



## Communities & Localism Select Committee minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Communities & Localism Select Committee held on Thursday 21 January 2021 in via MS Teams, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 12.15 pm.

### Members present

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

### Others in attendance

C Harriss and G Williams

### Apologies

P Hogan

### Agenda Item

#### 1 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 2 **Minutes**

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2020 were AGREED as an accurate record.

#### 3 **Public questions**

No public questions were received.

#### 4 **Chairman's Update**

The Chairman provided the following update:

- The public consultation on taxi licensing policy closing date had been extended from 21 December 2020 to 4 January 2021. The full draft was now available on the Council's website. All feedback on the draft policy would be considered by the Licensing Committee and then Full Council.
- There had also been a change to the Communities & Localism Select Committee work programme to include an additional item of the new Town and Parish Council Charter.
- The recent inquiry on community grants was progressing well with meetings

with a range of contributors having taken place via MS Teams.

## **5 Covid update - Verbal update from the Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health**

The Chairman welcomed Gareth Williams, Cabinet Member for Communities & Public Health.

During his update, the following key points were made:

- The Committee was advised that the Leader's updates on the coronavirus pandemic were being distributed to around 200,000 email subscribers which equated to 40% of the population of Buckinghamshire. Anyone could choose to subscribe to this list to receive these updates.
- The Council's website contained a dedicated webpage with coronavirus statistics and figures.
- Buckinghamshire Council had declared a critical incident on 30 December 2020 and the hospitals were still under pressure for capacity of beds and ICU. In response to the critical incident being declared, cells were operating across Buckinghamshire as part of the Council's emergency planning which was being led by the Senior Management Team.
- The Chief Executive, Rachael Shimmin, co-chaired daily meetings with health partners, and Richard Barker, Corporate Director Communities, had led on the local partnership Covid vaccination programme.
- The vaccination rollout was improving in Buckinghamshire after a challenging start and there were currently 9 GP sites in the county: Chalfont, Chesham, High Wycombe, Princes Risborough, Winslow, Aylesbury, Buckingham, and soon Burnham.
- A mass vaccination site in Salt Hill, Slough, was now servicing residents in South Buckinghamshire which was an area that had previously been underserved. There were pharmacy sites in Marlow, Wycombe, and Aylesbury, and additional sites would be opening soon to include Buckingham and Chesham.
- Hospital sites were in place to vaccinate NHS staff and care workers. With hospital sites and pharmacy sites being rolled out, Buckinghamshire was on target to have vaccinated the top four priority groups for mid-February which was the Government's national target. All those aged over 80 years old would have received their vaccination offer within the next two weeks and those aged over 70 years old would have received their vaccination offer in the next four weeks.
- At the time of the meeting, around 20,000 vaccinations had been carried out in Buckinghamshire and working in partnership had been key to this achievement.
- The Cabinet Member warned to be cautious of scammers and advised that the vaccination programme would never ask for payment, bank details or proof of ID.
- The business support grants had allocated £16m to Buckinghamshire businesses and it was positive that Buckinghamshire Council had been one of the fastest dispersers of capital to businesses compared to other local authorities.

- The Council would continue its Helping Hand programme which started at Christmas 2020. This was a voucher based scheme of £15 per child per week delivered to those that received free school meals and the voucher was redeemable at eight supermarkets. The benefit of the voucher was that it enabled choice rather than a prescribed box of supplies. Schools had been encouraged to sign up to this scheme and it was noted that take up of free school meals in Buckinghamshire had increased noticeably during the pandemic. The Helping Hands programme had assisted those in need by providing a range of aid such as winter clothing provision, food bank referrals and grants for broken boilers. Those interested could contact Helping Hands on 01296 531151.
- The Bucks Online Directory continued to list hundreds of community organisations and charities across the county that provided assistance on a range of services including shopping and transport.
- The Cabinet Member thanked the organisations and volunteers for all the work they had carried out for their communities.

