



# Buckinghamshire Council

## Communities & Localism Select Committee

### Minutes

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITIES & LOCALISM SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 26 OCTOBER 2021 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.47 PM**

#### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

M Harker OBE (Chairman), A Waite (Vice-Chairman), P Drayton, G Smith, L Smith BEM, J Baum, P Cooper, F Mahon and G Hollis

#### **OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE**

S Bowles and C Harriss

#### **Agenda Item**

##### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP**

Apologies were received from Councillors P Bass, I Hussain and M Stannard.

##### **2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

##### **3 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July were agreed as an accurate record.

##### **4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No public questions had been received. The Chairman advised that she had received a number of questions after the public questions deadline had passed which related to community boards, these questions had been given to the relevant Cabinet Member to respond to in due course.

##### **5 CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE**

The Chairman reported that the draft Statement of Licensing Policy under the Gambling Act 2005 was approved to go out to a public consultation exercise by the Licensing Committee at its meeting on 20 October. The Scrutiny Officer would circulate the link to view and respond to the consultation once it was live on the council's website. Members were advised that under the terms of the transitional legislation, Buckinghamshire Council had been given two years to prepare and publish a new single policy under the Gambling Act and align service provision which led to this draft policy being produced for consultation. In producing the work programme it was felt that other items were more beneficial for this committee to look at in detail as this

Act was relatively prescriptive and allowed for limited local influence. Should members have any questions they were encouraged to contact the scrutiny officer who would co-ordinate responses from the licensing team.

The Chairman advised that two public consultation survey links had been circulated to Committee members in recent weeks. These were the 2021 Domestic Abuse Strategy Survey and the Community Safety Survey 2021, these surveys had now closed but it was hoped members had managed to respond.

The Chairman reported that with Community Boards having been highlighted by the Committee as a priority area to include in its work programme, she had attended a number of Community Board meetings since the last meeting of this Committee and planned to attend further meetings with a view to gaining a greater understanding of how the different boards operated across local areas. The Chairman would be meeting with the Cabinet Member for Communities to feed back her views of these meetings to date.

Further, the committee was given an update on the support being given to those arriving from Afghanistan. Buckinghamshire Council had been committed to keeping people safe from vulnerable situations, close partnership working had been taking place to welcome people arriving from Afghanistan who were in urgent need of protection. After months of planning and discussions with the Home Office, matching a family to an accommodation offer, Buckinghamshire was looking forward to welcoming its first family. The family was being helped to integrate into society and build a new life. A further twenty-nine families were expected to arrive within the next few years as part of Buckinghamshire's pledge to take in up to 30 families. The local community was highly praised; landlords across the county had responded to the call for much-needed homes, huge offers of support had come in from communities and considerable amounts of money had been donated to the Afghan Crisis Fund, hosted by Heart of Bucks, which currently stood at £65,000. For people wanting, there were a number of volunteer organisations and groups that the council works with who can be contacted about volunteering, befriending opportunities or donating clothes and toys for the Afghan nationals. The council website holds more information - <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/community-and-safety/how-we-are-supporting-the-afghan-crisis/> . For individuals wishing to donate money to the Buckinghamshire Afghan Crisis Fund they can visit this link <https://www.totalgiving.co.uk/appeal/helping-hand>

The Chairman provided an update on work ongoing as part of the Armed Forces Covenant work streams. The Chairman who is also the Chairman the Civilian Military Partnership Board reported that there were four task and finish groups which had been set up and members were encouraged to put people in contact with the groups where relevant. These groups included NEETS and Cadets; Veterans Hubs and Clubs; Events and Commemorations; and Going for Gold, which focused on the Council ambition to achieve gold employer scheme accreditation.

## **6 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY BOARDS**

The Committee received an update on Community Board activity from Cllr S Bowles, Cabinet Member for Communities and then heard from Emily Davis, Programme Director at Action4Youth who presented information on projects for young people which had received funding from Community Boards.

Slides supporting Cllr Bowles update were included in the agenda pack. The following points were highlighted:

