



Cabinet Member report – Leader

Councillor Martin Tett

Role during COVID-19

As the situation is rapidly changing, the latest position on COVID-19 will be provided at the Council meeting.

HS2

With the intensity of activity by HS2 Ltd increasing, the Council continues to emphasise its continued opposition to the project and, now construction has started, to try and hold HS2 to account. The Council is currently in an appeals process with HS2 Ltd on a number of lorry route approvals impacting the A413 and the A422. The Council did not determine these applications as it was considered that we had not received sufficient information and reassurances regarding the cumulative impacts of the lorry movements on the Council's highway network.

East West Rail (EWR)

As with HS2, EWR activity has increased over recent months and is causing (along with the HS2) massive disruption in the north of the County. Officers have set up regular meetings with both HS2 and EWR contractors to minimise their impact on Buckinghamshire's highway network. We are additionally recruiting for a number of posts including HS2 and EWR Marshals to respond swiftly to live on the ground issues related to both DfT projects.

Due to the pressure being applied on the EWR Alliance who are building the line, they are putting an improvement plan in place to address the multiple issues local communities are facing, including HGVs not using the right routes and speeding. EWR Alliance have confirmed that as part of this they will employ two mobile traffic marshals to monitor their contractors, which is a step in the right direction.

Buckinghamshire Recovery and Growth Proposal

Following its approval by the Buckinghamshire Growth Board, an ambitious Recovery and Growth Proposal was submitted to central government ministers and civil servants in a comprehensive and tailored exercise. We have since been working closely with partners to develop the proposals in greater detail and liaise with the Government on aspects of the proposition. The proposal which builds upon Buckinghamshire's strengths, partnerships and opportunities has been published on the Council's [website](#).

Buckinghamshire Growth Board

The Growth Board has met twice since the previous report to Council. In December, the Board members considered an emerging draft Buckinghamshire Strategic Vision and discussed the key

strategic planning issues facing Buckinghamshire, including the planning white paper, climate change, duty to cooperate and the Buckinghamshire Local Plan. In the first meeting of 2021, the Board received an overview of the health sector in Buckinghamshire and an update on the Recovery and Growth Proposal. The Board also discussed the progression and feedback from Board partners on the draft Buckinghamshire Strategic Vision and received an update from Government on the budget announcements and their approach to regeneration.

Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership (BLEP)

The Local Growth Fund programme which has been in place since 2014, has recently received a positive evaluation. £75m of public funding has been invested to date in targeted interventions, leveraging millions more of private sector funds, delivering a broad range of projects and schemes to support economic growth across Buckinghamshire, with the backing of government and local partners. At its recent AGM, the LEP also updated on the delivery of the Local Industrial Strategy and Economic Recovery Plan and launched the new Buckinghamshire Skills Hub.

Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee

Updates have been provided to the Committee at its meetings in January and March as part of the recurring item on Covid-19 and local economic recovery. Intelligence was reported on the impact of the pandemic on the local economy of Buckinghamshire and an update provided on the distribution of the business support grants available which the team have worked hard to allocate as quickly as possible. Thanks to the Council's close partnership working with Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF) and Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership (BLEP), the Committee also received updates on wider business support programmes including Screen Skills for Aviation, Start Up, and advice on the new rules following the EU exit. An update was also provided to the Committee on the programme for reopening the high streets as part of the roadmap out of lockdown and how the successful Future High Streets Fund bid for High Wycombe will be spent.

Finance and Resources committee

A financial comparison to London Borough of Croydon report and action plan that had also been to Cabinet on 2nd March was presented to the Committee on 25th March. The report highlighted the tighter governance that Buckinghamshire Council has in place and the large amount of member involvement in building and scrutinising budgets in comparison to LBC. A 12 month progress update on the 2020 Budget Scrutiny recommendations was also presented, with the majority of recommendations now being complete.

Enterprise Zone update

Phase 2 of the Silverstone Development completed construction on December 20th with 11 out of 13 units planned to be occupied by end of March 21. Phase 3 of the development is being prepared for the next phase of construction which is anticipated to commence later in 2021.

Phase 1 of the Disruptive Innovative Space Centre (DISC) at Westcott has now closed to construction tenders with works expected to commence by May 21 and complete early 2022. Construction of the National Space Propulsion Test Facility (NSPTF) funded by £4m investment from UK Space Agency, was completed in March 21. Propulsion Testing equipment is being commissioned and expected to be operational by summer 21.

At the Woodlands site we have confirmed (March 2021) that Apple TV are creating a film production facility in two employment units built within the Woodlands EZ site (Units 2 & 3 Symmetry Park Aston Clinton - 170,000 sq ft). The units are being fitted out currently and will be operational later in 2021.

Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF)

The Aylesbury Garden Town HIF contract between Buckinghamshire Council and Homes England was signed on 27th November 2020. The first quarterly report is being submitted to Homes England in mid-April and for 20/21 the Council will have drawn down over £8m of HIF funding. Related projects are progressing, with Kingsbrook Primary School nearing completion. Kingsbrook Secondary School will go to planning committee over the next few months. Design work is also progressing on a number of other projects.

South East Aylesbury Link Road (SEALR)

The planning application for Phase 1 of the SEALR, which is partly funded through the Housing Infrastructure Fund, was unanimously approved at the Strategic Sites Committee meeting on 11th February 2021 and is now going through the process of signing off conditions. A key decision was taken in March to continue with the SEALR Phase 2 project with a planning application to be submitted in Summer 2021.

England Economic Heartland (EEH)

In February, England's Economic Heartland submitted its Transport Strategy to the Secretary of State for Transport, enabling the region's priorities to shape investment decisions going forwards. The strategy makes clear that enabling growth in a way that improves the environment requires a fundamental switch in the way the region's transport system is planned and delivered. EEH has also commissioned its first two connectivity studies, which will identify solutions for improving the transport system in a number of corridors across the region, starting with Oxford-Milton Keynes.

LGA's People and Places Board

Two meetings of the board have taken place so far this year, content included: an EU exit paper, an update on equalities, an update on the 'devolution deal to delivery' and discussions around the Rural Digital Connectivity programme.

South East Strategic Leaders (SESL)

Since the last update, SESL has met Matt Warman MP, Minister for Digital Infrastructure, and Raj Kalia, CEO of Building Digital UK, to impress upon them the importance of providing high speed and reliable digital connections to all households and businesses across the wider South East. SESL also met Bill Grimsey to explore ideas for the regeneration of high streets and town centres, David Reilly of the Carbon Trust to discuss best practice on carbon reduction and emissions reduction and Adam Marshall (Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce) to discuss the best ways in which to facilitate and support businesses as they recover from COVID-19 and the associated lock-downs.

SESL has been working on proposals to revise the duties and responsibilities relating to home to school transport, following correspondence with Nick Gibb MP (Minister for Schools). Through joint working with member authorities, SESL also have responded to the Government's consultation on its proposals for Supporting Housing Delivery and Public Service Infrastructure and questioned representatives of the One Powerhouse Consortium on their work on regional planning.

Strategic Finance

Budget Scrutiny took place in January with a number of question and answer sessions held on the overall budget proposals and financial strategy.

The budget for 2021/22 was approved by Full Council on the 24th February. Whilst still in very uncertain times the assumptions used in setting the budget remain valid and so the new financial

year starts with the Council on a firm footing in terms of delivering the Council's priorities within approved budgets. The final outturn position for 2020/21 is still being finalised but there is confidence that the Council will come in on budget which is a major achievement in these particularly difficult times. The financial implications of COVID-19 continue to be forecast based on the latest position and lobby of central government continues to ensure that all additional costs and lost income is fully funded.

Annual Report and Covid-19 Report

In March the [Buckinghamshire Council Annual Report 2020/21](#) was published which was developed to celebrate achievements against the Corporate Plan priorities during our inaugural year as the Buckinghamshire Council.

Sitting alongside this, a [Buckinghamshire Council - Our Response to Covid-19 2020-21](#) report was also published which reflects on the responses and achievements of the Council during the unprecedented challenges faced during the pandemic. Many of these have been achieved whilst working closely with partners and the [#proudfobucks appendix](#) was published alongside the report with a selection of stories and examples of local people and organisations pulling together to help their communities during the pandemic.





Cabinet Member report – Adult Social Care

Councillor Angela Macpherson

Social Care Workforce Innovation

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of a skilled and valued workforce and adult social care continues its investment with a number of developments in recent months. A Career Progression Framework was launched in March 2021 to help drive and retain a highly skilled, responsive and confident social care workforce, able to meet our statutory responsibilities. The framework sets out clear career pathways and opportunities for our workforce.

As part of this framework, the first one-year ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) programme for newly qualified social workers has now ended with all eight staff successfully completing their first year and successfully progressed to Social Worker Level 1 in the career progression framework. A new cohort is planned for April this year.

The service's first social care cadet scheme was launched in January 2021, with four cadets currently on the programme and further work planned to expand this approach to include health partners later in the year. The scheme is part of a series of initiatives to boost work opportunities for local people post Covid-19.

To help address the national challenge of recruiting qualified social workers, a Social Work Degree Apprenticeship has been developed. Nine members of staff are in the first tranche and a further six are expected to start their studies in the autumn. A new training provider is being sought to support delivery of our new Post-Graduate Diploma in Social Work programme. This offers a complementary pathway to social work qualification for staff who are already graduates with a good degree.

Finally, work is currently underway to procure an Occupational Therapy Apprenticeship Scheme in line with the Social Work Apprenticeship.

Covid-19 Response

Adult social care continues to respond to the demands of the pandemic, working closely with partners in the protection and care of residents. Since the start of the year the service has focussed on hospital discharges, working with health partners to manage the difficult second peak, ensuring local hospitals were able to continue to provide essential services to those who needed it. The Home First and Discharge to Assess approaches were developed, and processes changed to ensure more people could be discharged from hospital more quickly. Between 1st September 2020 and 18th March 2021, 892 people were supported to leave hospital with domiciliary care to support them at home or through care placements.

The local health and care system identified and created a designated setting so that people recovering from Covid-19, but without ongoing care needs, could do so without taking up a valuable hospital bed. The system continues to work jointly to proactively plan for any future peaks should they occur.

