



Cabinet minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 20 July 2021 in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, HP19 8FF, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 11.25 am.

Members present

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

Others in attendance

J Ward and R Stuchbury

Apologies

A Cranmer

Agenda Item

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Cranmer. Deputy Cabinet Member J Ward attended in her place.

2 Minutes

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2021 be approved as a correct record.

3 Declarations of interest

There were none.

4 Hot Topics

The following hot topics were reported:

Leader

The Leader informed the meeting that until last week he had been sending Bucks residents a fortnightly Covid email newsletter. Unfortunately, the emergency legislation that allowed these emails to be sent had now lapsed. People who wished to continue to receive a regular newsletter were informed that they would need to

sign up for this service via the Council's website. The regular newsletters would contain Covid information but also other relevant Council news and information.

The Leader provided an update on the Covid 19 position in Buckinghamshire. The following statistics were highlighted:

- The infection rate across the whole area had risen considerably and was currently 315.3 cases per 100,000 people. This was less than the South East of England average figure (321.4 / 100,000) and the whole of England average figure (425.3 / 100,000).
- That less than 10 people were currently in Buckinghamshire Hospital Trust hospitals due to Covid, with most of these being younger people.
- That the highest infection rates were now in people aged under 30 years.
- Vaccination Programme for Bucks: over 90% over 40 years olds had received one vaccination, with 83% having received two doses.
- The figures for younger people were lower – 68% of 20-39 years old having had received one dose, and 24% having received 2 doses.

Finally, a plea was made to any adults who had not yet been vaccinated to come forward and do so.

Councillor Angela Macpherson (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health and Well-Being)

Cabinet were informed that the Government had now issued guidance to allow Health and Social Care workers not to self-isolate if they had been contact traced. This would only be in exceptional circumstances where staff shortages would result in health and safety risks, and the employees would have to be double vaccinated and be required to take a daily Covid test. If staff tested positive, then they would be required to self-isolate.

Councillor Broadbent (Cabinet Member for Transport)

Cabinet were informed of two issues:

- Grassing Cutting – that additional resource had been employed to deal with grass cutting on highway verges, including for the second planned cuts in rural areas.
- Winter roads – 10,500 tonnes had now been stored in winter barns in preparation for road gritting for the forthcoming winter. New HGV drivers had been receiving relevant refresher training and the fleet was being serviced and prepared.

Councillor Bowles (Cabinet Member for Communities)

Cabinet were informed of five issues:

- Communities & Development – in June, the team had held a social isolation showcase to share information and learn about community projects, and on interventions which sought to address social isolation. The showcase had also been attended by a number of local partners.
- Voluntary and Community Sector –the Enterprise Infrastructure support contract had recently been awarded to Community Impact Bucks, the service

would go live on 1 August 2021.

- Community Boards – the Cabinet Member heralded the success of the Community Boards in engaging with young example. An example was given of the Aylesbury Community Board and a recent project that had worked with young people to develop an app to allow people to share their views. The winning proposal, that had been judged by a panel, would now have the opportunity to develop their app.
- Schools meals over the summer period – that utilising the recently extended Government’s local Covid support grant, the Council would be providing £70 digital food vouchers to those families and young people who were eligible for free school meals. The Council would also be working closely with the Voluntary and Community Sector and using the support grant to support holiday initiatives/activities over the summer period. The Helping Hand team (01296 531151) were also available to direct people to support they might need.
- Town / Parish Council Charter – the final document and feedback had been sent out last week with a view to a launch event being held at the end of August / start of September.

5 Question Time

Question from Councillor Robin Stuchbury to Councillor Martin Tett, Leader of the Council.

“The Leader of Buckinghamshire Council recently suggested that Buckinghamshire had been one of the most successful Councils in England when it came to supporting local businesses through the pandemic. However on reading national data on Restart Grant payments the data suggests that Buckinghamshire ranks 108 among the 309 English Councils, paying around 16% of the £22.6M funding made available from Central Government. How does Buckinghamshire Council reconcile these two very different views of the Council’s performance and what future help can our local businesses expect to receive from Buckinghamshire Council?”

RESPONSE from Councillor Martin Tett, Leader

“The figures in the question have been misattributed. The referred to document, which relates to the Restart Grant Scheme, shows that Buckinghamshire Council has paid out 84% (not 16%). The amount of the award to the Council was allocated on an estimate, by government, of eligible businesses in Buckinghamshire, so it is expected that this will not align perfectly to 100%. Furthermore as this scheme is ongoing, the 84% figure has further increased (since the publication of this data), to more than 90%. Not all businesses that apply meet the strict Government criteria, but we are satisfied that all eligible businesses that applied for a Restart grant have been awarded a grant.

There is a separate grant scheme that the council has administered which is called the Additional Restrictions Grant. Under this scheme the Council was allocated £21m to create a discretionary grant scheme to support Buckinghamshire

businesses. The guidance for that scheme urges local authorities to distribute this support to businesses as quickly as possible given the impacts of the lockdown restrictions. Buckinghamshire has been a top national performer in distributing all the funding that has been received as quickly as possible (according to the last reporting of this by the Department for Business Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)).

