



Cabinet minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 9 May 2023 in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 11.55 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, R Stuchbury, S Wilson

Agenda Item

1 Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

2 Minutes

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 April 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Declarations of interest

Cllr S Bowles declared an interest as a Director of Bucks Advantage.

4 Hot Topics

The following hot topics were reported:-

Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

School children from across Buckinghamshire took part in the grand finale of Buckinghamshire Council's Coronation crown making competition on Thursday 4 May. The 15 finalists each created incredible Coronation crowns, which were judged by Buckinghamshire Swan Envoy Lorraine Kelly, The Countess Howe, HM Lord-Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, Chairman of Buckinghamshire Council, Dev Dhillon, Cllr Joseph Baum, Deputy Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Chief Executive of Buckinghamshire Council, Rachael Shimmin and Adam Teeuw, Director of Physical Production at Lucasfilm, at the event held at the council offices in The Gateway, Aylesbury. The competition was extremely close, but the winners were Lent Rise School, Burnham (first prize for a primary school) and Heritage House School, Chesham (first prize for a secondary school).

Cabinet Member for Transport

Crews were continuing to work over the weekend filling potholes with a total of 1,140 filled which related directly to jobs raised through Fix my Street. The plane and patch programme had also ramped up from the additional funds committed to the budget. 10 schemes had been completed including Totteridge Lane, High Wycombe and White Hill, Chesham. Work on the A413 remained ongoing and further work would be carried out in Great Missenden shortly. These Schemes were weather dependent.

Cabinet Member for Communities

Street wardens had now completed their Community Safety Accreditation Scheme and from 16 May would be qualified to undertake additional responsibilities such as obtaining addressing from ASB offenders and issuing fixed penalty notices for low level offences. This would be on a trial basis but if successful Thames Valley Police would authorise additional enforcement powers.

Cabinet Member for Homelessness and Regulatory Services

The Cabinet Member referred to a consultation on Buckinghamshire Council's Charitable Collections Policy and also the Animal Licensing Policy which was available via the following link:-

<https://yourvoicebucks.citizenspace.com/>

5

Question Time

Question from Councillor Stuart Wilson to Councillor Martin Tett, Leader of the Council

It is noted that the recent Scrutiny Committee Chairmans' report to Full Council references that Scrutiny is cross-party and non-political, however, all 12 chair and vice-chair positions are held by one political grouping. This is very different from the Parliamentary model which I am informed was the basis for the introduction of Select Committees in Buckinghamshire local government. To further enhance the Council's regard for Scrutiny by the Local Government Association, then surely, even on the basis of proportionality, there should be 3 positions held by other political groupings or more and that this will be addressed in the remaining years of this Council?

RESPONSE from Councillor Tett

I would just reaffirm that Scrutiny is cross party and is a very effective part of governance of this Council. Under the Constitution, each Select Committee elects its own Chairman and this will be done after the Council's Annual General Meeting where nominations can be put forward by each political group.

Question from Councillor Robin Stuchbury to Councillor Peter Strachan, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration

I have received an update from the archaeological department on the draft scope for the excavation work from Network Archaeology for the West End Farm site in Buckingham, outlining what analysis will be taking place as part of the post excavation assessment which includes radiocarbon dating to determine how old the skeletons are and the DNA analysis to assess and look at whether there was any family relationships. This information has been shared with experts at Historic England, who provided some useful feedback and suggestions. The Archaeological Team are awaiting information from Network Archaeology on the programme of works. Please could I have any additional information which you can share with me and also what information can be given to the wider community on the subject, including whether it would be possible to work with the local museum within Buckingham who could promote these historic findings.

RESPONSE from Councillor Strachan

Cllr Stuchbury, thank you for your continued interest in this site. Our archaeology team is working closely with the archaeological contractors, Network Archaeology, to progress this project. We all agree that there needs to be thorough assessment of the 75 skeletons discovered at West End Farm in Buckingham, and a clear plan for their long term storage and archiving. Network Archaeology have agreed a scope for the post-excavation assessment work going forward with the archaeology team and Historic England. This will include DNA analysis, isotope analysis and other investigations to determine the age, health, cause of death and origins of these individuals. The developers have been asked to agree to fund this work and all being well, assessments will start soon. This may take several months, but once the results are known we will ensure these are shared with the local community and discussion regarding the long-term deposition of the skeletons will follow.