- Efforts had been made to increase the awareness of Community Boards, and further work was ongoing to engage residents more with their local board and increase public attendance at meetings. The first Community Board newsletter had been issued; the Cabinet Member had held individual meetings with Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen to hear about board activities and challenges; and briefing sessions had been held internally with directorate management teams to promote the work and offerings of the boards. A marketing budget had been established for centralised branding and marketing to ensure boards presented professionally and consistently with grab kits now available for Community Board Co-ordinators to use and take with them to events. To increase awareness, Co-ordinators had been holding engagement events including attending fayres and a number of local events as well as meeting with delivery partners such as Leap, Buckinghamshire Business First, local schools and community groups.
- The second round of board meetings for this year was underway and feedback to date had been encouraging with good progress reported. There were active action groups for each board.
- Work was also underway with the Community Resilience team to understand how boards could support local communities and councils during a major incident. An emergency planning exercise had recently been held and local communities were encouraged to take up resilience plans, with the boards helping to apply for emergency funding for items such as sandbags.
- The funding panel was now established, closely monitoring budget usage and met fortnightly. The spend and project breakdown for each Board was kept under review. With the funding process having opened in July 2021, £1.15m worth of projects had been passed to the boards and £590k of contributory funding had been secured. Projects funded and projects being progressed could be viewed on pages 15-16 of the reports pack.
- Priorities for the next three months would continue to focus on ensuring projects were prepared and submitted in a timely manner with a focus on environment and economic recovery projects. A menu of initiatives was underway to share with the boards detailing potential projects and delivery partners.
- The Proud of Bucks awards would include categories for Community Boards, and each board would decide how to deliver these awards with the suggestion of a physical event which could also aid with increasing board awareness.
- There was also a focus on looking at how engaging with young residents could be improved to establish their needs.

During the presentation from Ms Davis, Action4Youth the following points were highlighted (presentations slides are appended to these minutes):

- A brief background and summary of the work undertaken by Action4Youth was provided to the committee. Action 4 Youth had received Community Board funding for two projects, these were The Junction in High Wycombe, and a Youth mentoring project across Aylesbury Vale. Details of each project can be seen in the appended presentation slides.
- The Junction received £40k funding from the High Wycombe Community Board to support core running costs for the next three years. It served as a multi service drop in centre offering a range of planned sessions and activities seven days a week catering for young people aged 12-18, and provided specialist support to those who were vulnerable. The Junction was located in the High Wycombe library, which was chosen for its town

centre location which already attracted young people and was accessible by public transport. Sessions were based around health and wellbeing, crisis support/counselling and the general youth space.

- Timetable sessions had included boxing and dance and a weekly mental wellbeing counsellor was available for one to one support. There was also a female only evening to support harder to reach groups getting involved in activities.
- The centre had three core staff members and had various partners coming in to collaborate and support young people. It had also been positive to see pupils from different schools and backgrounds mixing.
- The youth mentoring project had been awarded £41,947 from across six community boards in the Aylesbury Vale area. A similar project which had been successful in the Wycombe area was coming to the end of its three year funding it received from the legacy district council.
- This was a 1:1 mentoring project for young people aged 11-17 who experienced low self-esteem, confidence issues, anxiety, low level mental ill health and challenging behaviour. Interactions were face to face weekly for between ten and twelve weeks' dependant on individual needs. Action4Youth would work with its already established network to receive referrals from schools, council, social care, youth groups and direct from parent/guardians.
- The boards who had funded the project had initially identified young people in their priorities and had secondary schools located in or very near the area covered by the Community Board. It was identified that matching the approximate number of young people in each area to the number of referrals may present a challenge when ensuring Community Board money is spent in the right local area, and flexibility would be required in instances where a young person attended school in one area but lived in another.
- There had been significant interest in the full time mentor role and an excellent field of candidates were due to be interviewed shortly. The aim was to get the project running as soon as possible, with January 2022 being the latest start date.

Following the presentations, questions and comments were raised by the Committee. These included:

- A member asked whether there were plans for The Junction to support young people transitioning in to employment by offering CV writing sessions as well as other practical support. Members were advised that an employability programme was planned for the future when the centre had been established. The Junction was also involved with the Government Kick Start programme and would be taking on four junior youth workers who would have been on universal credit for a period of time.
- In relation to access to funding, this was said to be an ongoing process. In addition to Community Board funding, funding was secured through other sources including donations and the National Lottery. The target was for a minimum of three years running costs to be covered at any time.
- The Committee questioned outreach work and were advised that staff visited a number of schools and community groups and also worked around the town centre to make young people aware of the facilities and services on offer. There was a target to increase outreach work to keep attendance growing. In relation to distance, it was said that outreach targeted any young people who were in reasonable distance to the town centre library location which is located by the bus station. A long term ambition was to have local hubs. Further it was said that if Action4Youth were approached by a Parish Council who had an available venue and funding for establishment costs, advice could be given to run that facility. There was a yearly membership fee from Action4Youth, however this would cover DBS checks, introductions to youth work, support with getting a management committee up and running and access to subsidised training.

- It was confirmed that both Wycombe Youth Action and Aylesbury Youth Action were members of Action4Youth and had access to training and DBS checks with both working on the NCS programme as charity partners. Action4Youth had asked youth groups about their interest in running projects at The Junction and groups had been invited to give proposals of programmes.
- A member noted that Community Board funding had been granted to Action4Youth and that the Council had also provided funding to Aylesbury Youth Action and queried if the figure was known that was being provided to youth groups in Buckinghamshire. The Cabinet Member advised that he would obtain this information and feed it back.
- In terms of attracting staff and holding on to quality youth workers, members were advised that at the current time recruitment was not an issue and a number of sessional staff were still available for the centre to use.