Across the various business grant support measures that Buckinghamshire has administered since the beginning of the pandemic, over £166m in funds have been put back into our local economy by way of support to our businesses.”

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 Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) Initial Programme

Councillor John Chilver, Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets introduced a progress report of the Future High Streets programme in High Wycombe, which requested approval to progress with the first tranche of spend for the grant (outlined in Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report). The Council was about to receive the first tranche (£6.7m) of MHCLG’s Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) grant (totalling £11.8m over three years). The grant was based on a specified development programme and for 2021-22 involved a series of proposed property acquisitions. Delegated approval was required from Cabinet to progress the acquisitions, in order to meet the FHSF delivery programme and thereby ‘secure grants for subsequent years’. A further report on the programme and its resourcing/governance arrangements would be made to Cabinet in September.

Background

Following the submission of a successful expression of interest and award of feasibility funding to Wycombe District Council in 2019. A full bid had been made by Buckinghamshire Council to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in July 2020 for £17.2m of capital funding for FHSF for High Wycombe. On 26 December 2020, an announcement had been made by MHCLG that funds were allocated to the High Wycombe bid at a level of 69% of the total ask, amounting to £11.8m (or a total programme of £15.4m). In order to receive the smaller allocation, the Council had been required to revise the bid to match the reduced funding envelope. A summary of the revised bid was set out in the confidential appendix to the Cabinet report.

The intervention projects set out in the confidential appendix were not the usual commercial property investment propositions, and were primarily regeneration schemes (with socio-economic outcomes), so standard risk/reward commercial

returns did not apply. The Cabinet report included information on how each project would be appraised, with the indicative projects having already been through the MHCLG's Green Book Treasury appraisal process and already carried MHCLG sign-off.

The funding would be released in early June/July, subject to the Council having signed a Grant Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding. The latter would include annexed documents comprising (a) Spend Profiling (b) Work Plan and (c) Risk Register.

As the programme largely depended on acquiring properties, there was the potential for individual projects to change or be substituted for other opportunities as they arose. In parallel with the property acquisition programme, work would commence on working up detailed designs and procuring refurbishment works.

During discussion of the item it was agreed that it was important for Members to have oversight, and give final approval, for the offers to purchase properties and prior to the exchange of contracts and completion on the proposed acquisitions. As such, recommendations (1) and (4) of the Cabinet report were updated to reflect this.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Leader, in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets and the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration, and the Section 151 Officer, be authorised to submit the offers to purchase the properties listed in Annex 1 (confidential), subject to the exchange of contracts being conditional upon Future High Streets grant first being received by the Council from MHCLG.**
- (2) That the Section 151 Officer be authorized to sign the MHCLG Future High Streets grant offer agreement, as set out in paragraph 5, and to draw down on the first year's allocation.**
- (3) That the Service Director for Property and Assets be delegated to appoint the external consultants to undertake development management, valuations, due diligence and lettings, to be funded by the Future High Streets grant.**
- (4) That the Leader, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets, and the Section 151 Officer, be authorised to exchange contracts and complete on the proposed acquisitions set out in the Cabinet report.**
- (5) That the Service Director for Property and Assets, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets, and the Section 151 Officer be authorised to undertake the tendering, selection and**

appointment of buildings contractors to undertake the refurbishment (subject to planning, if required) of acquisitions, once purchases have been completed.

8 Former Orchard House

Councillor John Chilver, Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets introduced the report which proposed the construction by the Council, in partnership with South-Central Ambulance Service (SCAS), of a new Ambulance Resource Centre on the site of a former property (now demolished) owned Freehold by the Council in High Wycombe under Title Nos BM357755 and BM357753. The development would replace the much smaller existing High Wycombe ambulance facility and would meet current and future operational needs.

The reasons for taking the decision were set out at paragraphs 2.1 to 2.4 of the Cabinet report. The Centre would be located on a dormant Council owned property asset with unrealised potential to create revenue income and improve the Capital value. Following its closure, the former Orchard House had remained unused and unproductive for some time after which it had been agreed that the current buildings could not viably be repurposed and were therefore demolished to free the site up for eventual re-development.

The project would also provide both synergy and a holistic fit with Buckinghamshire Council's Corporate Plan for 2021-22 and its key strategic and economic activities relating to Strengthening our communities, Protecting the vulnerable, Improving the environment and improving prosperity.

Discussions involving the Council's Property and Finance Team and the SCAS Estates Director, had resulted in the emerging draft Heads of Terms contained in the confidential appendix. The rent review provisions contained within the Lease would ensure that the rent payable kept pace with market rent growth and would increase over the 30 year period as well as the continuing increase in capital value of the property. Cash flow associated with this acquisition was set out in the confidential appendix.

The key risks associated with the proposal and mitigation measures, relating to issues such as SCAS withdrawing before the building was complete, SCAS failing in their obligation to pay rent, construction costs escalation, were set out at paragraphs 6.1 to 6.5 of the Cabinet report.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That Cabinet recognised this project represented a good example of a Local Authority (Buckinghamshire Council) and a NHS Foundation Trust organisation (South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS)) working jointly together to better serve the Council's resident population in providing a more modern and larger ambulance facility to replace the much smaller existing facility which would enable the Service to meet current and future**

operational needs.