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 Children's Services update

Since the last update to Cabinet in October 2022, the Service had received two regulatory visits. The first was a Focused Visit from Ofsted that looked at the services and support offered to care leavers and the second was an inspection of Youth Offending Services by HM Inspectorate of Probation. Both visits went well and confirmed that the Service continued its improvement journey and whilst there was more to do, the Service had an accurate self-assessment and understanding of what was needed to be done. In addition, two of the Council's Children's Homes were now judged to be 'Outstanding' by Ofsted and the Council's new 4 bedded Parent and Baby residential assessment resource had just opened, following registration by

Ofsted.

IMPOWER had now completed their analysis of the profile of demand and developed a number of recommendations outlining how the Service could improve its financial sustainability by delivering better outcomes at less cost. The IMPOWER work also concluded that the service and its partners could work differently together to meet the needs of children and young people. The findings from this analysis had helped the Service to refine its self-assessment from which a whole system Children's Services Transformation Programme had been developed. This change programme would redefine the support that was to be provided to children and families and redevelop the model to enable interventions that were more responsive to children's needs. The ambition was to create more opportunities for professionals, including partner agencies, to integrate services around the needs of communities and move from a process driven case management model with multiple hand off points to a relationship based, solution focused system.

The Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services reported that there were a number of significant national policy changes on the horizon and the proposed changes to the way in which the Service operated were in line with national policy direction and were based on ensuring that children receive a consistent, purposeful and child centred approach wherever they are on their journey of need from early help through to being in care. It also covered Buckinghamshire's local needs and identified any gaps in service. The report covered social care, schools, SEND provision, the implications of the new Child Care Provision and reforms, service transformation and strategy, placements, corporate parenting work and the two Ofsted visits mentioned above.

The Service area was dealing with increasing demand, increasing complexity of care, staff recruitment and retention, lack of cohesive partnership working, difficulty in accessing placements, rising costs of providers and subsequent year on year increasing costs. Overarching all of this was a national Strategy which was a direct response to the Care Review called 'Stable Homes; Built on Love'. The Council was broadly in support of the six pillars for reform, which were set out in the Strategy. The Council's goal was to ensure that children and young people receive the best care, have the best life possible and achieve their best potential. The Council was transforming itself to bridge gaps and fulfil needs.

During discussion the following points were noted:

- One of the things that had been highlighted was the increasing demand and complexity of cases particularly since the pandemic. It was important to understand the causes of this and whether it was temporary or permanent. The Service Director of Children's Social Care reported that it was due to a combination of factors and he was concerned about the deterioration in children's and adults' mental health as a driving factor. There had been an increase in the level of demand in the Opportunity Bucks wards which could be a result of substance misuse, domestic violence and mental health issues.