Adult social care has demonstrated its flexibility and approach throughout the pandemic to ensure resources were focussed on key areas, particularly as needs changed. Since late 2020, the service has supported and encouraged its own staff and those in care homes and other settings to have vaccinations offered and has supported NHS colleagues in the vaccination programme for care home residents.

Care homes and providers in Buckinghamshire continue to be supported to respond to the pandemic, with regular communications to and from the provider market, and practical and financial support to enable social care organisations to continue to provide essential care for our most vulnerable residents.

Since November 2020, 376 people have received weekly 'keep in touch' calls, with a total of 5,200 calls made to clients during this time. A local consortium of five local VCS organisations, supported by redeployed library staff, has delivered the scheme. Where appropriate, the consortium has referred clients to receive further community-based provision, including befriending, to help them stay well at this difficult time.

LGA Better Care Fund Small Grants Programme

Working with Bucks Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), highly contested funding has been secured from the Better Care Fund Small Grants Programme. The successful bid will help to meet demand from Home First providers who are keen to improve their carers' skills in home-based reablement and rehabilitation.

National Update

Over the past few months, the Government and national bodies have produced a number of reports which have proposed changes to the health and social care environment. The council has responded either directly or contributed to representative organisation responses on the proposals.

In January, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) consulted on proposals to change the national inspection regime. CQC will be placing more emphasis on the experiences people have of care and increasing its focus on safety and reducing inequalities. The Commission is proposing a targeted approach to individual inspections in future, with a system inspection to support the drive for a joined-up approach across the health and care sector.

In February, the Government published its NHS White Paper on Health and Care. The White Paper, which pre-empts a Bill in the autumn, proposes a number of changes including greater control over the system by the Secretary of State, putting Integrated Care Systems on a statutory footing and abolishing the need for competitive tendering for NHS services. The Council and partners will be looking at implications for Buckinghamshire. The long-awaited reforms of social care are expected later in 2021.

The Council has responded to proposals for how the NHS Provider Regime will work in practice after the requirement for competition is removed from the NHS.

Finally, the reforms to the Mental Health Act are proposed in a consultation which ends in April.

Proposals include clarification of the detention criteria, ensuring people get a therapeutic benefit from being detained under the Act, and changes to the workings of Tribunals.



Cabinet Member report – Resources

Councillor Katrina Wood

Income Management and Cash Receipting Update

On 23rd February 21 Buckinghamshire Council went live with a new income management system.

This new system holds all data relating to all income received by Buckinghamshire Council in one place.

All of the legacy councils had different ways in which they were receiving and allocating income received and we had been maintaining five different systems. This new solution will mean that Buckinghamshire Council will be using a single income management system and one payment channel.

This will make the management of income far simpler as there is now a single user account to view and search for payments across all payment channels, whereas previously payments were received in separate systems on legacy platforms and multiple user logins would have been required.

Bank Project

In December 2020 Barclays Bank was awarded the contract to provide banking services to Buckinghamshire Council. The award of this single banking contract meant that we have had to manage the move from the existing legacy bank contracts (BCC and AVDC - Lloyds, C&SBDC - Barclays and WDC - NatWest) to a single provider with Barclays.

Finance, Payroll and IT teams from across the council worked together to ensure a seamless transition and the new bank contract went live on 1st April. Moving to a single provider will greatly improve the efficiency of the council's financial transactions, enhance its financial controls and make it easier for our customers.

The project has been complex and reduced the number of bank accounts from over 25 accounts to just five main core accounts. Other features of the implementation include the transfer of Direct Debits, Barclays.Net the new banking platform, a new set of banking controls, new credit arrangements, updating of banking stationery and a range of system changes to support the new bank accounts. New accounts for our schools will be put in place in June this year.

The project has involved great joint working between teams in Finance, Payroll, IT, Communications and other affected services. The project will continue until the end of September 21 when the legacy bank contracts finally close. In the meantime, the old bank accounts will be carefully monitored to ensure any outstanding transactions are moved to our new Barclays accounts.

Together Survey

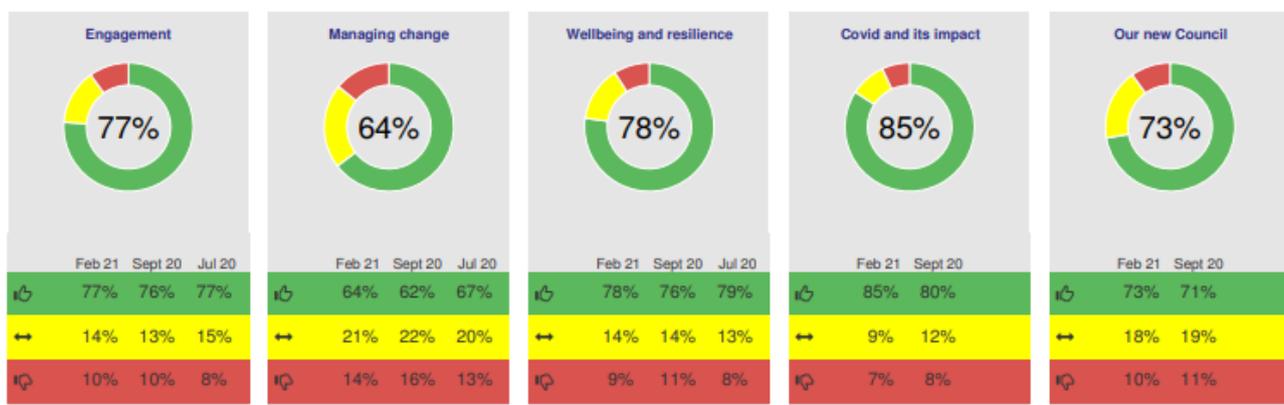
The Together Survey is carried out three times a year and invites employees to say how much they agree or disagree with 10 core statements relating to Engagement, Wellbeing and Resilience and Managing Change.

Since the pandemic, we have also included a 'Covid-19 and its impact' set of questions to understand how employees feel the organisation is supporting them through this time; and a fifth index, 'Our new council,' was introduced last September to help the organisation understand how people are feeling around employee experience issues that have been raised by employee reps in relation to unitary integration.

The latest organisational level results from the Together Survey, which took place between 8 – 28 February 2021, showed overwhelmingly positive results with very strong uplifts across all indices.

Index scores relating to Engagement, Wellbeing and Resilience, Managing Change, and Our New Council have all increased either one or two percentage points. The Covid and its Impact score saw a more substantial increase of five points. These scores echo the incredibly high engagement scores seen at the start of the pandemic.

Index results:



The organisation is comfortably ahead of or equal to external benchmarking index scores:

Index	Buckinghamshire Council	External benchmark
Engagement	77%	65%
Managing change	64%	64%
Wellbeing and resilience	78%	72%
Covid and its impact	85%	74%
Our new council	No benchmarking available	

(External benchmarking data was last updated in January 2021, and comprises data from 2020 and 2019)

Results have been shared with all staff, via corporate communications, in a short video during w/c 29 March. The next survey is scheduled to take place in June.

Single Telephony through MS Teams

Buckinghamshire Council telephony was provided by four separate legacy systems. As part of our work to consolidate and upgrade the council's IT infrastructure, and following the rapid growth in the use of Microsoft Teams across the council during the pandemic, we procured a telephony connector for Teams. This is currently being implemented, with anticipated completion in June 2021, and it will mean that all staff will now be able to use Microsoft Teams for all their communications and collaboration activities – making and receiving internal and external phone calls, as well as attending voice and/or video meetings and messaging.

Movement of Systems to the Cloud.

The council has a range of legacy hosting arrangements for our business systems, including both a number of on-premise datacentres and cloud hosting arrangements. We have been working on moving our systems to Microsoft Azure, and the project is expected to take us to the end of 2021. We will be left with a small residual of servers that cannot operate in the cloud, and for them we have procured, in partnership with the NHS Trust, space in two commercial datacentres located at Slough and Croydon. This project will give us a more resilient, higher performance and flexible hosting environment, as well as generate savings once we consolidate legacy business systems.

Customer Service centre – End to End Process Mapping Journey

The Customer Service Centre Service Review is now fully underway, and we are expecting the initial business case to be produced in May. As a reminder the CSC review is looking at re-imagining the future customer experiences and a delivery model that moves beyond 'channel shift' to ensure all customers in Buckinghamshire have an accessible, helpful and joined-up experience when they engage with the council. As part of this we are looking at the service demand, customer experience, customer journeys, staff structure and if that is appropriate for the demand from customers, as well as engaging with services to collaborate on ensuring that most customers can get the resolution at first point of contact and where that isn't possible hand off criteria to back office specialists.

Along with much data and evidence based research we have held workshops with staff in the CSC to understand their pain points and successes. We have also held workshops with services that via customer data have shown to be either high volume, high profile (via complaints or something not working well), high complexity or have replicability. The services that we held workshops with were Planning (including Development Management, Enforcement) Building Control, Waste, Adult Social Care, Housing and Homelessness. We are now in a period of 'synthesis' which allows us to analyse findings and start to plan service design recommendations. We will continue to co-design our service solutions with other service areas and in the coming weeks we will test our findings and proposals with staff and customers. Alongside the workshops and customer research we have also been looking at the technology needed to support our staff, customers and the demand for the service to enable the CSC to give the best possible customer experience to our residents and businesses.

COVID Support

Track, Trace and Test

Resources Directorate has responsibility for our Local Contact Tracing Team and the Community Testing Team also known as Rapid Testing and Lateral Flow testing.

Local Contact Tracing supports the national Test and Trace service. When the national team are unable to make contact with a Buckinghamshire resident who has tested positive for Covid then the case is passed to our Local contact tracing team.

This team makes calls using a local number and we introduce ourselves as Buckinghamshire Council. This helps residents who are in many cases wary of national call numbers to feel assured. As part of the call we help them to identify close contacts who may themselves now be Covid +ve. We are also able to assist and advise with self-isolation and to provide support from our welfare team where there is a particular need. For residents who still do not answer our calls we have been working with Bucks Fire and Rescue to make door knocking calls to encourage residents to self-isolate and to provide support information.

