



Cabinet minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 21 March 2023 in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 11.28 am.

Members present

M Tett, Cllr A Macpherson, G Williams, S Bowles, S Broadbent, J Chilver, A Cranmer, C Harriss, P Strachan and M Winn

Others in attendance

P Martin and R Stuchbury

Agenda Item

1 Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

2 Minutes

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 February 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Hot Topics

The following hot topics were reported:-

Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and Deputy Leader

The Cabinet Member reported that Seeleys House Short Breaks Centre in Beaconsfield has been awarded a rating of 'Good', following a recent inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and thanked staff for their work on improving this facility. She also reported that she had enjoyed her visit to Buckingham Library which was dementia friendly.

Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment and Deputy Leader

The Cabinet Member had been helping with the tree planting scheme. The new Wing Wood would see 132,000 trees planted on land owned by Buckinghamshire

Council which was a 51-hectare site, working in partnership with Forestry England. Wing Wood would include a mix of tree species suited to the locality, five new wildlife ponds and a community orchard as well as accessible paths for walking and cycling.

The 132,000 trees would form part of the council's pledge to plant 543,000 trees, one for every resident in Buckinghamshire by 2031, as part of its Climate Change Strategy. In addition, there was an event at Grange Farm, Hazlemere End to plant over 400 trees (totalling 12,700 trees in all), 12,300 trees were being planted across a site of 7 hectares at Bury Farm, Amersham, 250 trees were planted in Buckingham for a community tree planting event involving Buckingham Town Council and 120 students from Princes Risborough School attended an event to plant 600 trees.

Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources

The Cabinet Member reported that webchat had been rolled out and members of the public could now get an instant reply to any queries and provided a good alternative to phone and email. It was also helpful that people were paying council tax bills by direct debit.

Cabinet Member for Transport

Reference was made to pressures to fix the road network following recent poor weather, which was a national issue. The County Council Network had also reported that 85% of Councils were under pressure with their budgets. The Government has announced £200 million for highways maintenance for the financial year 2023-24. The Council had already agreed to invest an extra £5 million, on top of £100 million for the four-year period, which would make £7.3 million with the additional funding from Government for Buckinghamshire. Work would commence on repairing the roads as quickly as possible, depending on the weather.

Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

The Cabinet Member reported on the very successful Bucks Skills Show which was recently held in Stoke Mandeville Stadium. This was organised by Buckinghamshire Skills Hub. Over 5,000 people attended where there were more than 100 business with stalls. This included a number of high profile employers such as Pinewood Studios, Metro Bank, Amazon and Disney. The event was aimed at the under 25s. A further event would be held in Chesham in September.

Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration

The Cabinet Member referred to the call for brownfield sites which had now been plotted onto a map which could be viewed on the Council website. This provided raw data only and had not been advocated by the Council.

<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/planning-reporting/brownfield-registers/>

A report would be submitted to Cabinet in future months on the Council's Regeneration Strategy which would include Aylesbury, Wycombe and Chesham. This aim was to ensure that Buckinghamshire was an attractive place to live, work and visit and supporting local economies to thrive.

Cabinet Member for Communities

Further funding had been received for the Household Support Fund of £4.8 million and a report would be submitted to a future Cabinet meeting on allocation of this funding. Charities and Community Groups could now apply for grant funding for projects that relate to the Safer Bucks Plan priorities through a Community Safety Fund. This was funded by the Council in partnership with the Heart of Bucks and further information can be found on their website.

<https://heartofbucks.org/apply-for-a-grant/>

Finally the Cabinet Member attended a launch at the Heart of Bucks for the Voluntary and Community Social Enterprise Sector Resilience Fund. The £230,000 fund had been established in partnership with Heart of Bucks, Buckinghamshire Council, the Mulberry Trust and the Rothschild Foundation. This new fund was designed to support new organisations which were suffering from increased operating costs due to the cost of living pressures. Organisations could apply for one off grants up to £10,000 with priority given to those who wanted to reduce inequalities in disadvantaged areas.

Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure

The Cabinet Member referred to all the leisure and cultural activities available in Buckinghamshire during the Easter holidays.

[Things to do in Buckinghamshire | Family Information Service](#)

[What's on this Easter - Visit Buckinghamshire](#)

[What's on in Buckinghamshire Libraries](#)

5 Question Time

Question from Councillor Robin Stuchbury to Councillor Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

“Can the Cabinet Member please provide information on what is being done to improve the percentage of SEND children and young people under 25 years who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in place, as improvement efforts will likely be impacted by the long waiting lists that exist for diagnoses for autism, speech therapy, attention deficit and hyperactive disorder?”

RESPONSE from Councillor Cranmer

The reduction of waiting times for children to see specialist nurses, paediatricians and therapists a primary focus within the Written Statement of Action work that the Local Authority is engaged in with health partners. Following a decision from the Integrated Care Board regarding increased funding for this work, activity will accelerate to transform the way these services are accessed by families in Buckinghamshire. We are working in partnership with parents and carers to improve their lived experience and that of their children.

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 what reports would be discussing at forthcoming meetings.

RESOLVED – That the Cabinet Forward Plan be noted.

7 Select Committee Work Programme

The Leader introduced the Select Committee Work Programme and commended it to all Members of the Council and the public, as a document that gave forewarning of what Select Committees would be discussing at forthcoming meetings.

RESOLVED –

That the Select Committee Work Programme be noted.

8 A Vision and Strategy for Buckinghamshire Libraries

Cabinet received a report on a new vision and strategy for Buckinghamshire libraries. Libraries had transformed over recent years to offer a range of services and activities that promote wellbeing, inclusion, and community cohesion.

The vision was for a service that provided welcoming and safe spaces for everyone to access reading, culture and the information and services they need to learn, discover, imagine, and thrive. The priorities for Buckinghamshire Libraries were:

- Encouraging Culture, Reading and Learning.
- Building Stronger Communities.
- Enabling Access, Information, and Inclusion.
- Promoting Health and Wellbeing.

The guiding principles for delivery were building partnerships; developing libraries as hubs; engaging and empowering staff and volunteers; and continuous service improvement.

An extensive engagement exercise had been undertaken to inform the priorities and gauge the level of support for the proposed approach. This had demonstrated that 90% of respondents agreed with the vision, with approval ranging from 84% to 92% for the four priorities. Work had taken place to develop short to medium term objectives to deliver the new vision and priorities, along with the associated measures of success.

The service would now engage with staff, volunteers, and partners to develop a detailed action plan to deliver a modern, relevant, and sustainable library service for Buckinghamshire. The action plan would be reviewed annually with particular attention given to ensuring alignment with the *Opportunity Bucks - Succeeding for All* programme including future discussion with ward partnerships.

The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure reported that the Library Service was

evolving to meet the needs of residents and to also act as Council hubs providing IT facilities, warm spaces and local advice. Reference was made to facilities like the Chiltern Lifestyle Centre which included the library. Hubs such as these could be expanded to provide other services such as GP surgeries in the future. The Service Director for Communities – Culture Sport and Leisure reported that it was an ambitious strategy aiming to make services accessible to all. Reference was made to expansion of cultural participation, health and wellbeing including working in partnership with Public Health and support to the Opportunity Bucks Programme and to other programmes such as climate change.

The Leader welcomed the Strategy and commented on how libraries had changed over the years and evolved now into community hubs. He asked whether this pre-empted a national policy or strategy and may have to be amended in the future. The Service Director reported that a new national libraries strategy was in development; in the meantime the Buckinghamshire Libraries Strategy aligns well to existing strategies such as that of Arts Council England and the service was connected across a range of professional bodies such as Libraries Connected, CILIP and the Local Government Association to continue the right direction of travel. There would also be an Annual Review of the Strategy in the next 12 months and an opportunity to refresh it. The Leader also asked for reassurance that the main purpose of the library was to help promote reading particularly to help people with literacy problems. The Cabinet Member reported that the staff had been trained to help with reading and also provide support on other areas such as CV's. Libraries now provided a tablet so that residents could read books in their own language. The Library Service also worked with Adult Learning and Read Easy literacy charity. The Leader then asked about tourist information and whether this was provided by the library. Members noted that leaflets were provided which had been left by local groups and also there were various displays on local history. The Service Director reported that there were also walks that started from some library buildings.