- In terms of a question around the support from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, the Service Director reported that the Council continued to work with CAMHS and that the relationship had developed year on year. They also faced similar challenges to the Council in understanding demand changes and responding to them in a defined financial envelope, with similar recruitment issues.
- Regional Care Co-operatives had been introduced by the Government to help manage the market, but some concerns had been voiced by the Local Government Association. The report referred to the County being in a crisis since last October when the availability of placements was significantly reduced, particularly for children with complex needs. There was recognition that local authorities could not solve the placement sufficiency on their own and the Co-operatives were a step in the right direction in the medium and longer term but did not address current pressures. The Cabinet Member reported that the transformation strategy would work with early years and families to address the major problem of family breakdown, trauma and anxiety to ensure that this did not result in longer term complex needs.
- It would be helpful for the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel to have more visibility at the Health and Wellbeing Board to increase the visibility on the mental health of Looked After Children. The Cabinet Member reported that changes had been made to the Panel to ensure that the Voice of the Child was heard and to look at what young people need and want.
- Buckinghamshire Council had now, along with all other local authorities, been mandated to take Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) when they were referred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). In addition, the Council was also now required to continue to receive referrals until it reached 0.10% of the child (0-18) population (128 individuals for Buckinghamshire) compared to the previous ask of 0.07%, 89 individuals for Buckinghamshire. At the time of writing, the Service supported 73 UASC, an increase from 48 in September 2022. A question was asked about whether this had been factored into the budget, whether this had been funded by the Government and also how these children were housed. The maximum amount for Buckinghamshire was 130 young people. Placements were made on the individual needs of children and young people, such as a foster placement or semi-independent living. There was some unfunded burden due to the time it took the Home Office to make a decision (2/3 years). The age that the child was when they were referred was also important, as whilst a grant was given to under 18's, they would need to be supported by the Council over the age of 18, up to the age of 25 where the costs were much higher than the grant being received.
- With the Social Work Qualified Agency Rate agencies often restricted the supply of staff to teams rather than individual vacancies. A concern was raised with the Locality Based model and whether it would be more difficult to obtain individual agency staff and what was a realistic target, as 26% seemed to be quite high. Also a question was asked whether there would be any impact on the Council regarding recruitment with the Government harmonising agency rates. The Service Director reported that this was

difficult to predict but the main aim for the Council was to have as few agency staff as possible. Agency staff would always be required because of the statutory nature of the Service areas work. The rules that were being implemented were positive ones such as a newly qualified social worker could not leave their first place of work for five years and also individual agency staff could be allocated. Last week there were three sets of interviews and those candidates said they wanted to join Buckinghamshire because the Council was strong in their wellbeing support.

- The opening of further children's homes was dependent on capital funding and suitable sites. Registered Children's Homes have a requirement to ensure that there were good matching arrangements and that was one of the reasons it could be difficult to place a child. It was important to increase capacity in Buckinghamshire. A Mother and Baby Unit would be opened and potential buildings were being identified.
- The reform of the childcare system would have significant economic advantages to families so parents could go back to work. From 2025, 30 hours would be available for every child over 9 months. With more children in childcare any difficulties could be picked up early and addressed by the Service area. The Service area was also providing a new skills agenda for mothers returning to work. The Service Director reported that they were yet to understand what the funding arrangements would be for Buckinghamshire.
- Following the consultation on SEND Review: Right support, right place, right time which proposed reforms for a single, national SEND and alternative provision system, the Cabinet Member reported that the chief problems were waiting times and the need for more training and staff to encourage confidence for schools to provide good services. The Government had outlined the package that they would provide. The funding was £10 billion nationally by 2024 which would help the Service Area to provide more advisors for schools, so that the schools could take on more of the SEND provision and to recruit more staff; currently there were 6,000 ECHP's and rising. The Council were recruiting more psychologists from 12 to 20.
- In response to a question regarding what the differences were between the Government Independent Review of Children's Social Care proposed in 2022 and what was now being currently implemented, the Cabinet Member reported that the chief difference was the amount of money being devoted to all the reforms. The Government's initial review was that £2.5 billion was required over 5 years. The Government was now able to give local authorities nationally £200 million over two years, which was why a transformation policy was required. The Government said that Councils needed 500 more social workers nationally, but a plan had not yet been put in place on how to achieve this. However, there was a plan for Buckinghamshire. The Government would be allocating £45m to 12 families first for children pathfinder areas to trial the care review proposal to introduce multi-disciplinary family help services, however Buckinghamshire was not involved in this. The main issue was children's placements which was not being addressed nationally. There was no windfall tax on profitable care

providers and no regulation and very little money for foster care (£27 million nationally).