The Council has set up four Rapid testing hubs in Buckingham, Aylesbury, Wycombe and Amersham. These centres provide asymptomatic testing and are open to anyone. The centres also provide pick up points for home test kits and we are encouraging residents to take a test first. Our trained staff explain how to correctly take a swab and process the test to improve the accuracy of the results. [Get tested for COVID-19 | Buckinghamshire Council](#)

Mutual Aid

Mutual aid is where employees with particular skills or during periods of lockdown have the capacity to learn new skills and are moved from their normal role to pick up urgent work that is in direct response to and as a result of Covid-19.

The Mutual Aid team have developed a mutual aid register where employees are matched with work requests. This may involve the employee being released from their normal role for a few hours a week or more if their normal responsibilities have decreased or can be undertaken in a different way.

In the most recent lockdown the Mutual Aid Team have helped to repurpose over 120 staff into Lateral Flow Testing; Local Contact tracing, assisting at Vaccination Centres and supporting our most vulnerable or housebound residents through phone calls. Some roles are completed from home to support teams to deliver critical services, others have been out at vaccination centres and testing sites.

Grants

During 2020/21 the Council has received 47 separate additional grants totalling c£330m of funding. This has provided support across wide range of activities to help support our residents, businesses and communities.

The grants have helped in areas such as businesses adversely impacted by the Covid pandemic, additional support to the most vulnerable in our communities, measures to help manage and contain any outbreaks, the provision of rapid testing and track and trace. It also helped to provide support for re-opening our High Streets and accommodation to shelter the homeless.

The Finance team have been busy keeping track of this grant money, making sure that it is correctly applied within the grant conditions; checking for fraudulent applications and making all of the returns to each relevant government department.

A number of grants will continue into the new year and continue to be targeted to support key measure to help within Buckinghamshire.



Cabinet Member report – Children’s Services

Councillor Mark Shaw

Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Focused Visits

On 17 March 2020, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Ofsted suspended all routine inspections and introduced an interim inspection framework. As part of this framework, Ofsted conducted a Focused Visit in Buckinghamshire on 24 and 25 February 2021. During the course of this visit, inspectors evaluated the quality and impact of key decision-making in the following practice areas:

- Children in need of help and protection
- Children in care and care leavers
- Impact of leaders.

Inspectors specifically looked at what had happened for children and families during the 6 months prior to the visit in order to understand children’s experiences and review our local response to the pandemic. As part of the inspection activity, I was interviewed as Lead Member, as well as the Chief Executive, Corporate Director, our Department for Education appointed Commissioner, the Chair of our Safeguarding Partnership and the local judiciary. In addition, a range of evidence was considered during the visit, including electronic case records, discussions with social workers and their managers and other supporting documentation. The full report can be found [here](#); however, a summary of the findings is shown below:

- The start of the pandemic coincided with the council’s transition to a unitary authority. This considerable logistical challenge did not divert the council from its steadfast support of children’s services. Effective emergency planning and a whole-council response enabled the smooth transfer of the service to remote working.
- Strong partnership arrangements have ensured the provision of support to the most vulnerable children in Buckinghamshire throughout the pandemic.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the service and have maintained a firm focus on doing the best for children and families.
- The senior leadership team has focused relentlessly on the well-being of the workforce. Staff value the exceptional support that they have received from leaders and managers and talked positively about working for Buckinghamshire.
- The recruitment and retention of a stable workforce rightly remains the top priority in the local authority’s improvement plan.
- The council has provided additional financial investment to enable the service to respond to the growing challenges for those families who have been affected.
- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) provides a proportionate response to initial concerns about children.

- Threshold decisions about the provision of early help are proportionate, and transfers between early help and children's social care are managed well.
- Leaders have developed clear expectations about visiting children during the pandemic, including returning to face-to-face visiting where possible. Most children are visited in accordance with their needs; however, despite improving practice in this area, visiting is not always timely for some children.
- The local authority and schools have worked together well since the start of the pandemic.
- The pre-proceedings phase of the Public Law Outline is used effectively to safeguard children; however, some practice shortfalls lead to some delays that are not purposeful.
- Children in care have continued to make some progress despite the challenges presented by the pandemic. Most live in stable homes that meet their needs, with carers who are committed to them.
- Care leavers benefit when they have established relationships with personal advisers, but this is not always possible given changes in the workforce. For some, this negatively affects the progression of their plans.
- Leaders have strengthened commissioning arrangements. This is beginning to deliver results, with greater scrutiny of unregulated provision and the vast majority of care leavers now living in suitable accommodation.
- The Corporate Parenting Panel has put targeted work plans in place to respond to these issues, alongside a sharper focus on the emotional well-being of children.
- Although management oversight is now routinely evident on children's files, actions arising are not consistently followed up, leading to delays in some children's plans being progressed.
- Audit and quality assurance activity needs to be embedded and completed alongside practitioners to drive quality of practice.

Overall, we are pleased with the feedback and the recognition given from Ofsted on the progress made during the last year despite the unprecedented challenges faced. The team has a clear plan in place and is working at pace on the areas of improvement identified.

The dedication and commitment by the staff, to do the right thing for the children and young people in Buckinghamshire, has made a significant difference to our response to the pandemic. The personal sacrifices they have made, and incredible selflessness, has not gone unnoticed.





Cabinet Member report – Environment & Climate Change

Councillor Bill Chapple OBE

Climate Change & Air Quality Strategy

Following the motion on climate change at Council in July 2020, we have developed the first version of our Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy, which sets out how we will reach net zero no later than 2050. This is an ambitious but crucially deliverable approach to reducing both our direct emissions as an organisation as well as those across Buckinghamshire. The strategy sets out 60 specific actions and will see us reduce our direct emissions from measures such as installing more renewable generation and improving the efficiency of our buildings and streetlighting and many more.

We have been actively engaging on the detail of the strategy and its implementation, including a detailed discussion at the Transport, Environment and Climate Change (TECC) select committee and attending 10 of 16 Community Boards (or their sub-groups). The strategy has been very well received with significant support expressed by these Community Boards for our ambitious plans for Climate Change and for our large-scale tree planting as further discussed below.

Tree Strategy

A large-scale tree planting programme that aims to see over 543,000 trees planted on approximately 20 large sites of council-owned land over the next ten years was agreed at Cabinet on the 16th February. It is planned that the scheme, which links to the Climate Change Strategy, would help the council becoming carbon neutral by 2050, or earlier, whilst at the same time delivering all the other numerous benefits that woodlands provide.

Work has begun on designing detailed woodland creation plans for the first phase of sites to ensure that these will be deciduous trees grown in Great Britain and that the right tree is planted in the right place. We will also ensure we seek to secure the available grant funding for creating these woodlands in order to offset some of the cost of buying and planting the trees. The woodlands will be designed in accordance with the Woodland Carbon Code to provide assurance on the levels of carbon being captured. It is anticipated that approximately 75% of the tree planting would take place over the next five years starting during the next planting season which is December 2021 to March 2022, and we would seek to maximise community involvement in planting the trees on these sites wherever possible. We have allocated a sum of £800,000 for maintenance of the young trees we will be planting. Once delivered in full, the project has the potential to create at least 200 hectares of new woodland in Buckinghamshire.

BMERC Conference

The Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Record Centre (BMERC) held their annual seminar in March. This year's theme was '*Home is where the wildlife is...*' building on the fact that

many of us have become more aware of our local wildlife during this year of lockdowns. Delivered virtually for the first time, the presentations covered a range of topics, including updates on the valuable work of the BMERC team and the Natural Environment Partnership. Over 100 people attended the event, which received excellent feedback, and attracted an audience of seasoned wildlife recorders as well as a new generation of wildlife enthusiasts.

Green, Food, Bulky and Wood (GFBW) Waste Contract

Buckinghamshire Council has signed a contract with FCC Environment to provide services for the transfer, management and treatment of GFBW waste. The contract starts immediately and is for a term of five years but may be extended by a further five, however, should it run for ten years, it will be potentially worth up to £26m, over the life of the contract. Around 70,000 tonnes of material will be handled via the contract every year.

The new contract sees most of the waste treated either in Buckinghamshire or just a few miles over the border, which means less miles travelled and less impact on the wider environment.

Completion of Pembroke Road Waste Transfer Station redevelopment

Pembroke Road Depot, located in Aylesbury, is managed and occupied by the Waste, Recycling and Street Scene teams servicing the North of Buckinghamshire. The site's main purpose is to provide a transfer facility for all recycling materials that are collected from the 88,000 households. The site also has a workshop which provides servicing and maintenance for all vehicles. In 2017 funding of £9.2m was awarded for the redevelopment of the site. The funding would enable several key enhancements:

- Increase recycling capacity within the Waste Transfer Station to enable the site to cater and accommodate growth within Buckinghamshire.
- Update the old tired site to create a safer environment for the 200 plus frontline workers.
- Build a larger commercial workshop to provide a facility enabling more vehicle repairs, servicing, and MOT's to be carried out in-house.

We have worked closely with contractor Morgan Sindall over a period of three years to develop the site to ensure works carried out were efficient and timely with minimal disruption to services. Due to the impact of COVID-19 on the construction industry, some of the work on site was slightly delayed. However, there was no noticeable effect on the household recycling and waste collection service for residents in the Aylesbury Vale. Now three years on from the start of the project the development is complete, and all areas of the site are fully operational. The teams are still working through some initial teething issues but are very proud of the great work that has been achieved.

New waste fleet for the south of the County

New Waste Vehicles have been procured and are being used in the South of the County. This includes new vehicles for Refuse, Green, Food and Narrow Access. New recycling vehicles are scheduled to arrive in June 2021. These new vehicles are replacing the ex-Serco vehicles which have arrived at the end of their useful life. The new vehicles are fitted with FORS Silver (extra safety equipment including side bars and extra reversing cameras) as well as 360 cameras to give a real time update of crew activity throughout the day. Vehicles are more environmentally friendly and more fuel efficient and, as it stands at the moment, we are rescheduling the new rounds needed on the 21st June. An electric collection vehicle will be trialled in the next 18 months.

