



Cabinet minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 29 June 2021 in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, HP19 8FF, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 11.48 am.

Members present

M Tett, A Macpherson, G Williams, S Broadbent, J Chilver, A Cranmer, N Naylor and P Strachan

Others in attendance

A Collingwood, A Hussain, P Irwin and R Stuchbury

Apologies

S Bowles and C Harriss

Agenda Item

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S Bowles and C Harriss. Deputy Cabinet Members A Hussain and P Irwin attended in their place.

2 Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2021 be approved as a correct record.

3 Declarations of interest

The Deputy Cabinet Member for Sport Councillor Irwin declared a personal interest in Item 9 as Chairman of Bernwode Community Bus.

4 Hot Topics

The following hot topics were reported:-

Leader

The Leader provided an update on the Covid 19 position in Buckinghamshire as at 22 June 2021. The following statistics were highlighted:-

- The infection rate across the whole area was 60.8 cases per 100,000 people which was in line with UK figures.
- This compared to 10.5 in early May and 21 on 27 May.

- There was very little prevalence in the over 60 age group but higher in younger age groups who were yet to be vaccinated.
- Hospitalisation and death rates were low which showed that the link between the infection rate and hospitalisation had been broken due to vaccinations.

In terms of economic recovery the Leader informed Members of the Bucks Additional Restrictions Grants which would help local businesses. As of 25 June the Council had already committed £166 million for local jobs and businesses, predominantly funded by the Government and Buckinghamshire Council had acted swiftly in distributing £20million of the grant to support the maximum number of local businesses. They were the second best Council in the Country in terms of distribution.

In terms of supporting High Streets the Leader had spoken to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government with regard to concerns around permitted development rights and changing retail units into residential housing. It was important to protect prime space on the high street.

Deputy Cabinet Member and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing Councillor Macpherson provided an update on new legislation which would be implemented from October pending Parliamentary approval where anyone working in a CQC registered care home in England for residents requiring nursing or personal care must have two doses of Covid-19 vaccine unless they have a medical exemption.

Cabinet Member for Transport

Councillor Broadbent reported that road verge cutting was underway but that some verges were being left to encourage wild flowers to increase biodiversity. However, road safety was paramount. In addition drain clearance works and gully emptying was also being carried out (additional £4million had been allocated for this purpose). As of Friday 13,100 gullies had been cleared.

Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change

- Councillor Strachan referred to legacy issues with refuse collection in the South of the County. This was due to contractual performance (staff shortages) including a large increase in gardening waste. The Council were working closely with the contractor to improve performance.
- A press release had been issued on Bucks Tidy Up which encompassed everything from enhanced delivery of 'business as usual' activities e.g. litter picking, sign and bin replacement, gully cleaning, a range of street cleansing operations, renovating community play areas and skate parks, vegetation clearances, and country park maintenance, to supporting nationwide initiatives – most recently Keep Britain Tidy's Great British Spring Clean. The Council had injected over £300,000 of extra funding.
- The Council had set up a Working Group to look at celebrations for HM The Queen's Platinum Jubilee 2-5 June 2022.

Deputy Cabinet Member for Sport

Councillor Irwin referred to the success of WhizzFizzFest in Aylesbury Town Centre and thanked officers for their hard work in making the event a success and bringing residents into the town centre.

Deputy Cabinet Member for Community Safety

Councillor Hussain made reference to the relaunch of the Community Boards who were starting their summer round of meetings. Their two main priorities were economic development; and environment and climate change. They were also working with the community engagement team on the BAME network and public health. Community Boards helped deliver the Council's priorities locally and £1million had been allocated each for protecting the environment and economic recovery.

5 Question Time

Question from Councillor Robin Stuchbury to Councillor Angela Macpherson and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

"In 2021/22, the Adult Social Care precept represented 9.6% of the Council Tax paid by residents in Band D properties, and overall accounted for £34.3m of the Council Tax requirement of £357.5m. Since 2016/17, monies collected via the precept has been £120m of the £2,112.2m Council Tax collected. The Council also receives £9m Council Tax support per annum towards the cost of Adult Social Care.

Given this, is the current model of funding for Adult Social Care sustainable and what is the Council doing to meet the growing older age profile of Buckinghamshire residents and the need to provide vital services for the longer term, given that there is likely to be an uplift in demand experienced post Covid?"

Response

"Table 1 below shows the growth added to the adult social care budget over recent years, as part of the former Buckinghamshire County Council and latterly as Buckinghamshire Council.

Table 1

	Growth in complexity, demographic growth and inflation
2021/22	£9.6m
2020/21	£9.530m
2019/20	£8.841m
2018/19	£8.270m (including supplementary Better Care Fund (iBCF))
2017/18	£10.070m

However, despite the additional investment, demographic growth is outstripping the available budget. Buckinghamshire is facing a number of challenges in terms of

demand for adult social care. The number of people eligible for social care services is increasing, both older adults (65+) and young people approaching adulthood, and those who were either funding care for themselves or whose care was previously funded through the NHS. In addition, we are seeing an increase in the complexity of the needs of people requiring adult social care and the length of time over which that care is required.

