

Questions on notice from members

Question to the Cabinet Member Education, Councillor Anita Cranmer, from Councillor Robin Stuchbury.

With the Covid pandemic the onus is on the Council to engage and provide a deliverable programme of support to every primary and secondary school within Buckinghamshire to establish how they can best provide support towards mental health awareness for their pupils. Can the Cabinet Member confirm what help is being planned for young people needing emotional support in our secondary schools to ensure there are no lasting effects on our children and that they achieve their full potential?

Response

This response looks at the work the council has done to support wellbeing in schools as a result of covid-19.

DfE Well-being for Education Return Programme

The DfE Wellbeing for Education Return aims to equip schools and colleges to promote children and young people's wellbeing, resilience, and recovery in response to Covid-19. As well as strengthening and building wellbeing and resilience it aims to prevent the onset of mental health problems in children and young people and ensure those with pre-existing or emerging difficulties access the right support.

There were several elements to the project in Buckinghamshire:

1. A new national training package was provided including guidance and resources for education staff on responding to the impact of Covid-19 on the wellbeing of their students and pupils. This training was tailored by local experts within Buckinghamshire to reflect our local needs and services and to consider the full range of support available in Buckinghamshire. Aspire Schools worked collaboratively with a project steering group to lead the project and adapt the training, this included; the Council's Public Health, Education and Educational Psychology Teams, Buckinghamshire CAMHS, Oxford NHS Trust Mental Health team, and delivered by Aspire Education.
2. This locally adapted training was delivered to nominated staff in education settings across Buckinghamshire during the Autumn and Spring terms. This offer was available to all educational settings, regardless of status of school. Training was delivered by a range of experts representing the above organisations in 3 separate hour long virtual settings to 274 members of school staff, representing 217 schools. The training was delivered across 24 small, local area groups of schools to ensure maximum participation by staff and to provide collaborative groups for discussion and support. Refresher courses continue to be held for all school staff. Delegated members of staff who attended the training then cascade the key messages, resources and signposting to all staff within their education settings.

3. To provide resilience in the system, the local expert team provided ongoing support to schools through the Autumn and Spring terms, including to education staff to embed their learning in their settings and to feel confident in responding to emerging and additional pupil issues as they arose. This will continue in the Summer term.
4. A online local directory of CYP wellbeing and mental health services for Buckinghamshire was developed, to provide details of all mental health services available locally to Buckinghamshire schools. <https://www.connectingbucksschools.com/buckinghamshire-wellbeing-resources/>

In addition, the following programme of support was delivered during the Autumn and Spring terms, and will continue to be delivered in the Summer Term, to schools across the county. These include (but are not limited to):

1. **Outreach Support for Pupils and Students (primary and secondary)**

Outreach services to schools, provided by Aspire School Outreach, have been extended. The focus for this support is for pupils who have dropped off the radar, are not accessing learning, have been difficult to engage or those for whom schools have concerns regarding their wellbeing. This support for individual pupils is tailored to meet the needs of the referred pupils and may include home visits, supporting a phased return to school, initial classroom support and working with pupils on issues such as anxiety, wellbeing and disengagement.

2. **Expert Webinars** - With the aim of enabling staff to better support pupils in both primary and secondary schools, an expert webinar programme was developed which comprised online training from an expert followed up a facilitated group session for those staff members who want to join. These sessions provide a space for participants to share ideas, ask questions, reflect on practice and develop their knowledge. These sessions were developed to enable schools to support pupils in a number of key wellbeing areas, which were identified by schools:

- Loss, Bereavement and Anxiety
- Well-being in the School Community
- Trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Attachment Disorder
- Emotional Regulation
- Looking after staff well-being
- Managing Challenging Behaviour

3. **Group coaching for all staff in schools** – We are offering group peer coaching sessions to all teachers, leaders and support staff across the county. These provide an opportunity to build collaboration during challenging times, to discuss current priorities to support pupils well-being in a small-group, safe and honest space and, as a group, generate ways forward. The subjects explored in the sessions were determined by the participants' current foci, concerns and priorities but were related to the themes explored in the webinars: emotional self-regulation, behaviour management, attachment disorder, trauma, behaviour, wellbeing, equity, student progress etc.
4. **A coaching package for Headteachers and Senior Leaders.** This consists of 5 x one to one sessions led by a trained coach and provided Headteachers with a safe and confidential space in which they can talk through the challenges, stresses and frustrations of operating schools and settings during this unprecedented situation.
5. The Educational Psychology team has curated **guidance for schools on how best to manage bereavement and grief** during the COVID-19 pandemic. It covers different situations and the difficult emotions bereaved people may have to deal with. The team have been available to support all schools through the establishment of a well-being support and advice line, as often as needed throughout the last year.
6. Creation of a dedicated **online resource bank** for schools [COVID-19 Well-being support for pupils and families \(including Bereavement Support\)](#) with information, resources, details of training and links to materials to help schools support the well-being and mental health of their pupils over this period and beyond.

