. This includes continuing to work with Town and Parish Councils to enable them to continue funding free parking schemes where they wish to.

We will review all charges as part of the Parking Strategy we are looking to develop in the near future. The purpose of the strategy, amongst other aspects, will harmonise the services we deliver, ensuring we are able to support all areas equally, in the best interests of local businesses and residents.