The Covid-19 pandemic has added more complexity to the situation. At this point in time there are unknowns relating to the type of care provision that people will want or need in future and in the shorter-term in relation to government funding that has been supporting the hospital discharge to assess process.

Internally, the Council continues with its commitment to delivering the Better Lives Strategy, a key part of the Council's approach to managing demand and growth, helping people to live the lives they want to lead by promoting living independently for longer.

Unfortunately, the external factors mean that the risk to future services is escalating. Buckinghamshire Council, like its counterparts across the country, is acutely aware of the need for a long-term solution to the funding of adult social care. The Council recognises the challenges in achieving this outcome but considers it vital that a solution is found. We await with interest the Government's proposals due later this year and eagerly anticipate a funding framework which enables us to guarantee the future delivery of these critical services for our residents."

6 Forward Plan (28 Day Notice)

The Leader introduced the Forward Plan and commended it to all Members of the Council and the public, as a document that gave forewarning of exactly what Cabinet would be discussing at forthcoming meetings.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet Forward Plan be noted.

7 Children's Services Improvement Plan Update

Cabinet received a report from Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services that provided an update on the continued impact of COVID-19 on the Service and the current progress against the Ofsted Improvement Plan. During the update the following points were noted:-

- The impact of COVID-19 had led to significant rise in demand that continued to be unpredictable. This coupled with an increase in the complexity and seriousness of situations that children and young people find themselves in, was having a substantial impact on workloads; however, the service's response to ensure children and young people were kept safe continued to be of paramount importance.
- The improvement plan (Appendix 1) had one area of red in terms of RAG rating. 4.10 'Children in care have a clear permanency plan by their second review.' It was expected that there would be sufficient evidence for this to be

'amber' by the time this plan was reviewed next. Almost all other areas were 'amber'.

- Reference was made to the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel which prioritised the needs of children and young people in or leaving care.
- There were lots of checks and balances in place such as an audit plan, dip sampling, weekly check and challenge and also improvements in management oversight and consistency.
- The recruitment of both qualified social workers and first and second-line managers remained a very high priority for the service. It was clear that the combined impact of working remotely for a significant period, the increased exposure to disturbing scenarios involving children and the increases in demand all have an impact on staff. Staff support continues to remain extremely important.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services then gave the following information in response to Cabinet Member questions:-

- In terms of permanency plans and amber areas, the Corporate Director Children's Services reported that work had been signed off this week in terms of quality assurance processes in relation to management oversight and supervision. Managers would provide a robust quality check on case work and ensure that pathway plans were of sufficient quality. The team had an upward trajectory and progress was being closely monitored by the Head of Service.
- Covid had meant that there had been some restricted access to children. Within the MASH, there had been a 40% increase in contacts compared with last April yet the MASH had maintained good performance with a decision made on 96% of contacts within 24 hours and 95% of referrals completed in 72 hours. The evidence of demand changes was also very clear from the data, particularly the over 60% increase in strategy meetings and those leading to Section 47 enquiries, which were the most serious cases. There was also an increase in mental health issues when children were absent from school and also an increase in demand for free school meals which showed families experiencing economic difficulties. Whilst the workload of staff was very high the Service was maintaining standards and making progress and there was no complacency on the part of managers and staff. Cabinet Members congratulated staff.
- The Deputy Cabinet Member for Sport commented that he had sat on the Corporate Parenting Panel for many years and had seen an incredible improvement in the last four years.
- The Leader referred to the abuse some young people suffer and the obligation of the Council to protect them. The Cabinet Member for Education and Children Services reported that a number of things had changed; not just covid but changes in society and the impact on young people's mental health, losing role models and the strength of family life.

Cabinet Members welcomed the report.

RESOLVED that the continued impact of COVID-19 on the Service and the current progress against the Ofsted Improvement Plan be noted.

8 Future Highways Services Contract

Cabinet had received and agreed a report on 2 March 2021 that set out the rationale and proposed way forward for the procurement of the Highways Services Contract. In addition it had been agreed that a future paper would be presented to Cabinet to seek views and agreement on the evaluation and quality criteria that would be used to determine the selection process and outcome of the procurement exercise as well as the criteria and process for determining any potential future extensions of the contracts.

The proposal had also agreed the formation of an Alliance. The Cabinet report set out the proposed governance arrangements and format of how the alliance would function and operate.

The Cabinet Member for Transport introduced the report as follows:-

- The Council's £45m per annum contract for highways services delivered all aspects of transportation and highways services, in terms of maintaining the highway. The current service was provided by Ringway Jacobs (RJ).
- Certain teams have already been transferred back to the Council. The proposed model comprised of a hybrid of arrangements to provide quality and value for money, whilst maintaining resilience in delivering services and giving the client greater control over the prioritisation of works.
- Appendix 1 of the report showed key milestones and the Service Director for Highways and Technical Services reported that the Project Team were confident of being about to commence the new contracts on 1 April 2023 allowing for a minimum of 6 months for mobilisation. They were looking to hold the Service Provider Engagement Day on 8 July 2021 with contract award in August 2022. There was always a financial risk around any procurement exercise. They were looking for a quality/price split of 60/40%.