In terms of social care the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing reported on the close working relationship between libraries and public health which included areas such as dementia, helping those with health conditions, health checks and reducing smoking. Work was also being undertaken with care homes. In response to a question about prison libraries it was noted that there was a separate contract with prisons as the service was designed around their needs. A Member queried why Steeple Claydon Library had not currently been listed. [Post Meeting Note; As this library operated outside of the Buckinghamshire Council network, it had not been listed but the library would be contacted to see how they would like to be listed.]

A Cabinet Member emphasised the important of attracting young people to libraries and to promote a lifelong habit. He also referred to orchestra's playing in libraries to increase learning. In terms of libraries being used as access points it would be helpful to promote these to increase awareness as they were launched previously just before the pandemic. In terms of the new library at Winslow it was important to engage stakeholders at an early point in the project. The Cabinet Member reported

that it was useful having one of the libraries in the Lifestyle Centre as that attracted young people who were also doing sport. With reference to skills mention had already been made of links with Opportunity Bucks, literacy and learning was core to the library offer, from the early years through to STEM activities, employment events such as Back on Track, and more.

Regarding access to libraries, research was being undertaken on barriers to access. In terms of transport they were also looking at providing better cycling storage and also facilities for EV where possible.

The Strategy included income generating opportunities such as rentals, room hire, digital advertising and donations. Volunteer staff were fundamental to the library service and there was ongoing recruitment for volunteers. Volunteers included a mixed age range of young people, people with special educational needs and experienced older professionals. In terms of library visits these were in decline nationally but increased use of online library resources was sustained; the Strategy recognised it was important to achieve a balance of needs.

Cabinet Members welcomed the Strategy and paid thanks to the hard work of staff.

RESOLVED –

That the Buckinghamshire Libraries Strategy be APPROVED, as set out in the report and appendix.

9 Food and Health and Safety Service Plan and policies

Cabinet received the Food and Health and Safety Service Business Plan that detailed how the food and health and safety enforcement services were to be delivered within Buckinghamshire Council for the period 2022/24. The Service Plan was divided into the issues covered by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Framework Agreement and the key priorities identified by the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Strategy Document. The Service Plan and Enforcement Policies were appended to the agenda.

Since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) had set out a timetable (Recovery Roadmap) to bring local authorities back on track with their inspection programmes following a cessation of the inspection programme during the pandemic. The Council had been able to achieve the current milestones in inspecting our category A, B and non-compliant C and D businesses and was able to get a rolling start on the inspection of the compliant Cs as well as triage 927 new businesses. However, the Service had experienced a continual increase in the number of new food business registrations which, together with other work, meant that the final milestone of all compliant C businesses inspected by the end of March 2023 might not be achieved. The FSA had identified this as an area of concern for the authority. This would continue to be the team's focus for 2022/24.

Whilst an annual plan was expected by the FSA, on this occasion due to the above

issues the first plan for Buckinghamshire Council covered a period of two years. At this point last year the Council had still been under restrictive arrangements and the focus had been heavily aimed towards the regulatory response to Covid-19. In addition to the FSA Recovery Plan, as part of an ongoing programme of service transformation, improved and more efficient and effective ways of working and delivering the service were being explored. These would include the inspection processes, schemes of delegation and procedures for the assessment of officer competency and authorisation, streamlining the export health certificate process and the harmonisation of sampling equipment and calibration of thermometers.