Environmental Improvements at the London Road East Depot

Veolia have installed brand new solar panels onto the workshop roof at the London Road (Amersham) depot, these are already generating green energy to be used by all tenants on the site and power electric vehicles used by Veolia's supervisors. Beehives have been introduced into a safe area of the depot and will have wildflowers planted in and around that area.





Cabinet Member report – Culture, Sports and Leisure

Councillor Clive Harriss

Buckinghamshire Archives

The Archives service maintained a remote customer enquiry service while its public spaces were closed for onsite access due to lockdown. It has also continued its #GreatBucksTour of the archives on social media and jointly ran an online event with the County Museum for LGBT+ history month in February. The service has worked with the Strategy and Major Projects Team to secure One Public Estate funding of £60,000 to explore options to relocate to new premises, along with other record keeping teams within the Council and Public Sector organisations. From 1 April, the Service introduced a new information management system (Epexio) to benefit customers and staff due to improved functionality.

Cultural Partnership

The five-year Action Plan to deliver the Cultural Strategy has been agreed with Buckinghamshire Culture and its Development Board. A new recovery programme for the sector, funded by the Rothschild Foundation, was launched in February by Buckinghamshire Culture. The 'Bucks Cultural Leaders' programme has enrolled 22 leaders and innovators from the sector to build leadership and a peer-to-peer network. Buckinghamshire Culture has also delivered a number of online training/sharing sessions for the sector, on topics including digital delivery and inclusion, and developed a programme of 'Building Skills' workshops to support the sector on re-engagement with their audiences post-COVID.

Heritage

Buckinghamshire Council has been successful in its bid for £70,000 funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for the Local Heritage List campaign. This funding enables us to start work on a county-wide list of locally-significant heritage assets, which may be buildings, archaeological sites, parks and gardens, public works of art etc; to engage with the public to seek nominations; and to build a digital platform to make the information publicly accessible.

The Buckinghamshire Council Design Awards 2020 concluded in February, with the winners of the People's Choice award being announced. Great Kimble School won the public/landscape category, and 'Pheasants' in Hambleden won the private/residential category. This year, 30 recently completed development projects were nominated by Council officers who felt they demonstrated significant contributions to the local environment. The Design Awards aim to demonstrate good quality design in Buckinghamshire and is a joint endeavour across the Planning & Enforcement and Culture portfolios delivered by colleagues in the heritage, urban design and planning teams. More details about the schemes that have been commended this year can be found by visiting: <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/buckinghamshire-council-design-awards-2020/>

Leisure

Construction work on the new Chilterns Lifestyle Centre has continued to progress positively; further information and an interior webcam showing the works can be seen at [Chilterns Lifestyle Centre](#).

Improvement and refurbishment of the 'dry' facilities at Chalfont and Chesham Leisure Centres, including new group exercise studios and brand new fully equipped gyms, was completed in December; and work to replace the swimming pool at Chalfont Leisure Centre has also now commenced.

We have continued to support and work closely with all our leisure operators, including significant joint work to submit our application to the National Leisure Recovery Fund in early January. The Council was awarded £1.25m from this Sport England managed fund for our outsourced leisure operators, to support the reopening of facilities. The operators have ensured that all sites have appropriate measures in place to welcome back residents safely and encourage physical activity.

Outdoor leisure facilities reopened on 29 March, in line with the government roadmap. Approaches have been made by clubs across the county to extend the grass roots football season. It has been possible to accommodate many of these requests while still allowing preparation time for summer sports/activities to be programmed in, and the rescheduling of essential grounds/pitch maintenance.

Farnham Park Playing Fields remained busy with dog walkers and local residents taking exercise while closed for sports during the lockdown period. Outdoor sports at Farnham Park started again from 29 March with both football and softball taking place from the first weekend in April.

The South Buckinghamshire Golf Course also reopened on 29 March. Staff used the lockdown period to prepare the course ready for opening and carry out maintenance work to ditches, bridges and pathways, which can be difficult to do when the course is open.

Country Parks

Buckinghamshire's Country Parks continued to be extremely popular throughout the most recent lockdown and visitor numbers are 62.8% above last year's total, with close to 1.7m visitors for the year. The ranger team have been focused on maintaining high standards of presentation while supporting visitors to remain COVID-19 secure.

A national partnership tree planting project arranged through the Japanese embassy has recently been completed with an avenue of Sakura flowering cherry trees being planted at Black Park. An 'Adopt a Patch' scheme to encourage the local community to adopt a small area of Black Park Country Park and commit to help keep it litter free, has seen its first individuals and families sign-up.

Significant work has been undertaken with HS2/National Grid at Denham Country Park to deliver an alternative access route into the park that would have a significantly reduced ecological impact. Denham Country Park has been flooded for much of the winter months and the Country Parks team have worked with HS2 and National Grid to remove the root cause and alleviate the flooding in the park and are drawing together a restoration plan to enhance habitats on site for protected species including water voles, great crested newts and several bat species.

Parks and play areas

The new Boathouse Café building in Wycombe Rye has been completed, bar some outstanding landscaping to be undertaken around the construction site.

Design and build contracts have been let for:

- the complete renovation of the Bridge Street skate park in Buckingham; the contractor has met with representatives of the local community as users of the skate park, who input into the designs for the new facility.
- the renewal of the toddler play area in the Alfred Rose Park in Aylesbury; designs have now been agreed.





Cabinet Member report – Education and Skills

Councillor Anita Cranmer

Pupils returning to school

School children across the county returned to their classrooms on 8 March 2021. The process of starting face to face lessons again was a welcome relief for pupils, parents and school staff alike, with the full return running very smoothly. In order to ensure that all their pupils were able to access on site testing, secondary schools managed a phased return, whilst all primary aged pupils returned to the classroom on the first day back.

Attendance at schools remains high with a very low level of reported positive pupils in the system. Prior to the full re-opening, schools had been working hard to accommodate pupils that were vulnerable or the children of key workers since the lockdown was implemented at the start of January, for some schools this was up to 40% of their total population. For those children who were not attending directly, schools ensured that learning could continue remotely. Where pupils struggled to access online learning, we made sure that devices were available through funding from the Council in partnership with the Rothschild Foundation. Schools have been supported through a joint project between the council and the Aspire Pupil Referral Unit which has delivered training, coaching and mentoring to school staff in order that they are equipped to manage the anxieties and fears of pupils as they return to full time on site education.

The response from our community of schools across the county since their partial closure on 24 March 2020, has been excellent.

The new Family Information Website

The new [Buckinghamshire Family Information Service website](#) has now launched. This brand new website and directory will make it even easier for families, parents to be, children and young people to find local advice and support. The website has a new look and feel which was built to meet the Government Digital Standards, accessibility regulations and was based on user research and testing with local families. It contains up to date information on subjects such as:

- Support available to help with issues affecting families
- What's on at family centres
- Things to do and holiday activities
- Support and inclusive activities if for children and young people with SEND
- Childcare and early years providers.

The website will be further developed over time using feedback gathered from families, young people and professionals.

Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF)

The HAF is a government funded programme that requires local authorities to coordinate free school holiday provision, including healthy food and enriching activities for children receiving Free School Meals. We are rolling this out for the first time in Buckinghamshire from Easter onwards when we aim to deliver four face to face activity sessions across three days, delivered by our voluntary and community sector partners.

Primary age children will enjoy multi-sports and arts and craft activities along with a healthy packed lunch with accompanying nutritional information. Due to the pandemic, face to face sessions are limited at Easter and therefore all primary age children who receive Free School Meals will also receive a £10 activity token that is redeemable at a number of retail outlets to purchase equipment and resources to support holiday activities at home.

The programme will be built upon in the summer and Christmas holidays once restrictions are eased, when we plan to deliver a wider range of activities in more locations across the county to primary and secondary children.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy 2021 – 2023

A new SEND and Inclusion Strategy was approved by Buckinghamshire Cabinet on 2 March 2021. This was the culmination of over a year's work with a range of key stakeholders across the local authority, health, the voluntary and community sector, and importantly with representatives of parents/carers and young people.

The strategy is a partnership document, built around the four Preparation for Adulthood pillars as outlined in the SEND Code of Practice (2015). It is informed by the experiences young people shared with us during the "Shout Out for SEND" conference back in November 2019. FACT Bucks, our parent/carer forum for families of children with SEND have described the Strategy as an "exemplary commitment to coproduction." The Strategy will be published on our Local Offer website pages, alongside an associated Buckinghamshire SEND Improvement Plan that is designed to drive forward our improvement work to fulfil the ambitions of the 3-year Strategy.

Our aspirations are high, and we will be reporting on progress at regular intervals, listening and acting on the feedback from children, young people and their families as we progress.





Cabinet Member report – Youth Provision

Councillor Tony Green

In house fostering, adoption and residential provision

Over the past year we have continued to deliver growth of our in-house fostering service, seeking to place children and young people with 'in-house carers' wherever possible. This helps to ensure that children and young people, wherever it is appropriate, are given the opportunity to remain within their family and community network. Children's Services has continued to increase in-house fostering capacity and this year has recruited an additional 22 fostering households that provide 27 placements and three respite placements. The team have also supported 11 early permanence carers who are dual approved as foster carers/adopters. There are now 171 households providing support (placements or respite care) for our children and young people.

The adoption service has focused recently on maximising the impact of digital recruitment. Following an award-winning project to implement an online adoption readiness checker we have seen a significant increase in registrations of interest. Last year (2019/20) the service approved 11 adopters, this year the service has recruited 30 adopters. This included seven early permanence carers and a third time adoptive family for a sibling.

We have seen a significant increase in the number of adopters and special guardians requesting support as a result of the additional pressures they are experiencing through Covid. We are now working on a second digital project, working with adopters, special guardians and our digital team, to enable adopters to identify where they can access sources support and who to contact if they are struggling.

The adoption team has also expanded their support offer through the adoption support fund. This has enabled upskilling of staff and implementation of more specialist support groups to ensure all adopters and special guardians are able to access support which reflects their needs.

We have continued to develop additional in-house children's homes provision enabling us to place more young people within the county and ensure we are able to provide high quality placements. Our third new home, Newlands Road, is on track to open in May following subject to completion of the Ofsted registration processes. In addition, we have taken the opportunity to fully renovate our long-standing children's home, The Steeples, to bring the building standards in line with that of the newer homes and Ofsted have confirmed placements can commence later this month.