Following the update, Members of the Committee had the opportunity to ask questions of the Cabinet Member and were advised that:-

- Additional Covid signage was available and Members were asked to help cover any gaps or remove outdated signs where possible as they knew their local areas. Thames Valley Police had received a number of calls of Covid gathering rules being breached which they had to investigate although some had proved ill-founded. When investigating breaches, the police followed 'the 4 Es': Engage. Explain. Encourage. Enforce. The police's policy was not to enforce fines unless there was a blatant disregard for the rules.
- Whilst some residents may be worried about having the vaccination, the number of adverse reactions to the vaccine was very small across the four million vaccines carried out nationally. The benefit of the vaccine outweighed any minor side effects particularly if residents were seen as high risk. The vaccine did not contain meat or animal products and the vaccination had been recommended by the British Islamic Medical Association.
- The breakdown of A&E admissions for Covid-19 based on ethnicity had not been recorded and improvements to capture this data were being developed. The Cabinet Member would investigate whether data on ethnicity was being recorded when vaccinations were being delivered and inform Members.
- It was acknowledged that communication over Covid updates can be challenging particularly when clarifying responsibilities that fell to either the NHS or the local authority. The vaccination rollout was an NHS programme and was the biggest peacetime project ever carried out, and the Council's intention was to assist with the communications element by using its public face to incorporate NHS messaging to residents. To not assist with this could create an information void which would likely be filled by misinformation. It was felt there was a public demand for this information as the Council's webpage on vaccination was currently the most visited on the Council's website.
- Around 24,000 vaccinations would be delivered in Buckinghamshire this week and there were 17 approved vaccination sites in the county.

- An Equalities Vaccine Subgroup would investigate the representative up take of the vaccine geographically across different ethnic and socio-economic groups which would identify any underrepresentation. This would then inform the future vaccination strategy.
- Vaccinations were being delivered through four different routes:
  1. Hospital hub: Stoke Mandeville Hospital exclusively for health and social care staff. This was delivering around 500 vaccinations per day.
  2. GP led local vaccination services: 8 in place with a 9<sup>th</sup> to follow in the Burnham area next week. GPs invited their patients to these vaccination appointments.
  3. Pharmacy sites: 3 launched this week with 2 more to follow in the next couple of weeks.
  4. Mass vaccination centres: 17 nationally. None were in Buckinghamshire. The closest were in Slough, London ExCel, Epsom, and Stevenage. Mass sites in Buckinghamshire were expected at Bucks New University in Walton Street, Aylesbury, with a launch in early February. A second site was being worked on with the NHS that was likely to be based in Wycombe.
- Parking for staff delivering vaccinations would be free. Those attending for vaccinations may need to pay for parking depending on the local site as providing free parking would be a logistical challenge. It was not envisioned that paying for parking would be an issue in vaccination take up.
- The Council did not hold the 'did not arrive' data for vaccines as this was held by the NHS however feedback had been that the number of no shows was incredibly low. This was due to there being a large appetite for the vaccination amongst the first tiers.
- The concern regarding the vaccination and female fertility had been highlighted in the media. As the vaccine programme continued, greater levels of data and evidence would become available and shared with the Committee.
- It was appreciated that grants from the Council, including those from the legacy councils, were integral to help cover the running costs of community groups and that clarity was needed on what would be available in the upcoming financial year. It was proposed that grants would be extended for another year (aside from one-off equipment or procurement grants). Officers would soon be in contact with organisations to advise of this proposal and provide reassurance for 2021/22. Community Boards would also have a role to play in allocating smaller grants too with their £3.9m budget which was the same as 2020/21.
- A grant review would be carried out in future to harmonise the grant processes inherited from the legacy councils which would also intend to clearly signpost organisations to the most appropriate grant available. There was a commitment to localism with local Members involved in local priorities and decision making.
- A suggestion was made that a pilot scheme be looked at to provide Councillors with a small, flexible fund for local projects.
- Assurance was given that the review of the grants would involve Members, including all the Community Board Chairmen. The Committee agreed that a briefing on the subject of grants would be beneficial.