The Service actively participates in the Primary Authority Partnership scheme, with seven established partnerships and two new partnerships formed in 2022. The primary authority acted as a point of contact and advice for food businesses that had a number of outlets nationally and local authorities who inspected them. This was a paid for service. There had also been a noticeable decline in hygiene standards which had resulted in an increase in enforcement action and revisits. There had also been an increase in requests for FHRS re-inspections as businesses moved to a more online presence.

The Health and Safety Executive had set out a 10-year strategic plan 'Protecting People and Places' which set out its key objectives and national priorities. In 2022/24 the Council would identify projects aimed to raise health and safety awareness and improve standards in a particular sector or topic. It was likely that these would focus on workplace transport in warehouses and distribution centres following a number of reported accidents this year and gas safety in catering establishments.

In 2021, the Environmental Health Service took on the responsibility for the issue of the General Safety Certificate for the Designated Sports Ground at Wycombe Wanderers Football Club. In addition, the team had also taken on the administration of the registration for skin piercing establishments and operators and as part of this, would look to harmonise the registration process and fees from legacy areas and adopt a single set of byelaws covering safe and hygienic arrangements for skin piercing.

Both policies reflected the principles set out in the Regulators' Code issued by the Office of Product Safety and Standards. The key principles were to support growth, engage with businesses, have a transparent and risk-based approach to activities, share information between regulators and provide clear information and advice to businesses. The Regulators' Code applied to local authority regulatory services such as: environmental health, licensing, housing standards, planning enforcement, building control and revenues and benefits. A corporate enforcement policy had been developed and the policies have been drafted in accordance with this overarching policy.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- It was recognised that the team had struggled because of the demands of the pandemic and the pressure had also been put on the service because of other work such as the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.
- There was concern that there had been a decline in hygiene standards and a question was raised as to the reasons for this. Whilst there had been a gap in interventions, the team was now on top of the highest risk businesses, Category A and B business were inspected every six months and Category C's were inspected every 18 months. One of the reasons for the decline was the cost of living crisis where businesses may have to cut corners which could mean money was not spent on general maintenance of equipment or structure, staff were not being trained in hygiene practices or for cleaning staff or cleaning regimes. Also in some businesses, inexperienced staff have been brought in to manage a business who did not necessarily have a formal catering background or knowledge of food safety management.
- 82% of businesses in Buckinghamshire were still rated good or very good (national average figure was 79.1%). Buckinghamshire had 4,500 businesses.
- In answer to a question reassurance was given that priority was given to those businesses not yet inspected rather than those businesses who had requested a re-inspection to improve their rating.
- Residents could check food ratings at <https://ratings.food.gov.uk/> before making a booking or purchasing food to ensure that businesses have a rating of 3 or above.

RESOLVED –

- (1) **That the joint Food and Health and Safety Service Business Plan (at Appendix 1) be APPROVED.**
- (2) **That the Food Policy (at Appendix 2) and the Health and Safety Enforcement Policy (at Appendix 3) be APPROVED.**

10 Q3 Budget Monitoring Report 2022-23

Cabinet received a report which set out the Revenue and Capital outturn position for Buckinghamshire Council for the financial year 2022/23 as at Quarter 3. The Council was continuing to experience significant financial pressures due to the current economic situation and the high levels of inflation. Although the rate of inflation had reduced recently and was forecast to reduce further by the end of the 2023 calendar year, the Council's budgets were continuing to experience ongoing pressures from inflation and energy prices, and also particularly in Adults and Children's social care due to increased demand and complexity of demand. In addition, in Children's Services the market had become sub-optimal with a lack of suitable placements driving up unit costs.

The Revenue outturn position as of Quarter 3 was a forecast balanced position, which was an improvement from the adverse variance of £1.8m reported at Quarter 2. Appendix 1 provided detailed information for each Portfolio and relating to the forecast revenue budget outturn and information about performance relating to overdue debts and late payments of commercial debt.