Alongside our children's homes we have also renovated our semi-independent unit, Redwood, providing an opportunity for young people over the age of 16 to develop their independence. As part of this we have also focused on building stronger relationships with providers and implementing a set of minimum standards to ensure that all provision for 16 to 18-

year olds is of a high standard and supports young people to live independently. The unit includes a training flat for work to take place with young people to prepare them for independent living and is currently home to 3 young people.





Cabinet Member report – Communities & Public Health

Councillor Gareth Williams

Working in Partnership with the Voluntary Sector

The Council has spoken many times about the value of the voluntary sector. Relationships were accelerated during the pandemic with the sector being instrumental in the community response. In February, the Communities and Localism Select Committee held an inquiry into the Council's approach to the funding of grants to community groups to help with the Covid-19 pandemic. The Select Committee praised the service's response, highlighting the high standard of partnership work which allowed the speedy deployment of funding to support grassroots organisations, often the first on the scene and the most innovative. The Committee commented on the 'bottom up approach' which ensured that funding was used where it was needed the most for residents. The Committee also welcomed the service's collaborative approach with establishing a Strategic Funding Group (Heart of Bucks, Rothschild Foundation, Clare Foundation, LEAP and the National Lottery) who have helped bring in further funding for Buckinghamshire. National lottery referred the funding approach as unique and the Chair of the VCSE Recovery Board commented that in 30 years of VCS work he had never seen such a 'can-do' attitude.

Harnessing the success of the collaboration seen throughout the pandemic, the new VCSE Recovery Board helped co-design an innovative 3-year strategic framework, which outlines how the council can work best with the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE) in the future. In February, the framework received unanimous support with Cabinet highlighting how critical partnership with the VCSE sector was. The relationships developed in the pandemic, as well as the new community boards, will continue innovative support to Buckinghamshire's communities.

Health and Wellbeing Board Update

I am pleased to say the Health and Wellbeing Board approved the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for 2021-24, 'Happier, Healthier Lives' at the February Board meeting. All partners are committed and focused to working together across the system to deliver the strategy which aims to create the best conditions in Buckinghamshire for people to live healthy, happy and fulfilling lives and achieve their full potential. The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy is the county's high-level plan for reducing health inequalities and improving the health and wellbeing of Buckinghamshire's residents. The Board has agreed that future meetings will be themed against the three key priorities identified in the strategy: Start Well, Live Well and Age Well.

We have also produced our first Annual Report capturing all the excellent work we have been able to do over the last year by working collaboratively across the system. The Annual Report details some of the work which the Board has been involved in to address its priority areas, meet its statutory requirements, develop its new strategy and direction, and respond to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Covid-19 Update

A year into Buckinghamshire's Covid-19 response, the operational complexity of that response continues to grow even as local case numbers are currently declining. This complexity results from factors such as the increased number of testing options available, the roll-out of effective vaccines and of surge testing when local cases of 'variants of concern' are identified. All of these new initiatives provide welcome new means to control the spread of the coronavirus and to protect our communities, and we also have much better data now than we did 12 months ago, which helps us to act more quickly and effectively in response to clusters or outbreaks. Local contact tracing has been successfully set up, supporting the national 'Test, Trace and Isolate' programme, and linking in with our excellent Support Hubs which provide essential services to people who are shielding or struggling.

Public health continues to work closely with the Environmental Health team and Covid-19 Marshals, especially as schools and businesses begin to re-open and concerns will inevitably be raised about unsafe behaviour in public places. Some groups have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19 and we continue to work with members, communities and colleagues across the Council and the NHS to ensure that these groups are protected from Covid-19 harm and encouraged and supported to access the vaccine as it rolls out. We also work with colleagues to ensure that the Council is a trusted source of information and support for all residents. Last but not least, we are currently working on recovery planning, to both incorporate the valuable lessons and begin to heal the damage caused by the pandemic in our communities.

Transforming the Public Health System

In March the Government published a policy paper on its reforms of the public health system. The reforms include the abolition of Public Health England and the creation of the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and the Office for Health Promotion. The UKHSA will be formally established in April 2021 and will bring together national public health science and response capabilities to ensure the UK is prepared for future pandemics. Over the coming months work will take place with local leaders to develop a sub-national operational structure.

The new Office for Health Promotion will sit within the Department for Health and Social Care, under the leadership of the Chief Medical Officer. The Office will focus on improving health through the NHS, local authorities and across government, in recognition of the role that other government departments have in tackling the wider determinants of health.

The policy paper recognises the central role that local authorities provide in local leadership for health promotion and does not propose any changes to the scope of local authority commissioning responsibilities. In addition, government will be considering if local authorities and Directors of Public Health need any additional powers, responsibilities or levers to help them drive change locally.

A further update on the reformed public health system and more detail on plans and ambition for improving the public's health is expected later in the year.

Libraries Update

Since January, the focus of the library service has been on re-deploying staff to support the Council's work around Covid-19. Library staff have been active across a number of areas including Helping Hands (befriending and problem solving), business support grants, the mass vaccination centre at Buckinghamshire New University, lateral flow testing and surge testing. Library staff were particularly effective in supporting surge testing and three members of staff are now identified as key players in the programme operations team and can be called up at short notice should the Council need to undertake another such testing programme.

Library staff have also been providing phone and face-to-face Census support for residents who have difficulty completing the forms. Sessions were delivered at Aylesbury library on Tuesdays and Fridays, plus some Saturdays during April, with customers booking in advance by telephoning the Customer Service Centre (who then transferred callers through to the library). Although Census Day was 21 March and everyone was encouraged to complete their form as soon as possible, the service will remain available until Tuesday 4 May. People can be fined if they do not complete the form.

Finally, detailed work on design to deliver a new library for Amersham as part of the Chilterns Lifestyle Centre has taken place. The furniture, signage, computer areas and self-service technology have all been agreed and the new library will be the first in the county to offer an early morning/late evening 'staff-less' service.





Cabinet Member report – Logistics

Councillor David Martin

Public Transport Update

Local bus services have been increased in line with the government's roadmap out of lockdown; and additional buses have been provided at peak times following the schools re-opening on 8th March. The Public Transport Team worked with bus companies on further service increases from 12th April, as non-essential retailers reopened, and more off-peak and weekend travel took place. Travel information has been updated online, via our electronic bus stop displays and in bus stations, along with improved "travel safe" messaging to passengers.

The new National Bus Strategy was launched on 15th March, which outlines a significant change to the way local bus services will run from 2022, with local transport authorities having a greater role in agreeing service levels with bus companies through an Enhanced Partnership arrangement. The strategy promises the opportunity to bid for additional government funding for bus services. Further details and new guidance are expected in the coming weeks; and we will be developing a plan for Buckinghamshire when we have more information.

Rural Mobility Funding Bid

In February the Public Transport and Transport Strategy Teams worked together to produce a robust Phase 2 bid to the Department for Transport's (DfT) Rural Mobility Fund. The aim of the Rural Mobility Fund is to deliver flexible, local transport solutions for residents and improved connectivity for communities.

On 15th March, DfT confirmed that Buckinghamshire Council had been successful in securing £1.85m over the next four years to introduce Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) in and around Aylesbury and High Wycombe. DRT is a form of shared transport where vehicles alter their routes based on passenger transport demand rather than using a fixed route or timetable. The Council will be implementing DRT in both towns, working closely with local members, public transport operators, local businesses and Chiltern Railways.

Client Transport Update

Since 4th January the Client Transport Team has continued to put transport in place for eligible children who had been attending school during lockdown. The team established a detailed process and worked closely with our schools to ensure that all eligible children whose parents wished it, were able to attend school throughout the third COVID-19 lockdown. With effect from 8th March, all school transport contracts returned to pre-lockdown levels of service, with minimal issues arising from this mass return to education.

The team also completed the first phase of contract retendering for home to school transport, which included client transport contracts for all students who attend Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and all post-16 SEND students who attend colleges. 56 PRU contracts and 101 Post-16 SEND college transport contracts went live from 22nd February.

Transport Services Improvement Update

On 30th March Cabinet approved the updated Home to School Transport Policy and associated Post-16 Transport Policy Statement, which set out the Council's approach to providing transport to educational settings for 0 – 19 years (and up to 25 years for those with SEND). The Policy incorporates the choice of a Personal Transport Budget for parents of students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

A Personal Transport Budget is money paid by the council to families with SEND children and who are eligible for transport, who choose to make their own arrangements, as opposed to the council arranging transport. This gives families freedom and flexibility to make their own travel arrangements rather, than relying on transport that we provide. Personal Transport Budgets commenced being rolled out to families of SEND students earlier this month.

Report to the Transport, Environment and Climate Change (TECC) Select Committee

On 11th March, the TECC Select Committee received an update on Home to School Transport, including a presentation on service improvement. The webcast of the School Transport Update is available [online](#).

Progress on a unified parking service

The on-street parking back office team transferred into Buckinghamshire Council employment from Ringway Jacobs in January 2021. The on-street enforcement contract with NSL will end in September 2021, at which point the Civil Enforcement team delivering that service will also transfer to Buckinghamshire Council employment. The rest of the work around uniting the parking service is progressing well, with the two senior posts now having been recruited to; and the tender process for a new parking system is nearly complete and a new contract will be in place by the end of the month. These key elements provide the foundation on which to create a new, efficient and cost-effective parking service from the disparate and fragmented arrangements inherited from five parking authorities at unitary.

TROs near country parks and beauty spots

Five initial sites have a number of temporary traffic regulation orders (TTROs) in place, put in place following demands by residents caused by a huge upsurge in visitor numbers; and we are working on making these orders permanent over the next few months. The locations include Black Park, Burnham Beeches, Denham Country Park, Dorney Reaches, Great Brickhill, Langley Park, Medmenham, Pitstone Quarry, Stockgrove Park and Wendover Woods. Initial discussions with local members and parish councils have commenced, following which there will be informal consultations with residents; and thereafter, having taken local views into account, we will proceed with formal public consultations for every site.

