



Report to Communities & Localism Select Committee

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| Date: | 2 October 2024 |
| Title: | Opportunity Bucks: Culture, Sport and Leisure Contributions |
| Author: | Sophie Payne |
| Recommendations: | For Information – To provide a summary of contributions and initiatives linked to the Opportunity Bucks programme from the Culture, Sport and Leisure service. |

1. Background

- 1.1 Opportunity Bucks is Buckinghamshire's flagship programme to improve opportunities for people in the county. It focuses on 10 wards across Aylesbury, Chesham, and High Wycombe and aims to tackle local priorities that will make a difference to the lives and lifestyles of people living in these areas experiencing the most hardship. Opportunity Bucks is a long-term programme, and we recognise that it will take time and a collective effort across local partners, the voluntary and community sector, businesses and other public sector bodies to achieve our aims. To achieve this, we are focusing on addressing priorities within 5 thematic areas of: Health and Wellbeing, Standard of Living, Education and Youth Engagement, Jobs, Employability and Skills and the Quality of Public Realm; and utilising hyper-local intelligence and insight to deliver meaningful initiatives that address the specific challenges these communities are facing.
- 1.2 Over the past 18 months, the Culture, Sport and Leisure service has focused its resources and collaborated extensively with partners to provide increased opportunities for people in the Opportunity Bucks wards, to support the delivery of the local community priorities that have emerged through the ward partnerships, and to contribute to initiatives across the key workstreams of the programme.
- 1.3 This work has generated increased participation in cultural, sporting and leisure activities including people attending events and taking part in community activities, children and young people benefiting from creative learning, and increased

volunteering. Taking a place-based approach with a shared focus on outcomes has also facilitated enhanced partnership working and a deeper understanding and connection with our local communities. Some of the key initiatives that have contributed to this success are set out in this report. We are very grateful to all our partners who work with us on these projects.

2. Sport, Physical Activity and Green Spaces

- 2.1 The Council is committed to promoting and supporting physical activity in the county, both for health and wellbeing benefits and for community cohesion and social inclusion. We work with a range of partners, including Public Health, Leap (the county's Active Partnership), our leisure operators, local clubs and organisations, to deliver programmes and initiatives that encourage more people to be active more often. Some of the specific developments in this area are listed below.
- 2.2 **A range of activities to support access to our leisure facilities, including:** targeted promotions/competitions with our leisure operators on the Better Points Bucks app which rewards people for making healthy choices; Holiday Activities & Food (HAF) programme at Wycombe Leisure Centre; the Be Healthy Bucks programme in the Opportunity Bucks wards, with free or low-cost physical activity sessions, such as exercise classes, and sports coaching, delivered by local providers in community venues; reduced admission fees of £2 for activities during off-peak times as part of the 'Everyone is Family' initiative offered by one of our leisure providers; links through the Holiday Activities and Food Team to offer free swimming for individuals receiving free school meals; and a pilot of top-up swim lessons for children from a school in an Opportunity Bucks ward, all of whom saw an increase in their overall water confidence and enjoyment.
- 2.3 **Developing new walking groups in local places:** Simply Walk, our successful programme of volunteer-led walks for all abilities, has created new Level 1 ('get started') supported walks with social prescribers in Aylesbury - Southcourt, Watermead and Berrycroft - building on existing walks in Chesham and High Wycombe including Totteridge, Micklefield, Loudwater and Booker.
- 2.4 **Local Park Walks:** in partnership with Public Health, the introduction of signposted park walks in Aylesbury and High Wycombe offering everyone an opportunity to be a little more active by walking and exploring the local parkland. There are currently four Local Park Walks in Aylesbury and five in High Wycombe.
- 2.5 **Love Exploring App:** working alongside Public Health and Community Safety to launch Love Exploring games/trails to encourage people to explore their local area, parks and green spaces more through walking in multiple locations. Free to all, the

games and guide trails include quizzes that get the user hunting for clues as they explore the place they are visiting.