The Revenue outturn position as of Quarter 3 was a balanced position, which was an improvement from the adverse variance of £1.8m reported at Quarter 2. The key areas of movement in the forecast variance from the Quarter 2 position were detailed at paragraph 1.8 of the Cabinet report, and related to:

Forecast variance Quarter 2	£1.8m adverse
Health & Wellbeing – reduction of £2.1m in the adverse pressure to £2.7m (£4.8m last quarter). Although there have been increased demand pressures, corporate contingency budget of £3.3m has been released to mitigate pressures and additional government funding of £1m has been received from the Hospital Discharge fund.	(£2.1m)
Education and Children’s Services – reduction of £2.8m in the adverse variance from £9.5m to £6.7m. This reflects revised staffing forecasts and maximisation of grant funding to reduce pressures.	(£2.8m)
Homelessness & Regulatory Services – an increase of £3.1m from an adverse variance of £0.8m to £3.9m due to a significant increase in demand for Temporary Accommodation, particularly nightly accommodation. Temporary Accommodation has now been escalated to a Key Financial Risk. Although the budget for 2023/24 has been increased to meet additional demand, work is progressing apace to develop a more sustainable solution.	£3.1m
Transport – increase of £1.4m in the adverse variance related to Home to School Transport from £2m to £3.4m due to inflationary pressures on contractors.	£1.4m
Accessible Housing and Resources – improved position in Property and Assets due to revised forecasts for rental income.	(£0.7m)
Other – minor movements in Culture & Leisure, Planning and Regeneration and Leader.	(£0.3m)
Corporate and Funding – although the overall movement is an improvement of £0.4m, within this there are some significant movements in forecast due to £3.3m of contingency released into Health & Wellbeing budgets, a further £2.4m of contingencies forecast to be released to offset pressures, £0.7m of additional interest income due to increases in interest rates, and £0.5m surplus of income relating to the reversal of the 1.25% increase in National Insurance effective from November.	(£0.4m)
Forecast variance Quarter 3	£0.0m

Paragraph 1.9 of the Cabinet report detailed information within the overall position of the adverse variances on Portfolio spend of £14.3m (£15.7m forecast at Quarter 2) that was offset by £14.3m of corporate mitigations (£13.9m forecast at Quarter 2). £19.2m of savings had also been incorporated into the approved 2022-23 Revenue budgets. Overall, there was a shortfall of £0.6m against this target, attributable to delays in the Revenues and Benefits system implementation in the Accessible Housing and Resources portfolio, and £407k overspend in the placements budget. Additionally, the £250k Agency Staff

saving had not been achieved. Trading with schools was forecast to increase by £43k more than the target.

The Cabinet report also detailed information on external funding where the Council had been successful in obtaining additional funding during the financial year from external grant funding.

At Q3, the overall forecast capital outturn was £30.7m (21.0%) less than the capital cash limit for the year. The position as reported was subject to approval of a number of in-year changes to the approved capital programme. These had been through the appropriate internal governance boards and were pending a further Cabinet Decision. This was also an increase in net slippage of £17.7m compared with the Q2 position. Further details of the delivery of the capital programme for each portfolio were in Appendix 1.

The Leader paid tribute to the robust financial management of the budget, particularly as some Councils nationally were facing problems with debt. Portfolio areas were significantly overspent by £14.3 million which had been affected by interest rate changes but this had been balanced out by income generation. Another Cabinet Member reported that this pressure was likely to continue over the next year or two and the Council could be faced with some difficult financial decisions. Reference was made to the substantial savings the Council had already made and also would make this year within the budget however given the pressure on expenditure by adults and children's services and education services, achieving those future savings was a challenging job.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the current forecast outturn for the financial year 2022/23, and the associated risks and opportunities, be NOTED.**
- (2) That a drawdown from the Mitigating Future Financial Risks Reserves to fund a further contribution of £150k to the Staff Hardship Fund be APPROVED, as agreed by the Senior Appointments and Pay Committee (SAPC) on 1 February 2023.**

11 Date of next meeting
Tuesday 11 April 2023 at 10am