Question 1 to the Leader, Councillor Martin Tett, from Councillor Robin Stuchbury, relating to strategic infrastructure.

South Bucks District Council and Buckinghamshire County Council secured two central government grants with a total value of £10.5 Million towards the cost of constructing the Beaconsfield Relief Road, also known locally as the 'road to nowhere'. These grants were £6.1 Million from the Buckinghamshire LEP and £4.4 Million from the Housing Infrastructure Fund. The projected cost of constructing the road is £8.2 Million, but we understand the actual cost of road construction was £5.3 Million.

Whichever number is correct, the Council received at least £2.3 Million more than was required and probably as much as £5.2 Million. Can the Council please clarify how much surplus funding is available from this project and what plans it has for these funds?

Could the Cabinet member comment on whether the expenditure on staff costs, on legal and professional fees, the cost designing the road, including modelling, business case development and planning - at a construction cost of £5.3 Million, which nearly 28% of the cost to build which seems extraordinarily high – and whether that is considered value for money?

Response to question 1

Can I thank (Robin) Cllr Stuchbury for his question.

As you are aware, the Council has received funding of £6.1m from the LEP, through the Local Growth Fund, and £3.3m from Homes England through their Housing Infrastructure Fund to deliver the Beaconsfield Relief Road. As the Local Growth Fund money had to be spent by March 2019, the LEP agreed to 'cashflow' the Homes England money to ensure the LGF money was not lost. The Homes England money was eventually confirmed in February 2020.

The total funding available for the project was £9.4m, and expenditure was £8.2m. The Council has drawn this down from the LEP based on the costs of the works. In addition, the Council agreed with the LEP that when the (£3.4m) Homes England money was received in 2020, they could spend that on additional shared transport priorities. These include:

- A404 Westthorpe Junction - Globe Park Access
- A40 London Road improvements
- A355 – future road safety, landscaping, monitoring and land compensation claims
- A418 Oxford Road NPIF scheme
- Aylesbury Eastern Link Road

The scheme development costs are not considered unusually high for this complex highway improvement project and therefore it does represent value for money. Benchmarking work undertaken with other local authorities has shown that the development costs are in line with other highways projects in Oxfordshire, Lincolnshire and Leicestershire. This project has been in development since 2014 and has understandably required considerable technical input. This has

included the purchase of land, on-going negotiation with land- owners and stakeholders, the preparation of materials for funding bid submissions, detailed design and the preparation of a planning application.

In conclusion, I'd like to mention that the delivery of a major project such as this delivers added benefits to the local economy. This scheme is calculated to have achieved £2.3M of social value added with 99% of the construction spend with SMEs and 87% locally employed staff as well as the industry recognised excellent environmental and ecological work the project delivered.

Question 2 to the Leader Martin Tett from Councillor Robin Stuchbury, relating to business grants.

Businesses have raised concerns with me that their questions around support to business remain unanswered. These have included issues about eligibility, payments for street licences, details of what money is available and what conditions apply. Can the Cabinet Member confirm what is being done to ensure that all the relevant agencies are working with businesses to ensure the safe opening of businesses with the end of lockdown?

Response to question 2

Buckinghamshire Council is highly proactive with its Additional Restrictions Grants (ARG), Local Restrictions Support Grants and Restart Grants. We have moved swiftly to make these Grants available, frequently well ahead of other similar councils. Our approach has been widely praised by local businesses. All eligibility criteria and application forms have been made available, when the grant application windows are open, on the Buckinghamshire Council website.

We have always been as responsive as we can to resident and business enquires and fully appreciate the pressures that businesses are under when it comes to these grants. Very recently additional pre-payment checks mandated by BEIS for the fourth round of the Bucks ARG have meant that this round of ARG applications has been more complex than previous rounds to administer but we are continuing to work through any backlogs as quickly as possible.

Application windows for all grants are publicised widely through council and member social media and through the Leader's newsletters. In addition, we work closely with our local growth hub, Buckinghamshire Business First, to promote these grants directly to Buckinghamshire Businesses.

We continue to support businesses who wish to apply for pavement licences to allow tables and chairs on the public highway to sell and consume food and drink. We have reviewed and updated the information on our website so that businesses can easily access the information they need and apply online, including for the suspension of parking bays for businesses who may need additional space. We have been actively working with our Highways and town centre teams to enable pavement licencing schemes across Buckinghamshire, including through the use of temporary road closures where appropriate.

Question to Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member Adult Social Care, Councillor Angela Mcpherson, from Councillor Robin Stuchbury.

In light of the board of trustees decision at Brendoncare in closing the nursing home, can the Cabinet Member confirm how many similar nursing homes are in the same financial position and what steps are being undertaken to prevent further closures.