During discussion by Cabinet Members the following points were noted:-

- Cabinet Members welcomed the name change from Transport for Bucks to Buckinghamshire Highways as it not only reflected what the service comprised but gave it an identity that was both recognisable to the communities and corporately to Buckinghamshire Council.
- The Cabinet Member for Property and Assets emphasised the importance of good communications with Town and Parish Councils with clear explanation of any changes in organisational structures and to reassure them that there would be no changes to the work of Local Area Technicians. He also referred to penalties or sanctions with regard to poor delivery. The Cabinet Member for Transport reported that communication was vital and information was already being shared on the procurement process. The Deputy Member for

Community Safety emphasised the importance of keeping all Members up to date and that Community Boards would be a good vehicle for this. In response it was noted that there would be updates on delivery of the current programme, updates on the procurement programme and finally the new contract.

- In previous years Members had previously identified the criteria and process for incentivising and offering any potential extensions to the contracts had been a key issue. The agreed contract duration would be 8 years with the opportunity to award 2 year extensions. There would be a robust communication with the market about what was expected so that the Council would be in a position to make changes.
- The current work with drainage and gully clearing was vital as there was 30% deterioration of roads when they were covered with water.
- In terms of testing the market there was only so much capacity in the Country for this type of contract.
- A Task and Finish Member Group would be set up on the Highways Service Contract and as part of the procurement a further report would be submitted to Cabinet next summer prior to any appointments being made.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the progress made to date on the procurement of the new Highways Services Contract be noted.**
- (2) That the evaluation and quality criteria for determining the new service providers be agreed.**
- (3) That the extension criteria and process be agreed.**
- (4) That the proposed change in name for the Service and the terms of the Alliance be noted.**

9 Bus Service Improvement Plans and Enhanced Partnerships

Cabinet received a report on the 'Bus Back Better' National Bus Strategy that required Local Authorities to enter into Enhanced Partnerships with bus operators. The Government announced a £3 billion fund to improve bus services. The aims of the National Bus Strategy were to make buses more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, better co-ordinated and cheaper and gives a greater role for the Local Authorities in the planning and provision of services.

The Cabinet Member for Transport introduced the report as follows:-

- A commitment to entering into Enhanced Partnerships with bus operators was required by the end of June 2021. The commitment was to establish Enhanced Partnerships with operators under the Bus Services Act, or (for authorities with an elected Mayor) begin the statutory process of franchising services. From 1 July 2021, only LTAs and operators who meet these requirements would continue to receive the COVID-19 Bus Services Support Grant (CBSSG), or any new sources of funding
- The Government also expected publication of Bus Service Improvement

Plans by 31 October 2021 to outline how these partnerships would improve services. These Plans would have to be updated annually.

- The Enhanced Partnership was required to be in place by April 2022.

During discussion by Cabinet Members the following points were noted:-

- An Enhanced Partnership not only meant being more reliable etc but also more integrated with good connection links with neighbouring authorities. There should be no barrier to making travel difficult by ensuring that journeys between different providers were seamless. The Service Area was currently having conversations about transport routes.
- It would also be good to modernize the fleet with electric/hydrogen buses to work towards being zero carbon. However, bus services which were run by private operators could not be told to buy a green fleet and it would be up to the Council to work with operators to incentivize them to help towards that target although no funding had been provided for this. A comment was made about school buses turning off their engines whilst waiting outside schools.
- Reference was made to the recommendation securing long term funding for vital bus services and what that meant for rural areas where the volume of use would be lower. The Cabinet Member for Transport reported that it would be impossible to provide a regular bus service for every village but they would ensure that the right routes were as frequent and deliverable as possible. In terms of obtaining local information they would be having conversations with Community Boards and exploring gaps in services.
- A Cabinet Member commented that the Council was already providing a pilot bus service but the pilots had been allocated to more urban areas. This was important to identify demand.
- A Deputy Cabinet Member asked that the Service Area speak to areas providing community buses which provide fantastic services locally. The Cabinet Member reassured Members that they provided a vital service which was part of the network who also would be able to provide information on any gaps in services. Community buses could be funded by Section 106 monies with some match funding from the Bus Improvement Plan.
- A comment was made that as well as rural areas it was important to prioritise the vulnerable such as older people and young people perhaps who were leaving care and starting a new job and that the Service Area should liaise with Connexions. The Cabinet Member reported that an aim of the Strategy would be to connect people and communities, including connecting young people into employment and older people to vital services in addition to helping bus operators not go out of business.

RESOLVED –

- (1) **That it be agreed, in principle, to commit to Enhanced Partnerships with local bus operators, as required by the 'Bus Back Better' National Bus Strategy by 30 June 2021.**
- (2) **That the development of a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) by 31**

- October 2021 be agreed, to secure long term funding for vital bus services.**
- (3) That an Enhanced Partnership with bus operators be entered into no later than 31 March 2022.**

10 Date of next meeting

20 July 2021 at 10am at The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, HP19 8FF