#### *Recommendation*

With the intention to get more young people involved with Community Boards, the Committee recommended that Action4Youth could facilitate discussion of potential Community Board schemes and topics with a view to obtain and understand the views of young people. This could then be fed back to Community Board Co-ordinators and taken in to consideration when progressing projects and allocating funding.

## **7 LEISURE FACILITIES STRATEGY**

The Committee received an update on the current leisure provision in Buckinghamshire and the emerging Leisure Facilities Strategy. The Committee also heard about work and plans to increase involvement in leisure from groups who historically had low involvement. The Committee had the opportunity to hear from Cllr C Harriss, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure, Richard Barker, Corporate Director for Communities, Sue Drummond, Head of Leisure and Mark Ormerod, Director, Leap. Presentation slides were appended to the agenda pack

During the presentation, the following points were highlighted:

- Prior to introducing the leisure facilities update, the Cabinet Member reported that the swimming pool at Chalfont Leisure Centre was again open for use, a film office was being explored as Buckinghamshire was regularly being used for film and television, the Rye Boathouse was open and six parks had been awarded the Green Flag award. The opening of the Chilterns Lifestyle Centre had been slightly delayed due to supply of handrail which would be a health and safety risk, however there remained excitement around the centres opening in the near future and it was noted that despite covid restrictions throughout construction, work had progressed on the centre as planned.
- Key principles had been set to progress the overall leisure strategy and consideration given to where investment was best placed to encourage participation from those groups less likely to take part in leisure activities. It was emphasised that the strategy not only focused on indoor facilities but would also cover the important areas of playing pitches and open space strategies.
- In addition to the Council leisure provision, Buckinghamshire saw strong leisure provision in the private, voluntary, education and MOD sectors.
- Leap continued to make efforts to bring external funding in to the county, with a focus on investing in supporting behavioural change among residents, where a systemic approach was required, particularly for those groups that found it most difficult to be active. It was noted that whilst the charts on page 24 of the report pack showed Buckinghamshire compared well nationally, these were not significantly large percentage differentials. Since agenda publication further figures had been made available and within the last 12 months there had been a 2.7% increase in adult activity in the county

- and a 2.4% decrease in inactive people.
- With such a significant number of residents shielding, when people had started to engage in activities again there had been a spike in incidents such as falls where core stability had decreased and this had resulted in injuries such as wrist and hip fractures.
  - It had been found that the pandemic had a profound on young people with 16% fewer children reporting having taken part in sport than in the previous year, although girls had fared slightly better than boys who had usually been involved in more traditional team sport games.
  - Approximately 400 organisations were involved in helping to deliver activity programmes in Buckinghamshire to support the four broad principles on page 27 of the report pack. The Council and Leap worked with mental health charities, housing organisations, Age UK and a broad range of partners. There were 119 satellite clubs across the county offering the best chances for young people to get involved with sport and there was a drive with DfE funding to open up more school facilities after school to young people and communities.
  - Leisure centre usage was at around 70% of pre-covid levels which was significantly better than forecast and resulted in a smaller financial loss to the Council than had been planned for over the first five months of this financial year. There had been a high demand for swimming, and the covid related restriction to book a swimming lane had been really popular and given users confidence when using facilities. Swimming lessons were also seeing high demand.
  - Buckinghamshire had seen significant investment in centres at Chalfont and Chesham with facilities having been improved at Risborough Springs and Court Garden as well. The new Chilterns Lifestyle Centre would also be opening in the coming weeks. As part of this strategy the leisure facilities at Aqua Vale, and the Buckingham Swan would be assessed to see what improvements may be required and expansions required to meet the growing housing population in the north of the county.
  - The wider benefits of physical activity were highlighted with improved jobs and volunteering, fewer GP visits, improved educational attainment, prevention of ill health and improved mental wellbeing all being linked to being physically active.
  - In terms of indoor facilities, there was a higher concentration of facilities in the south of the county and it was explained that Sport England set principles on recommended journey times for residents which show 90% of people should be within reasonable distance of a facility, although this may be a school facility, or a facility in a neighbouring authority.
  - It was noted that should appropriate outdoor provision be in place for playing pitches this could create more indoor space for activities so the strategy would look further in to solutions such as this. Work was also ongoing to look at potentially maximising public access to facilities at school sites outside of school areas as there were a number of education providers with the capacity to offer more in this area, although there was often local resident opposition to nearby schools being used in the evenings for leisure activities.
  - Through discussions with national sport governing bodies there were sports looking to expand such as gymnastics and netball and Buckinghamshire as a place could be repurposed to support this expansion.