Response

The Council has been in close contact with Brendon Care on the closure of the home referred to in the question. I can confirm that the closure of the home is not related to financial pressures. Questions have been asked previously at Council in relation to the sustainability of adult social care providers and the responses given remain valid. The Council is working very closely with care providers, both to understand the pressures they are experiencing and to work together to ensure safe and effective services.

Social care providers are also responding to changing needs, with reduction in demand for some types of care, such as residential care, and increases in demand for home care and other support which helps people to maintain their independence and stay at home. We continue support the development of a strong and healthy care market by helping those providers who wish to diversify or consolidate their business onto fewer sites.

Detailed modelling has been undertaken as part of the budget setting process which included growth and inflationary pressures and as a result £9.6m has been added to the budget in 2021/22. The national approach to the funding of social care services is a matter for Central Government and we await the proposals due to be published later in the year.

Question to Cabinet Member Sports and Leisure, Councillor Clive Harris, from Councillor Robin Stuchbury.

You will be aware that the contract for the Swan pool & Leisure centre comes up for renewal in March 2023, in the original contract it maintained public access to the only public squash courts in North Buckinghamshire within the centre. Will the Cabinet Member confirm whether any new contract include the responsibility to facilitate public access to the Buckingham squash court which have been used by the public over a great number of years.

Response

With 57 squash courts across 22 sites in Buckinghamshire, squash is reasonably well catered for and remains a popular activity in comparison with other parts of the country. The two public pay and play courts at the Swan Pool and Leisure Centre are well used by the local club - Buckingham Squash and Racketball Club - that uses the centre as its base; the courts there have recently been repainted and resanded and remain an important part of the mix of facilities available to the public. We would expect to see the courts remaining popular, the club continuing to be based there and for this to be reflected in any future operating contract.

Question to Cabinet Member Communities and Public Health, Councillor Gareth Williams, from Councillor Jonathan Rush.

The first person in Bucks to be vaccinated against Covid-19 was a Chalfont St Peter grandfather who was vaccinated in the excellent Chalfont and the Gerrards Cross hospital in mid-December 2019. What are the latest available figures for Bucks residents who have had first and second vaccination doses? Could you please give me an estimate of the additional cost to the council of the vaccination rollout?

Response

The successful delivery of the vaccination programme in Buckinghamshire has been a real collective effort and a number of organisations and individuals have really stepped up to ensure such a positive rollout. The efforts by the Buckinghamshire health system and the NHS have been remarkable including our GPs, Pharmacists, our Hospital Trust and Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group. The programme has also been wonderfully supported by a number of other organisations and individuals including the Council, Bucks Fire and Rescue, Bucks New University, Wycombe Wanderers FC, Stoke Mandeville Stadium, Town and Parish Councils and an amazing contribution from volunteers across the County which has been ably coordinated by our colleagues at Community Impact Bucks.

There are 20 sites across the County delivering vaccinations with more planned to start in the coming weeks. We've also delivered the vaccination directly into care homes and to the housebound and have also delivered a number of 'pop up' vaccination centres in community settings to maximise uptake.

Progress to date has been excellent and over 263,000 first dose vaccinations and over 53,000 second doses have been delivered in Buckinghamshire. Uptake rates of the vaccine have also been extremely positive:

- Nearly 60% of all adults in Buckinghamshire have received their first dose vaccination, in line with the national picture
- Nearly 90% of adults 50 years +
- Over 90% % of adults 60 years +
- 95% of adults 70 years +

We have seen some wonderful stories and received excellent feedback from those visiting for their appointment since the first vaccination was delivered in December (the first to receive the vaccination in Buckinghamshire was Brian Horne a 90-year-old resident who was very much looking forward to being able to see his family and returning to the 'friendship lunch club' that he has been involved with for the past 10 years).

Given the huge importance of the vaccine in protecting residents from the virus and enabling a successful recovery from lockdown, the Council has absolutely prioritised the rollout of the vaccination programme and played a key role in the delivery including:

- Providing local leadership to coordinate the development and delivery of the programme across the County
- Helping to identify, secure and set up sites for local vaccination centres
- Leading and supporting with logistics and project management
- Providing administrative and 'front of house' staff at the centres
- Leading on local communications activities to provide clarity for residents and partner organisations and increase awareness
- Working closely with local communities to understand any issues of vaccine hesitancy and providing support for targeted 'pop up' vaccination events to encourage take up

In terms of the costs of the programme, the direct cost of the vaccination programme is being met by the NHS and this includes all paid staff, the cost of venues, logistical activities and communications. The Council, has provided staffing support on a 'mutual aid' basis including redeploying staff from other duties (e.g., libraries staff whilst the Council's libraries were closed during lockdown). The Government has provided local authorities with grant funding to offset some of the costs associated with Covid - which of course have been really significant for all local authorities, The 'opportunity cost' associated with the mutual aid support provided by the Council has not yet been fully quantified and we remain fully committed in working with our partners in ensuring the continued successful delivery of the vaccination programme which is so key in ensuring a sustainable departure from lockdown and the successful re-opening of our economy.