- Reference was made to the unprecedented increase in referral and re-referral rates which were statistically higher than neighbouring councils and how these were contributing to extra demand pressures. The Cabinet Member reported that this was a reaction to national and local difficulties and the Transformation Programme would be based around partnership, community and co-operation. There needed to be a better alignment between services and a menu of intervention. Early help was also important to help the whole family unit. Less reliance on agency staff would also help and assigning social workers to a varied case load to avoid burn out. The Service Director reported that the Council wanted to be proactive in transforming ahead of the Government review and making sure all partners such as schools, voluntary sector and health services were involved with children and young people at an early stage. In terms of re-referrals, there had been a system issue in how the Council measured this area which had now been addressed. If a re-referral was made, analysis was undertaken on why the previous service offered had failed and what needed to be put in place in terms of having an effective partnership around children to ensure better outcomes.
- In terms of academisation of all schools, this initially caused alarm as there were 242 maintained schools. However, some schools got together in small groups, particularly with small village schools and also there was the option for local authorities having their own academies. This was a possibility for the future.
- The Corporate Parenting Panel used every other session to listen to the voiced wishes of the child and the other session to go through corporate reporting.
- With recruitment and retention the Council needed to be mindful of the cost of living crisis. The worst pressure was in child protection teams where the work was more complex and traumatic than other areas. Support was given to individuals and to teams, the staff survey had shown that staff felt well supported and there was a good culture for discussing difficult cases. There was also a comprehensive wellbeing offer for staff. The combination of this had led to people applying for work in Buckinghamshire.

RESOLVED –

That the national and local developments across the Children’s Services Directorate be NOTED.

8 6 Monthly Adult Social Care update

The Cabinet report provided an update on the recent developments in adult social care, both locally and nationally, and plans for the next period. The report included updates on several recent developments in April, including the Next Steps to put People at the Heart of Care government white paper and the findings of the Hewitt Review into Integrated Care Systems. An update on the current position of adult

social care services in Buckinghamshire was provided.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing referred to a number of issues in the report such as social care charging reforms, liberty protection safeguards, mental health reforms, Care Quality Commission assurance, national workforce challenges, the new Integrated Care System, Better Care Fund and Spending Plan, Better Lives Strategy, demand for social care and performance. Like Children's Services the Service Area was being proactive and undertaking a transformation exercise and was facing an increase in demand and more complex cases. With an increase in demand from older people the Council were trying to support people living as independently as they could. They were also working closely with hospitals on discharge arrangements. They were also preparing for a CQC Inspection which was likely to go ahead in the near future.

During discussion the following points were noted :-

- In terms of financial performance, the service area was currently overspent but putting in mitigation measures. A question was asked about whether there were any financial concerns in the future. The Cabinet Member reported that she was confident as she could be in the circumstances and robust measures had been put in place with the transformation programme. However, there were significant financial challenges in the future. The Service area was currently getting 3,500 referrals a week with an increased ageing population and people with learning disabilities. There was also the cost-of-living crisis and inflationary pressures.
- Living independently was crucial to resident's self-esteem and there was concern about managing future demand. The Cabinet Member reported that the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board was crucial in terms of making sure people lived independently to improve their self-esteem and mental health. Funding was also available to adapt accommodation if necessary and also provide supported living and intermediate care. The Corporate Director also mentioned that extra care played a huge role and also the importance of working closely with housing.
- Reference was made to digitalisation – improved self-service options for residents who chose these channels and improved digital “backroom” processes to improve efficiency, especially greater automation of financial processes. The Social Care White Paper committed to accelerating the adoption of technology, however the Corporate Director reported that the White Paper was quite high level, and the Service area were waiting for further policy papers and for a funding announcement although in reality what was actually received by the Council was usually lower than expected. There was a workstream committed to this area.
- The CQC Framework has now been published so the Council could be inspected at any time. The Service area were undertaking a detailed self-assessment on how areas could be improved and having regular sessions with staff. This would continue to be developed including working with key partnership boards. This was well supported through the Better Lives

Strategy, looking at risk assessments and challenges around the workforce.

RESOLVED –

That the latest developments in relation to adult social care both locally and nationally be NOTED.

9 Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy 2023-26

The 2020-2023 Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy ended on 31 March 2023. Following the completion of the Community Safety Strategic Assessment and public consultation, the 2023-26 Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy had been produced ready for publication on 15 May 2023.