Electric Vehicle charging points on and off street, including planned additions

The Council currently operates 36 electric vehicle charging bays in Council-owned car parks, with a further 13 in the pipeline. Coming soon via a successful bid under the Office for Zero Emissions Vehicles (OZEV) scheme, we have a further 32 electric vehicle charging bays planned for the car parks. The above compliments the 20 on-street charge points installed across Amersham, Chesham, Marlow, High Wycombe, Princess Risborough, and Winslow. This year we plan to introduce a pilot

project to trial Inductive (Wireless) Charging solutions at three locations across Buckinghamshire. We will submit a further bid for funding from the On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS) to benefit residents who do not have access to off-street parking.

Persistent parking charge evaders - vehicle removals

A public consultation took place to implement a Vehicle Removal Policy that gives the council authority to remove the vehicles of people who consistently do not pay parking charges and penalties, deliberately park in a manner that prevents roadworks, those who fraudulently use parking permits and blue badges; and a number of other offences. The consultation received considerable public support with only 2% against. The policy came into effect on 24 March and it is expected that it will increase compliance with parking restrictions, greatly reduce the number of persistent evaders, and reduce delays on highways works due to inconsiderate parking.

Staffing matters

Our staff continue to go the extra mile for our residents, despite myriad challenges during the year. It is hoped that we are finally emerging from the many COVID-19 issues we have faced; and is the expectation that we will continue to provide high quality and improving services for our residents.





Cabinet Member report – Town Centre Regeneration

Councillor Steve Bowles

Reopening High Streets

The Reopening High Streets Officer team has been re-established to look at social distancing measures and licencing support for our hospitality sector. Engagement has been carried out via Community Boards to help identify any new interventions needed for social distancing to help our high streets reopen in June.

A Strategic Reopening Team has been established to look at broader reopening activities including support for businesses and communities, creating vibrancy and activity, cleanliness, and communications.

Regeneration of High Wycombe and Chesham Town Centres progressing through the Regen Boards

The inaugural meeting of High Wycombe Regeneration Board held in February and the next meeting is to be held once confirmation of Future High Street Fund release is received from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Recognising Chesham as a priority area for regeneration, at the beginning of 2021, a Regeneration Group was established for the town. The Chesham Regeneration Group brings together representatives from Buckinghamshire Council, Chesham Town Council, Chesham Renaissance Community Interest Group and the public and private sectors, with the aim of agreeing and overseeing a plan for regeneration across the town centre. As the Group is still in its infancy and has met only twice, the current focus is upon understanding and agreeing the role of the different partners; understanding the potential regeneration opportunities particularly on unitary council owned sites and agreeing an approach to regeneration, which builds on the existing Chesham Masterplan and the emerging Chesham Neighbourhood Plan.

Update on Aylesbury Garden Town (AGT) – annual review and programme for 2021/22

The AGT Strategic Oversight Board met on the 1st March to review of the AGT Programme over the last 12 months, together with an overview of the proposed programme for 2021/2.

Throughout 2020/21 there has been significant progress of the key projects identified within the AGT Masterplan, specifically:

- Proposals for the Gardenway orbital route around Aylesbury;
- Plans to progress a delivery plan for the Town Centre to ensure its place as a thriving commercial heart;
- Encouraging greater levels of sustainable movement around the town;

- Improving the quality of new housing and development.

Significant progress has been made in the above, with:

- Extensive communication and co-design on the Gardenway;
- Reporting of the socio-economic and commercial study for the town centre which informs the objectives of the forthcoming delivery plan;
- Focus on developing supplementary planning guidance for AGT and providing wider design support; and
- Implementation of sustainable transport initiatives including cycling infrastructure, the E Scooter trial, and street closures.

Significant Communication and Engagement work has also been required to support the co-design process and activities for the Gardenway including launch of the new AGT website alongside a number of significant achievements through the Community Programme: community food growing, the community projects funding pot, enhancements in the town including a new cycle park and planting scheme and work with community partners.

Turning to the programme and priorities for AGT in 2021/2, the key priorities are:

- Continued progress and reporting on the Gardenway commission;
- Commencing work on the delivery plan for the Town Centre Station Quarter/Exchange regeneration which will go out to tender in April;
- Further progressing the AGT Framework and Infrastructure SPD and supporting planning colleagues through a series of workshops focused on design quality;
- Reviewing opportunities for sustainable movement across the town;
- Establishing a design task force for AGT;
- Continuing the community programme including community food growing and exploring new models for community stewardship;
- Influencing the quality of infrastructure through the HIF programme;
- Developing a Communications and Engagement Strategy for 2021/2;
- Pursuing opportunity to discuss the wider potential of Aylesbury as a location for innovative employment and attracting new businesses.



Cabinet Member report – Property & Assets

Councillor John Chilver

Old Council Offices Update

The Council submitted a planning application in July 2020 and are awaiting decision. The scheme for 47 flats marks an important step in the regeneration of Aylesbury bringing additional vitality to the town centre in a building that has been unoccupied for some time.

Winslow Development

In October, Cabinet approved the next design stage for the new development at the Winslow Centre. The plans will see the provision of a new community facility which will include a library that will allow us to offer local services through one front door. This will be alongside new Extra Care and residential housing.

New plans for the re-provision of sports pitches have now been developed providing for a purpose built sports facility on the nearby Redfield Farm, including rugby, football and tennis facilities. These will replace the outdated existing facilities at the Winslow Centre. We are working to secure additional funding from sport's governing bodies (Football Foundation/S106 contributions) to enhance the facilities offered and future proof the development.

Demolition of the existing buildings on the main Winslow site completed in March 2021, with only the library building retained.

One Public Estate Funding

We have successfully bid for OPE funding for the following projects:

- Evreham Centre, Iver – feasibility study and massing exercise to ascertain the potential for development of a medical and community centre and housing. The site currently houses an under-utilised adult learning building and a failing council owned gym. All current community services (youth centre, adult learning, nursery) will be re-provided in new, more efficient, bespoke spaces. The project team will include Leisure, Education and Youth Services Officers, CCG and Buckinghamshire NHS Healthcare Trust and will be led by Major Projects.
- Amersham Civic Centre - following on from the Chiltern Pools development, a master planning and feasibility study on the Amersham Civic Centre site looking at options for transforming and consolidating the estate on the site and unlocking currently under-utilised sections for the delivery of housing.
- Storage and Archiving - a project to review storage and archiving in the Buckinghamshire public estate resulting in a solution for the currently lacking Archiving space as a minimum but also looking at options to maximise economies of scale by incorporating other storage needs.

Capital Schools Project

Property Services continue to work with colleagues in Children's Services in the development and delivery of substantial schools' expansion programme with a circa contract value of £70 million including:

- Amersham School – Works commenced on site in July 2020 with planned completion date in August 2021.
- Buckingham School – Works commenced on site in August 2020 with planned completion date in May 2021.
- Kingsbrook Primary – Works commenced on site in September 2019 with planned completion in July 2021.
- Kingsbrook Secondary – Development of a New Build Secondary School. The council, working with its external design team, has developed concept design from RIBA 0 to RIBA 2. The project is due at Planning Committee on 8th April 2021. Subject to planning approval the works are due to commence on site in April 2021.
- Chiltern Hills Academy – Planning Approval secured for both Temporary and Main Works at 9th July 2020 Committee. Early Works commenced on site 27th July. Temps on site. Main Works commenced on site 18th January 2021 and are expected to complete December 2021.
- Holmer Green – Planning approval was secured on 11th June 2020. Works commenced on site in November 2020, with planned completion date in November 2021.
- Misbourne School - Expansion and Sports Hall works contract executed in December 2020. Works commenced on site 25th February 2021 with planned completion date in June 2022.

Vale Retail Park

Terms have been agreed with a major retailer to take space at Units 1, 2 and 3 at Vale Retail Park, subject to planning approval. The Council will combine the three retail units whilst also retaining a smaller Unit 3b to let separately and undertake improvements to the frontage and car park. The letting will secure a significant income for the Council at the retail park and create new jobs. There is already interest in the smaller created Unit 3b.

Lancaster Road

The Council has agreed terms to acquire the long-leasehold interest of the site occupied by Playtrain and Fitness Experts Gym at Cressex Business Park. The Council already owned the underlying freehold interest and will result in substantial increase in rent received from the property whilst securing the site for future redevelopment options in the future.

Green Park

Terms are close to being agreed with a new operator at Green Park to preserve the venue as an outdoor learning centre. Green Park would benefit from a tenant led investment programme, providing financial savings for the Council and creating local jobs.

Kingsbury and Market Square public realm improvement schemes

The final phase of stakeholder engagement on the design concepts for these two historic spaces ended in March. The engagement programme included a number of webinars, presentation and Q & A sessions, dedicated to specific audiences and themes – for example, the business community and heritage. The webinars were well attended and overall demonstrated strong support for the designs including greater pedestrianisation in both spaces.

Pre-application meetings are now taking place and an application for planning is expected to be submitted in early summer.

Acquisition of Friars Square Shopping Centre, Aylesbury

The acquisition of the Shopping Centre completed on 6 April. The current managing agents will be retained for the next 12 months to provide continuity for the tenants and the council. A tenants' meeting will be held in the next few weeks to give tenants the opportunity to meet their new landlord.

The Centre currently only has one vacant unit, but a priority action will be to develop a short, medium and longer term business plan. The immediate focus will be on retaining tenants, improving income through new opportunities and ensuring that the Centre re-opens safely for business on 12 April when the next phase of lockdown restrictions are lifted.

The Gateway PPE distribution centre

Staff from the Aylesbury Community Centre team and the Gateway building management team, have been busy over the last few months managing the PPE distribution centre at The Gateway. To date they have processed 483 orders online as well as 300 schools' deliveries, and nine pallets have been packed for the forthcoming elections. In terms of quantities of items, over 1,579,000 aprons, 915,000 pairs of gloves 57,000 hand sanitiser bottles, 34,000 visas and goggles and 670,000 masks have been sent.