- (2) That the addition of this scheme to the Capital Programme, to be funded via the prudential borrowing facility, which in turn is funded by Public Works Loan Board for a new Ambulance Station be agreed, with the facility to be let on a long lease to The South Central Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SCAS).
- (3) That the Service Director for Property and Assets, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets, and the S151 Officer be authorised to appoint consultants and contractors within the agreed cost envelope set out in the Part 2 report (confidential) to progress and complete development of the site including seeking and obtaining planning permission.
- (4) That the Service Director for Property and Assets, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets, and the Section 151 Officer, be authorised to finalise and agree the Heads of Terms together with any necessary amendments for a development agreement and Agreement for Lease and Lease in accordance with the emerging heads of terms set out in the confidential annex at part two of the Cabinet report; and subsequently, subject to meeting contract conditions, to exchange and complete the contracts.
- (5) That the Service Director for Property and Assets, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets, and the Section 151 Officer, be authorised to prepare all necessary briefings and scopes of work, make and amend as required Planning Applications, undertake any Consultation and to tender for necessary consultants and a main contractor for the construction, design and delivery of this project and subsequently award the construction contracts, subject to those costs falling within the parameters set out in the financial envelope considered in the Part 2 confidential report.
- (6) That the Service Director for Property and Assets, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets, and the Section 151 Officer, be authorised to enter into, administer and comply with the terms of any required non-disclosure agreement for the duration of this project while it remained in force.
- (7) That the Service Director for Property and Assets, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets, and the Section 151 Officer, be authorised to make arrangements for a Public Works Loan Board loan to finance the project.

Assets introduced the report which detailed key performance indicators and targets being proposed for reporting to Cabinet in 2021/22. It was proposed that reporting against these indicators would commence for Quarter 2. Proposed key performance indicators and the associated targets to be reported to Cabinet had been agreed within each Directorate and with each portfolio holder. These would be reviewed on an annual basis in accordance with the Corporate Performance Framework.

Cabinet considered the KPIs and targets for 2021/22 (Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report) and discussed whether they provided a satisfactory range of indicators to evidence the key Council objectives for 2021/22, would evidence outcomes that Cabinet wished to achieve, and that the targets were stretching but achievable, in line with latest benchmarking (where available).

RESOLVED –

(1) That the key performance indicators for 2021/22 be agreed.

(2) That the associated targets for 2021/22 be agreed.

10 Q1 Budget Monitoring Report 2021-22

Councillor John Chilver, Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources, Property and Assets introduced the report which set out the Revenue and Capital position for Buckinghamshire Council for the financial year 2021/22. In the first year of the new council, budgets had been agreed on a Directorate basis and have been re-configured into Portfolios following the election and appointment of Cabinet Members. The appendix provided further detail for each Portfolio and information about performance relating to overdue debts and late payments of commercial debt.

The forecast revenue budget outturn was summarised in Figure 1 of the Cabinet report. The outturn variances were split between Business as Usual and those relating to the Covid-19 response. Overall, a £0.5m adverse variance was forecast after allowing for £4.9m of mitigations (paragraph 11 in Appendix 1) of the overall pressures reported by Portfolio. This comprised:

- £1.4m adverse variance on Covid related spend and;
- £0.9m favourable variation on BAU.

The £0.5m adverse variance broadly, therefore, comprised the proportion of Covid income losses not funded from the government's compensation scheme or BAU variances. The Council would continue to lobby Government for full recovery of income losses impacted by Covid. Furthermore, Portfolio's would seek to find mitigating actions in order to bring forecast spend back in line with the approved budget.

There was the potential for an additional opportunity saving of £1m from Disabled Facility Grants (DFG) which reflected a continuation of the position from 2020/21.

The Directorates' forecast for the Capital Programme was summarised in Figure 2 of the Cabinet report and reflected an expected £3.0m of slippage. Further details for each portfolio were also detailed in Appendix 1. To reduce the amount of slippage in this financial year, budget profiles had been reviewed and slippage would be reviewed as part of the carry forward process.

RESOLVED –

That the report, including the risks and opportunities contained within it, be noted.

11 Exclusion of the public (if required)

RESOLVED –

That pursuant to Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Minutes No 12 and 13, on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act as defined as follows:

Minute 12 - Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) Initial Programme.

Minute 13 – Former Orchard House.

Both items include Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) (Paragraph 3, Part 1 of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972) (The need to maintain the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure, because disclosure could prejudice the Council's position in any future process or negotiations).

12 Confidential Appendix for Future High Streets Fund

This item was undertaken in confidential session as part of Minute item 7 and details of the public discussion and the decisions taken are included within Minute number 7.

13 Confidential appendices for Former Orchard House

This item was undertaken in confidential session as part of Minute item 8 and details of the public discussion and the decisions taken are included within Minute number 8.

14 Date of next meeting

Tuesday 7 September 2021, at 10am.