The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) (as revised by the Police and Justice Act 2006, and the Policing and Crime Act 2009) placed a duty on the Safer Buckinghamshire Board (SBB) to undertake a strategic assessment of community safety in its area and produce a three-year community safety strategy. The Safer Buckinghamshire Board considered the findings and recommendations of the Strategic Assessment at its meeting on 5th December 2022.

As part of developing the strategic priorities for the Safer Buckinghamshire Board it was also a legislative requirement that there be public engagement. During September and October, through a survey and extensive communications plan, people in Buckinghamshire were asked what their community safety concerns and priorities were. The survey, which included multiple choice questions and the opportunity to make additional comments, was also promoted to Councillors and Town and Parish Councils in Buckinghamshire. An analysis of the public engagement was also presented to the Safer Buckinghamshire Board on 5th December 2022.

Taking the Strategic Assessment, the public engagement findings and other known insights into account, the Community Safety Team developed proposed priorities and key actions. The 5 proposed priorities, outlined in more detail within the Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy 2023-26, were:

- Neighbourhood crime
- Anti-social behaviour
- Serious violence
- Violence against women and girls
- Exploitation of vulnerable people

With regard to the next steps, the Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy would be published on the Buckinghamshire Council website. The Safer Buckinghamshire Board Managers would work with the relevant Priority Sponsors to:

- Ensure that detailed delivery plans were developed for the delivery of the priorities.
- Ensure mobilisation and delivery of the Strategy, commissioning task and

finish groups etc. as required.

- Develop a dashboard that would include delivery impact measure for the plans.

The Annual report on the work of the Safer Buckinghamshire Board would be produced in February/March 2024.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- Reference was made to the great work undertaken by the police force which was often difficult and dangerous.
- A Cabinet Member referred to the good work of the Thames Valley Independent Advisory Groups and asked how different community groups fed into the Strategy. In response it was noted that in developing the Strategy they consulted through their Annual Survey which was sent to a number of different partners such as the police, partnership boards etc. and their responses culminated in the resulting priorities alongside information received through police surveys.
- The National Crime Agency dealt with national scams, but the local police force and councils could provide advice if a resident was a victim of this type of crime. This was one of the most unreported crimes (20%). The first port of call was Action Fraud.
- With Violence against Women and Young Children partners were focussing on night-time economies, street violence and the sex trade, alongside all aspects of violence, to reduce this crime, which had been included in their detailed delivery plans.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the priorities and key actions for the Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy 2023-26 be ENDORSED.**
- 2) That the next steps be NOTED, which include;**
 - i) Publication of the Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy 2023-26 by 15 May 2023.**
 - ii) Development of detailed delivery plans for each priority area.**
 - iii) Development of measures to track and demonstrate progress and impact.**

10 Cost of Living Support for Buckinghamshire Residents

Buckinghamshire Council recognised the growing pressures being faced by its residents linked to the increases in the cost of living. The Council had developed and delivered a range of initiatives this year to support residents and staff in regard to these cost of living pressures and had committed to ensuring the continuation of its Helping Hand service to provide support to residents who needed it most.

The Council was pleased to receive confirmation of the fourth tranche of Household Support Fund grant allocation for the period from April 2023 to March 2024, which

would be used to continue to provide essential support to residents during the year. This built on the funding the Council had received from Government since 2020, initially through the Winter Grant and Local Support Grant and subsequently through the Household Support Fund.

Previous allocations of the Household Support Fund were awarded for a 6-month period only. For the period 1st October 2022 to 31st March 2023, Buckinghamshire was awarded £2.4m of funding from the Household Support Fund to provide support for residents in need of help with food, fuel and other essential household costs.

The Cabinet report outlined the support the Council had provided, and continued to provide, to support residents with cost-of-living pressures. The report also detailed how the previous Household Support Fund allocation was used and set out a proposed use of the new allocation between 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024, ensuring that this would be targeted to residents in need of support and in line with the Government guidance. This was the first time Councils had been awarded a whole year's funding of £4.8 million.