Following the presentations, questions and comments were raised by the Committee. These included:

- In response to a query on how the older population could be better supported, the Committee was advised that the Council and Leap worked closely with expert clinicians and carers. Through partnership working with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire,

Berkshire West Integrated Care System, front line clinicians and carers had received training on the benefits of physical activity with around 1400 people having received active medicine training. Leap had been able to fund this training for a number of people. Leap had worked with public health and the Community Boards to issue 10,000 activity packs to the homes of elderly residents promoting staying active and these had been well received. Digital support was also said to be an important factor in the strategy as it was an excellent tool to combat loneliness for older residents. Planning design would also take account of practical issues such as making sure there was adequate toilet access and seating.

- A member raised that new retirement living developments, were often now built to include wellness centres and officers agreed to discuss this provision with the Public Health team to ensure residential offerings were being captured where necessary.
- How the Council worked with developers was discussed. Where Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was in place in the county there was additional flexibility on spend whereas Section 106 contributions were more limited in how they could be used. Additionally, where developments were required to include education settings this fed in to the ambition for long term community access arrangements to be in place with these settings for their leisure facilities.
- The importance of the emerging Buckinghamshire Local Plan was raised as this would significantly assist in the understanding of population/housing growth, particularly in the north of the county and would be helpful in identifying areas needs for playing pitches and facilities. Members were told that the strategy would closely interlink with the Local Plan and planning policy. The Council assets in the north were of good quality but were worn and did not offer significant capacity for future growth so specific programmes would be explored including working with the Buckingham University to explore opportunities for growth with the Swan Pool.
- The Cabinet Member added that he would like the Council to encourage more personal trainers to become wellness trainers to assist in restoring people's confidence when it came to taking up exercise and this would in turn reduce strain on GPs, an option was link health hubs in to the leisure strategy. There was concern raised that the 6.5 miles radius set by adult social care for a resident to reach a hub would still be a difficult journey for many groups and town and parish council leisure provision would therefore remain important for these groups.
- The importance of getting young people involved in sport at an early age was spoken of, with the financial costs being one of the obstacles for parents. Accessibility of provision was said to be key in the strategy, legacy councils had varying approaches to their fees and charges, however work was ongoing with leisure operators to achieve a level of consistency across the county and meet needs through facility offerings. The Cabinet Member was also progressing a new 'Bucks Card' for residents which should help promote awareness of leisure offerings.
- The Committee recognised work undertaken by legacy councils in producing rolling programmes of investment and regeneration to ensure that facilities remained income generators and suggested these as a model for the Cabinet Member and officers to look at. Further, whilst it appeared in the presentation that the north of the county lacked provision, a member noted that the legacy Council had encouraged parishes to fund their own provision due to it being a large rural area so there were a number of facilities in addition to the council provision outlined on the map.
- The Committee raised concern around the transparency of legacy council use of CIL and section 106 contributions, and the Cabinet Member advised that this issue would be reported to Cabinet to ensure that there was transparency moving forward. The Committee were advised that the Cabinet was working across portfolios and was aware of work ongoing which affected different areas of the Council.

- There was a target to develop offers which promoted a wide breadth of use to meet the needs of different sports and to squeeze the most out of each facility so that they were financially viable. It was noted that Sport England was a statutory consultee on all open space planning applications. The areas identified as higher need would be explored further with an aim to make specific proposals. There had been pressure for football pitches due to a number of successful teams in the Aylesbury area but there was an awareness this needed to be balanced out to encourage involvement across all sports.

#### *Recommendation*

The Committee recommended that Leap link in with Community Board Co-ordinators so that Community Boards were made aware of the training available through Leap to individuals in the community so that in instances where a GP recommends exercise to a patient there could be more qualified individuals who could support those starting to exercise.

## **8 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received a draft work programme to cover this municipal year. Members were advised that items had been scheduled for the most appropriate meetings where member input would be most valuable. During discussion the Committee were in agreement that it would like a working group set up to focus on community boards and related issues as soon as practicable so that issues could be looked at during the year, rather than waiting until the end of the council year to hold an inquiry.

The Committee also discussed a desire to bring the devolution item forward on the work programme as it was identified as a priority topic for Town and Parish Councils and residents. Further, members asked for domestic abuse to be given higher priority on the work programme with the Council currently in the process of approving the 2021 domestic abuse strategy. Approaches to these items would be discussed ahead of the next meeting and reported back to members.

#### **Resolved:**

That the 2021/22 work programme be noted.

## **9 DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting is Thursday 16 December 2021 at 9.30 a.m.