Cabinet Member report – Planning & Enforcement

Councillor Warren Whyte

Buckinghamshire Design Awards

The Buckinghamshire Council Design Awards 2020 concluded in February, with the winners of the People's Choice award being announced. Great Kimble School won the public/landscape category, and 'Pheasants' in Hambleden won the private/residential category. Overall, 15 development schemes received Commendations as part of the awards, which aim to promote good design across the county.

The Design Awards were hosted virtually this year due to the pandemic, even so, the quality of entries was very high and a great way to showcase some of the fantastic developments across the County. High quality design will be a very strong feature of our new Local Plan and the Council has recently submitted an expression of interest to Government to become a pilot area for developing a Buckinghamshire Design Code.

Introduction of the Parish Newsletter

Recognising the importance of local engagement, we have launched a new quarterly newsletter for Town and Parish Councils, raising awareness of the new planning service and focusing on the issues which we know are of interest. This has been well received by the Town and Parish Councils, with positive feedback, and we are welcoming suggestions for future editions.

Neighbourhood Plans

Two neighbourhood development plan referendums are planned for 6th May for the Ickford and Great and Little Kimble-cum-Marsh neighbourhood plans. Thank you to everyone who participated in the preparation of those plans.

Planning Enforcement

As part of our new planning enforcement service, we introduced a new team structure last month. As well as a new Enforcement Manager, we have combined the five legacy Councils into two area teams, keeping our Minerals and Waste function as a separate specialist team. We now have the East, West and South team and the North and Central team. We are currently out to recruitment on two vacant team leader posts.

As part of our service review we are looking to re-distribute officers and provide additional support in order to move our legacy cases forward to resolution to allow us to focus on the future of our service and our aspirations. We are working towards adopting a new communications strategy which aims to provide a service that offers proactive communication rather than reactive. This will help frame expectations in a more proactive and strategic manner. The first phase of this was with the recent addition of planning enforcement briefings to the planning committees.

In 20/21 the team issued 56 enforcement notices. This is a 51.4 % increase on the previous financial year 19/20 where the combined number of notices issued by the legacy authorities was 37.

Buckinghamshire Local Plan and Statement of Community Involvement Consultation

We have made good progress with our early work on the new Buckinghamshire Local Plan. The overall programme for preparing the Plan (the Local Development Scheme) was agreed at Cabinet in December 2020 setting out how we will progress with the Plan whilst recognising the uncertainties around what the new local plan system will look like resulting from the Government's Planning White Paper reforms. A key early focus of the work has been on how we optimise the level of brownfield development and we launched a 'call for brownfield sites' that ran until 6th April. We have also been consulting on our Statement of Community Involvement which seeks to ensure effective engagement in the different elements and stages of the planning process. This consultation also ran until 6th April.

Supplementary Planning Documents

We have been progressing our more detailed planning guidance for key issues and sites in the form of supplementary planning documents (SPDs). Consultation closed in March on the draft Biodiversity Accounting SPD which sets out how new development should maintain and enhance biodiversity. We are now considering the responses. The Princes Risborough Expansion SPD was adopted in March. This provides a more detailed design and delivery framework for the main sites allocated in the adopted Wycombe Local Plan and will help guide the preparation and assessment of future planning applications for the area with a high aspiration for design, environment, open space and provision of community facilities.

Planning Improvement Board

As members will know, the planning service is within the first wave of transformation reviews of Council services. The first step of that review has been to put in place a new, single management structure for Planning & Environment and it is now live as of 8th March this year. We have also identified a number of key projects and improvements that now need to be made to the service in order to deliver the responsive, customer friendly service to which we all aspire.

To oversee the introduction of those improvements, we have established a Planning Improvement Board. This board is chaired by the Corporate Director for Planning, Growth and Sustainability and as well as senior representation from the planning service, is also attended by the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Enforcement. In addition, there is wider corporate representation on the board, and we have also commissioned an external 'critical friend' to play a key role on the board. The board will meet regularly and will have oversight of the delivery and pace of improvements in the service whilst at the same time retaining a focus on ensuring that performance across all of the functions remains at a high level.



Cabinet Member report – Transport

Councillor Nick Naylor

Rights of Way Enforcement Policy

A new version of the Rights of Way Enforcement Policy has been published, which will shortly be available on the Council's web pages. It was important to update the previous Buckinghamshire County Council version which was out of date; particularly as events over this past year saw an increase in usage of the rights of way network and prompted some owners to attempt to prevent public access which resulted in officers having to deal with some challenging enforcement cases around illegal obstructions on public paths. The new Policy provides a document to be viewed by officers, customers and stakeholders, which outlines the legislative powers available to the authority regarding enforcement and gives details of what action our customers may expect the authority to take on illegalities found on public rights of way.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan – published Action Plan

The Council has now published an action plan which outlines its objectives for improving public rights of way between 2020 and 2030 against six main themes, each of which cover an aspect of rights of way management, namely:

- Theme 1: Mapping the Network
- Theme 2: Looking after the Network
- Theme 3: An Evolving Network
- Theme 4: Knowing Where to Go
- Theme 5: Access for Everyone
- Theme 6: Effective Delivery

The Rights of Way Improvement and Delivery Plan can be viewed here: <https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/services/environment/public-rights-of-way/improving-our-rights-of-way/rights-of-way-improvement-plan/>

Transport for Buckinghamshire

Transport for Buckinghamshire provides a winter service from mid-October to mid-April and may be extended in exceptional circumstances. This year winter standby commenced on 12th October 2020 with the first treatment run being undertaken countywide on 3rd November 2020. The season has been relentless with the second highest number of salting runs (first being Beast from East in 2017/18) for seven years (so far 68 against average of 52 at this time of season) even going out Christmas Day and New Year's Eve with one minor snow event at the end of January. All this with Covid 19 restrictions in place and expansion of the salting routes to encompass Covid 19 test and vaccination facilities as requested.

Over the years, storms have become a regular feature during the winter season and, as well as the wet weather, it also brings additional duties for the crews including road closures, debris clearance from fallen trees and attending to flash floods after periods of heavy rainfall.

The winter storms over 2020/21 have taken their toll on the network starting with Storm Alex back in October. Alex saw over 900 sandbags delivered during one weekend, whilst the crews also attended to 15 fallen trees and 16 road closures. Each road closure was re-opened within three days of the flooding and a road sweeper brought after the flooding had subsided. The crews also attended and assisted at flood defence installation.

Storm Bella came along in December requiring our crews to attend site, day and night, in the days leading up to Christmas. Over 500 sandbags were delivered and 40 road closures were managed, whilst also attending to fallen trees. During this time, over 600-man hours were supplied across 48 hours and 66 separate call out located were attended to.

Our teams are kept up to date with flood warnings from the Environment Agency and ensure that 500 sandbags are on standby at each depot and the gully machine is on standby. This ensures a rapid response when needed.

Highways Infrastructure Projects

Two National Productivity Investment Fund projects are nearing completion. A418 Oxford Road, Aylesbury and A40 London Road, High Wycombe are both almost finished and both have been delivered under budget. Two key decisions were taken recently on the A41 Bicester Road, Aylesbury and A404/A4155 Westhorpe, Marlow projects and these are both expected to commence on site in Summer 2021. Already on site and progressing well is the A4010/Crest Road, High Wycombe project which is expected to be completed in Summer 2021.

East West Rail

The Council has taken the lead and is chairing the East West Rail Consortium, which brings together the local authorities along the route, Network Rail and the EWR Company who are the commissioners for the railway. One of the main reasons is that the Council wish to ensure that the Consortium, Network Rail and the EWR Company are well aware of the huge issues which the construction is causing in Buckinghamshire and the negative impacts this is having on communities. In particular, there has been a lack of contractor compliance, which was highlighted at the last meeting in March, led by a presentation by Buckinghamshire Council. Greg Smith MP has also pressed EWR Company and the EWR Alliance (who are carrying out the works) to improve and this has led to an action plan for improvement. The Consortium and the Council will now work with Greg Smith to ensure that this action plan is followed through.



Cabinet Member report – Housing & Homelessness

Councillor Isobel Darby

Service Transformation

Following a comprehensive and collaborative service review, discovery and design process involving the majority of housing staff, which started on 8th October 2020, the housing service entered a 45-day staff consultation period which started on 1st March 2021. This consultation on a proposed new single service structure for Buckinghamshire closes on 14th April and the finalised structure should be agreed by 19th April. Many helpful and constructive comments have been received from affected staff and these will be given full consideration and will help to shape the new service. Implementation of the new structure is intended to start on 1st May.

Business as usual under Covid

The housing team continues to support residents remotely and is providing tailored assistance to assist applicants, including supported applications and remote verifications. The third national lockdown has not prevented Registered Providers from making lettings and they are offering business as usual, with Covid safe arrangements and virtual viewings. Providers have worked closely with the council, particularly with regard to urgent or priority moves.

The national eviction moratorium and the need for landlords to provide six-month notice periods, has been extended until 31 May 2021. Exceptions remain in place for more serious cases including illegal occupation, anti-social behaviour and arrears of six months' rent or more.

The government is still considering the best approach to move away from these emergency protections which, barring any further change, will lift from the beginning of June. Officers are continuing to monitor the frequency of possession cases presenting to the area housing teams. The teams continue to monitor service demand, particularly with regard to Section 21 notice approaches (i.e. "no fault" evictions) and Domestic Violence approaches. As we approach the implementation of the forthcoming Domestic Abuse Bill, Housing continues to work with Community Safety in relation to its safer accommodation project and delivery of its new statutory requirements under the Bill.

Work has commenced in relation to the new Buckinghamshire Housing Allocations Policy and the Homelessness Strategy, with the aim to complete and adopt both toward the end of 2022.

The annual rough sleeper count took place on 18/19th November. This is the formal annual count, or 'snapshot' of rough sleeping that is reported back to MHCLG. The count this year revealed that there were five rough sleepers across Buckinghamshire. At the same time in 2019, the snapshot indicated 36 rough sleepers in the county. This represents a reduction of nearly 87%.

Currently, around 90 people are accommodated under the 'everyone in' initiative, with around five people known to be sleeping rough. All of these people have been offered accommodation, and have declined, but officers will continue to offer accommodation and support.