The Cabinet Member was thanked for the update.

## **6 Update on Culture, Sport and Leisure**

The Chairman welcomed Clive Harriss, Cabinet Member for Sports and Leisure, Gareth Williams, Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health and Sophie Payne, Service Director, Culture, Sports and Leisure. Patrick Hogan, Cabinet Member for Culture sent his apologies.

During the presentation, the following key points were made:

- The four country parks located in Denham, Langley, Black Park and Thorney had in previous years been visited by over one million people every year and continued to be very popular. There had been record-breaking numbers of visitors to the parks as people sought quality green spaces during the pandemic, however this increased demand had brought additional costs for waste collection and disposal, enhanced cleaning and other safety measures related to Covid. Parking on surrounding roads had also caused issues which needed to be addressed to allow traffic to flow more freely. This had been a national trend that was not unique to Buckinghamshire.
- One of the achievements for the year had been the award of six Green Flags for parks in Buckinghamshire.
- The libraries in Buckinghamshire were a mix of council and community libraries and had adapted their services in response to the pandemic. Their online services and resources had expanded which had seen a 50% increase in people using the service, and contactless request and collect and home library services were introduced. The libraries were becoming a further way for residents to access the council's services, and membership of the libraries had increased by over 3,500.
- The service had recently won the Proud of Bucks staff award for 'Innovation and Creativity'.
- Whilst closed during lockdown, staff at the libraries had been actively supporting the community hubs throughout Covid and had made over 2,500 telephone calls to speak to residents shielding, organized food parcels and delivered PPE around Buckinghamshire. Other activities had included supporting the vaccination programme, contact tracing, and business support grants. The Council was investing in its libraries, as seen with the refurbishment of Marlow Library.
- Buckinghamshire Archives had developed a remote service offering during the lockdown while their public access areas were closed. Part of this had included Buckinghamshire's first Virtual History Festival which generated 15,538 views from 4,862 unique users.
- Buckinghamshire Archives had renewed its National Archives accreditation to 2022.
- As well as this, the Culture service was focusing on work with Buckinghamshire Culture in developing and launching its local Cultural Sector Recovery Programme with support from the Rothschild Foundation. Several organisations in Buckinghamshire had also received support through Government's Cultural Recovery Fund which included Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre, Queens

Park Arts Centre, Wycombe Arts Centre, Elgiva Theatre, Swan Theatre, Chiltern Open Air Museum and Wycombe Museum.

The key service priorities for 2021/22 were also outlined which included:-

- the Covid recovery plan
- the countywide Leisure Facilities Strategy
- completion of the Chiltern Lifestyle Centre, Amersham
- progressing the wider Capital Programme for leisure, parks and play areas
- Service Improvement Review and development of the future strategies for libraries and Buckinghamshire Archives

Members of the Committee had follow up questions and were advised that:-

- The Chiltern Lifestyle Centre, Amersham, was scheduled for completion on 13 September 2021. Members agreed that this had the potential to be a flagship centre in Buckinghamshire.
- Income from the Country Park car parks went back towards maintenance of the country parks, with some funds also contributing towards upgrading payment facilities (e.g. contactless payments using mobile phones) and wider park facilities, for example additional bike storage. Some income had been lost due to scheduled events not being able to take place.
- The parking of vehicles on the verges at the entrances of country parks was a highways issue and had been raised elsewhere. This was an historic problem as verges would not support the weight of parked vehicles.
- The funds had been agreed for the pool repairs at Chalfont Leisure Centre with completion estimated in seven months. As the centre was closed during lockdown, work was progressing at a good pace. Other work at the centre included the installation of immersive cycling and workout studios.
- ATG, the operator at Waterside Theatre in Aylesbury, were in contact with theatre production houses and the Council was having discussions with ATG regarding the return of theatre. The ATG contract was due to expire in 2025 and a mid-term contract review was planned in FY2021/22.
- Different scenarios were being developed for how the WhizzFizz Festival could be conducted in 2021 after its cancellation in 2020 due to the pandemic. It was acknowledged how important the event was for Aylesbury and the surrounding area.