Cabinet thanked the Team for their excellent work in this area and paid tribute to the Team and the Head of Community Support. A comment was made about the Government spending £100 billion on the cost of living crisis and energy costs and good support across the Country including the local support programme and winter grants. Reference was made to referrals and supporting a father who was unable to seek employment because of reading difficulties. The Service Director reported that a holistic approach was taken in this area and residents were supplied with information on how to address issues long term such as adult learning support.

A question was asked about making the applications as simple as possible so as not to provide a barrier to residents applying. In response it was noted that there was a balance between streamlining the forms and avoiding fraud as this was taxpayers' money but the Cabinet Member could look at this.

RESOLVED –

- 1) That the range of support provided by Buckinghamshire Council for individuals experiencing hardship across the County be NOTED.**
- 2) That the arrangements for deploying the new Household Support Fund allocation be APPROVED.**

- 11 Buckinghamshire's Rural Business Grants Fund delivery and governance approach**
The Cabinet report set out details of the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), which was announced by DEFRA in September 2022.

The REPF was a new capital fund from DEFRA and was a 'top-up' to the UKSPF. It was part of the succession from the EU funded LEADER and Growth Programmes, which were part of the Rural Development Programme for England and hugely successful

in Buckinghamshire with over 50 businesses supported.

The Council submitted its Addendum to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Investment Plan in November 2022. DEFRA had now approved the addendum and Buckinghamshire Council had been awarded £1.8m to deliver the Rural England Prosperity Fund Capital Grants programme over two financial years up to 31st March 2025.

The Cabinet report proposed the delivery approach and governance needed by the Council to ensure high quality delivery and value for money that would support growth for rural businesses and support a vibrant Buckinghamshire rural economy. A suggestion was made to provide maps to ward members to indicate which rural areas could apply for grant funding. Alongside maps information would be provided on social media.

Reference was made to the top down targets from Government and whether the Council was restricted by those for example creating 55 jobs. The Service Director reported that they were reference points for equivalent targets with the amount of funding that had been received, which was based on previous experience with the Leader programme. The sum of the projects funded would be expected to be measured in the range of these types of targets. The actual outcomes would be on an individual proposal basis which would be the main priority rather than the global target. In terms of businesses having to claim the funding back after they had spent the money, which could mean they were exposed to borrowing costs, they would need to establish they had succeeded in their proposal but the Council would ensure that the claim process was as quick as possible.

RESOLVED -

- 1) That the programme eligibility and parameters for businesses applying for a Grant be AGREED.**
- 2) That the Buckinghamshire Rural Business Grants Fund be included in the Council's capital programme.**
- 3) That a new funding panel be formed to guide the review process of eligible grant applications.**
- 4) That the awarding of grants be delegated to the Economic Growth and Regeneration Service Director, in consultation with the Leader and S151 Officer.**

12 Buckinghamshire Shareholder Committee Annual Report 2022-23

The role of the Buckinghamshire Shareholder Committee was to ensure that the Council's companies and limited liability partnerships acted in the interests of the Council as shareholder and that best practice was being adhered to in delivering statutory arrangements. In doing so, the Committee contributed to the proper governance of the Council's subsidiaries. This added level of governance was more important than ever, following a number of other local authorities experiencing difficulties. Understanding the risks associated with wholly or jointly owned

companies was a key task of the Committee.

This was the first year of the Shareholder Committee and producing an annual report to reflect the work and outcomes achieved by the Committee over the past year was considered good practice.

Members of the Shareholder Committee were not directors, and did not have any direct involvement, in any of the subsidiary bodies.

A Cabinet Member asked what the chief priorities were for this Committee. The Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing and Resources commented that the forward plan for the following year still had to be finalised but they would look at developing business plans and identifying key risk areas. They were also looking to create a pool of future directors who would follow best practice.

RESOLVED –

That the 2022-23 Annual Report of the Buckinghamshire Shareholder Committee and the work it has undertaken to date be NOTED.

13 **Date of next meeting**
13 June 2023 at 10am