Successful funding bids to MHCLG

The Next Steps Accommodation Programme bought £485,000 revenue funding to the Council and this has been used to maintain the accommodation for rough sleepers across the county. The housing team also secured an additional £90,000 from the MHCLG Cold Weather Fund to assist with the provision of accommodation for rough sleepers during the winter period. This aligns to the Council's current Severe Weather Emergency provision which safeguards those that may find themselves homeless over the winter months.

In partnership with the Council, Hightown Housing Association will be commissioning nine units of self-contained supported housing at Ardenham Lane House, hopefully by the end of March. This will provide safe good quality accommodation for former rough sleepers along with the much needed support to enable them to transition into settled housing when they are ready to take that step.

Officers have now placed bids for funding with local partners under the 'Rough Sleeper Initiative 4' programme, having successfully bid in the three previous scheme years. If successful, these funding bids will provide support for local third sector partners who work directly with rough sleepers. Proposed schemes include pre-tenancy training initiatives, money and life skills training and other forms of support and outreach, including legal support and immigration advice.

A second grant programme under the Next Steps Accommodation Programme has been launched by MHCLG and re-named 'Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme' RSAP, and officers are currently preparing Buckinghamshire wide bids with Registered Provider partners.

Affordable Housing

Development partners continued to deliver new homes during lockdown, with council support bringing forward 149 new affordable homes including 46 new shared ownership properties for low income families and four ground floor flats to a wheelchair adaptable specification.

Working with partners and stakeholders

The Council's recently established independently chaired Housing Management and Homeless Prevention forums are well attended and are actively working with partners and stakeholders, both internal and external, to improve outcomes for those in housing need and to develop communication and co-working between the Council and providers of affordable housing.

Youth Concern has now launched its 'Next Steps' project in Aylesbury which can accommodate nine 18 to 25 year olds in need of support, for up to one year.

Enforcement

Officers have recently taken action against the licence holder for a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) in Aylesbury. An improvement notice was not complied with and legal proceedings were instigated by the Council. The licensee was found guilty of 13 offences and was fined a total of £42,000. The Council was awarded £6,658.54 in costs.



Cabinet Member report – Regulatory Services

Councillor Fred Wilson

Environmental Health

Since the last report the primary focus of the team continues to be related to Covid-19. Officers are still responding to requests for service, either from businesses seeking clarification regarding the legislation, or members of the public reporting potential breaches.

Environmental Health and Trading Standards officers have undertaken spot checks on large supermarkets to ensure they are complying with Covid-19 requirements. This followed a request from the Secretary of State that all councils visit large supermarket branches in their areas. Compliance with Covid requirements was found to be high. Following this successful project, the Council is working in partnership with the Health and Safety Executive to ensure compliance with Covid legislation at all smaller convenience stores within the county.

Whilst many non-essential businesses have been shut during lockdown, the Government has recently announced its road map for opening. From previous experience it is anticipated this will create a large demand for advice and visits to premises to support compliance. In order to prioritise resources, the Council has worked with Thames Valley Police to identify potential problems that may occur at each phase of the planned reopening.

Whilst all organised events have been cancelled during lockdown officers are now receiving a large number of notifications from event organisers who intend to hold events this year. These will include some high profile events such as motor racing at Silverstone, Penn Fest music festival, Marlow Town Regatta and Festival, Pub in the Park in Marlow and a number of events on the Rye and Culden Faw estate. Whilst details from the Government are still awaited on what conditions will be placed on events it is clear there will be significant pressure on officer resources in assessing event safety and advising event organisers on public safety measures.

In addition to the above, officers are still undertaking routine activities and responding to public complaints and enquiries. The Food Standards Agency has directed that Environmental Health departments focus on higher risk premises and therefore routine inspections and investigations in these businesses continue.

Coroner Service

The Coroner Service has seen an increase in cases between January and March related to a high number of deaths in this period, whilst Covid deaths are not referred to the Coroner, there has still been a 75% increase in deaths referred to the Coroner during this period.

Inquests were suspended during Lockdown 1 but were resumed in July 20; this created a backlog of cases to be heard and the Service has now dealt with the backlog of smaller inquest cases. With the

agreement of the families, these have been held remotely to save attendance in court and to promote Covid safety.

The larger inquests requiring a jury which generally have several counsel and numerous experts, or witnesses have been delayed due to a number of reasons, include securing suitable covid-safe accommodation and the availability of reports (health in particular) and the availability of health professionals who continue to be dedicated to dealing with Covid.

The first complex inquest was heard in late March with just the jury and Coroner in court and legal counsel, experts and witnesses attending virtually. Several more complex inquests will be held this way both during covid restrictions and then moving forward to business as usual.

Registration Service

Registering deaths has continued to be the main focus for the Registration Service during the first part of 2021. 1,190 deaths were registered between January and 24 March compared to 867 in for the same period in 2020; a 72% increase. Deaths continue to be registered by phone under the Covid Act easements; feedback from families about this offer is very positive in that they do not need to attend in person and it also allows for timely registration appointments due to not having to travel or co-ordinate people to attend the office. The service was able to accommodate this additional demand due to the suspension of weddings and associated legal preliminary work required for a wedding.

Birth registrations have continued, but in limited numbers and delivered through a hybrid process with part of the registration undertaken on the phone and then attendance in person. No easement was provided for registering births within the Covid Act. The hybrid process has helped greatly in reducing the number of customers attending registration offices for any period of time.

Weddings were suspended within Buckinghamshire when it entered Tier 4 in December 2020, unless there were exceptional circumstances.

However, weddings resumed without exception in the Council's ceremony rooms on 29 March and other venues in the County will come online at various stages after 12 April in line with the Government's roadmap. There will be a phased return to bigger venue weddings depending on their business status, with all venues permitted to offer weddings from 21 June so long as the conditions or 'four tests' for the road map are met.

The changes and restrictions to weddings have created a very substantial additional workload within the service. Changes, particularly with restrictions / suspensions, have come without notice which leaves the Service having to interpret the change quickly to work with couples on rearrangement or cancellations to fit.

The Service has also provided support where needed to wedding venues on the changes as well as ensuring ceremonies are Covid safe for guests and registrars.

Citizenship ceremonies – these have continued to be delivered virtually to allow citizens to complete their final steps in becoming a British citizen. Like the death registrations the virtual offer has been really well received by citizens who like the convenience and personal nature of their ceremony.

Trading Standards

Trading Standards has continued to support residents and businesses during this period. Officers have also supported the Covid work undertaken by Environmental Health. Whilst covid has received a substantial focus, there have also been other activities undertaken.

Illicit Tobacco Conviction – Trading Standards have regularly carried out operations to locate illicit tobacco sales using test purchases and sniffer dogs.

Animal Health Newsletter for Farmers – Trading Standards have recently published the Spring edition of this newsletter, covering a range of topics including lambing; avian flu; bovine tuberculosis; support available to farmers; hedge cutting and woodland; and heat stress in livestock, among others.

Business Against Scams – Following the ongoing success of virtual “Friends Against Scams” training aimed at residents, Trading Standards now offer virtual “Business Against Scams” training to help protect the Business against scams and fraud. The training sessions are aimed at employees, colleagues and volunteers that have the authority to make financial decisions on behalf of a business, or access to private company information.

In terms of a response to Covid, the guidance and subsequent legislation issued by Government has been often issued at short notice. The service has worked hard to ensure it can provide the correct advice, particularly to businesses, as the changes came into effect.

Licensing

The Licensing Service has delivered against its Cabinet Member priority of delivering the new Buckinghamshire Council Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Policy in year one of the new Council and the Policy was approved by Full Council on the 24th February 2021 and will come into effect from the 6th September 2021. Work is now underway to ensure that all of the necessary legislative and operational changes are prioritised and completed to meet the implementation date. This includes work on the development of a new single digital online application process for taxi licensing to provide a consistent customer experience and service standard across the Council area.

The Service is now working on the harmonisation of Licensing Act and Gambling Act Policies which is statutorily required by April 2023 and these policies will come forward to Licensing Committee ahead of consultation over the coming months.

We continue to actively work with internal partners across the Council in preparation for the re-opening of retail and hospitality businesses (outside) from 12th April 2021 including reviewing and refreshing the Pavement Licence scheme application process which enables businesses to trade on the public highway. The Service is working with Communications colleagues to promote and signpost businesses to this service and any additional advice and guidance that they may require ahead of re-opening. We are also working closely with Environmental Health colleagues and Safety Advisory Group in relation to events that are now coming forward and are starting to see an increase in applications associated with this in line with the re-opening roadmap.

The taxi licensing service has been working closely with Public Health colleagues to promote Covid-19 vaccination and other key public health messages to the licensed taxi trade including providing regular information by email and SMS to all.

Cemeteries and Crematoria

The Cemeteries and Crematoria Services have both seen an increase in activity since the beginning of January which unfortunately has been associated with Covid-19 excess death rates. The Crematoria Service has been particularly impacted, operating at 80-90% capacity continuously over several weeks. Service demand is now returning to more ‘normal’ levels. The teams working in this area have really gone the extra mile to ensure that customers receive the service they should over this period, including working additional hours and outside of their normal roles.

The Service has also received invaluable support from staff who normally work in other areas of the Council to assist with chapel services and administration where needed. This is a great reflection of the team and wider Council response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Chilterns Crematorium replacement cremator capital project (due for delivery in 22/23) continues to progress and a Specialist Project Manager has now been procured for the project. Work

is now underway to initiate the cremator equipment and construction procurement activities. We will be working hard over the next 18 months to ensure that we get the right solution in place to enable the Crematorium to continue to deliver a high quality service for our residents and communities.

The build works for the new Penn Road cemetery in Wycombe are now complete and the cemetery has been handed over to the Council. Work is now underway to implement the legislative and operational requirements needed to open the cemetery including the fees and charges regime, cemetery rules and regulations and burial plot mapping, and these matters will come forward to the High Wycombe Town Committee later in the year.

At Stoke Poges Memorial Gardens we have been working with volunteers to create a Tree Trail within the garden, which is sponsored by SEGRO, Slough Trading Estate, as part of their centenary celebrations. The trail is now almost complete, and we are working towards an official opening date in July when it is hoped families and visitors will be able to attend in line with Covid-19 restrictions at that time.