The Committee thanked the Cabinet Members and Service Director for the update and appreciated the work and innovation being demonstrated across the services.

## **7 Town and Parish Council Charter**

The Chairman welcomed Gareth Williams, Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health and Claire Hawkes, Service Director for Localities and Strategic Partnerships.

During their presentation, the following main points were made:

- The Localities and Strategic Partnerships Services had a focus on developing strong links and relationships with Town and Parish Councils and Buckinghamshire Council.
- A new Town and Parish Charter sought to show this ambition and outline new working arrangements to support collaborative working between the councils. The charter had been informed by best practice in relation to other unitary councils and a series of workshops with Town and Parish Councils to develop the contents. The charter had also been developed by BMKALC and a working group of Town and Parish Council Clerks to share expertise and vision on collaborative working.
- The Council's devolution agenda had slowed down due to Covid-19. Since the Select Committee meeting in November 2020, the working group had made the final amendments to the draft charter. The charter would be published from 25 January – 24 February 2021 and open for feedback. It would be shared with Town and Parish Councils and Unitary Members for their comments. BMKALC would also provide support during the consultation period. This consultation offered the Parishes another opportunity to submit their feedback. The charter would then be finalized and shared following the consultation.
- The Cabinet Member expressed his thanks to the Parish and Town Councils involved in the working group and hoped the Parish Conference would be able to take place in the Summer.

During discussion the following key points were raised:-

- The charter was the governing framework for the Parishes and was not specific to High Wycombe. The Appendix outlined the current arrangements for engagement and representation in High Wycombe. A Member suggested the governance arrangements in High Wycombe needed further consideration with the formulation of a Town Council. Creating a High Wycombe Town Council had been considered by the Shadow Executive last year and consideration of the Community Governance Review for High Wycombe would be deferred until the completion of the Electoral Review or until such time that the Boundary Commission consider appropriate. Comments regarding the governance arrangements in High Wycombe could be submitted in response to the charter consultation.
- Excellent work had been carried out by the High Wycombe Community Board locally during the pandemic.
- The charter was not intended to be imposed on the Parishes as it had been developed in partnership with them. The working group had been made-up of volunteers.
- Weekly communication with the Parishes had commenced when the pandemic started which had been well received. This communication would continue.
- The Cabinet Member for Planning and Enforcement had sent out the council's first Town and Parish Planning Newsletter. Concerns regarding enforcement cases should be raised with the Cabinet Member.
- It was important for Parishes to have a key contact to liaise with at Buckinghamshire Council for a quick response to queries.

- It would be useful to include a Member Code of Conduct in the charter so that all Parish and Town Councillors had a single code of conduct to sign up to. Parish Councils may choose to opt in to the code of conduct adopted by their principal authority (the local district or unitary council).

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member and Service Director for attending.

## **8 Draft Work Programme and update on Inquiry**

Members discussed the item for the next meeting on 18 March. It would be a themed meeting on domestic abuse with a focus on the perpetrator programme. Representatives would attend from the Police and Crime Commissioner, Local Criminal Justice Board, Thames Valley Police, Respect, Bracknell Forest Council and Oxford City Council.

Future items would be considered depending on whether the elections took place in May 2021.

Members discussed the inquiry that had taken place to look at the effectiveness of community grants during the Covid-19 pandemic. The response from the community groups had been inspirational and highlighted the huge range of support available to those in need across Buckinghamshire. Members thanked the volunteers and organisations for continuing to offer their services.

The Chairman thanked the Inquiry Group and advised that the findings of the inquiry would be drafted into a report with recommendations for Cabinet to consider in early March 2021.

## **9 Date of Next Meeting**

18 March 2021 at 10am.