- 2.6 **Smoke Free Sidelines:** To promote smoke free sidelines at junior sporting events in partnership with Public Health, officers worked with contractors (who book these activities) to make this a condition of pitch hire. This is currently just for junior football but other sports that we facilitate could follow.
- 2.7 **Healthy School Neighbourhoods:** We are part of the 'Physical activity and things to do Task and Finish Group' working with the two pilot schools – Elmhurst Primary in Aylesbury and Cressex Community School in High Wycombe. Our Parks team are looking at how Alfred Rose Park (Aylesbury) could be enhanced to offer greater active play opportunities, which had been raised at the Elmhurst stakeholder group. We are also working with our leisure operator Places Leisure on engaging with Cressex School (High Wycombe) in relation to their new Big Sister Project aimed at encouraging and supporting young women aged 11 to 16 years to be more physically active.
- 2.8 **Targeting investment** in high quality play provision to Opportunity Bucks green spaces. Examples include the new Ropes on the Rye play area in High Wycombe, new play equipment at Vale Park in Aylesbury, swing sets at Meadowcroft and Yellow Park play areas in Aylesbury, and an inclusive roundabout at Cottesloe Park in Aylesbury. The major theatres and museums in Aylesbury and High Wycombe run a range of creative learning programmes, including work experience, schools workshops and some free project opportunities for young people.
- 2.9 **Working in partnership on wider public realm improvements in Opportunity Bucks wards:** involvement in tree planting with the support of volunteer groups, including new 'tiny forests' at Totteridge and Booker recreation grounds; installation of outdoor gym equipment at Meadowcroft in Aylesbury; and wider work to improve public open space to make it more attractive and safe for users, including footpath and fencing improvements, clearing vegetation, wildflower and bulb planting (also involving volunteers), pest control etc.

3. **Healthy Libraries Programme**

- 3.1 Working closely with Public Health, the Healthy Libraries Programme aims to enhance the health and wellbeing services of Buckinghamshire's libraries, through a co-ordinated programme of activities, events, and information campaigns aligned to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities of Start Well, Live Well, and Age Well, and based on the needs of local communities.
- 3.2 The programme was initially piloted from February to April 2023 in seven libraries, including three in Opportunity Bucks areas: Aylesbury, Chesham and High Wycombe.

The pilot attracted a total of 1,361 attendees, with nearly 38% (517) of participants coming from these three libraries.

- 3.3 In July 2023, the programme rolled out to all 29 Buckinghamshire libraries, but with a continuing focus on supporting residents in the Opportunity Bucks areas. Between July 2023 and March 2024, 43% (53 of 122) of the activities, events, and campaigns delivered were in the Opportunity Bucks wards, and of the 4,561 participants across the entire programme, 45% (2,063) attended from the libraries situated within the Opportunity Bucks areas. The programme collaborated with 41 organisations, including many working directly in Opportunity Bucks areas. Additionally, 2,390 health MOTs were conducted from the health kiosks situated in Aylesbury, Chesham, and High Wycombe libraries, with blood pressure kits frequently borrowed from these three libraries.
- 3.4 The success of the programme has continued into the current financial year, with diverse activities at Aylesbury, High Wycombe, Micklefield and Chesham libraries (the latter being more restricted during the first part of this year due to the library closure for refurbishment works). Notably, 992 health MOTs were carried out from the kiosks situated in Aylesbury and High Wycombe libraries; and nearly 400 books were borrowed from the [Reading Well Collection](#), supporting mental and emotional wellbeing.

4. Access and Participation in Culture / Expansion of Community Activities and Learning Opportunities for Children and Young People

- 4.1 **WhizzFizzFest:** The Council's longstanding family arts festival has evolved to include a focus on Opportunity Bucks priority areas. Over the summer of 2023, there were artists' workshops in 15 schools and three Family Centres engaging over 800 children; theatre shows in libraries; and three festival celebration events in partnership with local organisers in Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham over consecutive weekends, which included street performances, crafting activities, dance workshops and stage performances from local groups, giving our local cultural organisations a chance to showcase their offer.



- 4.2 This year, there have been free family fun days over the summer in Family Centres in Opportunity Bucks wards in Aylesbury, Chesham and High Wycombe, offering local



families the chance to enjoy performances by Unbound Theatre, a local storyteller and various craft activities. Other events included the grand re-opening of Chesham Library on 17 August featuring puppet shows from Dread Falls Theatre, music, chess, and craft workshops, Zumba Kids sessions, dress-up, face painting and transfer tattoos and storytelling (attendance over 800), and 'Wycombe Celebrates' on 8

September, a day-long free family festival across the town centre celebrating food, music, arts, heritage, and crafts. Also coming up is a Sci-Fi Day in Aylesbury Library (and other town centre venues) on 19 October, with workshops, exhibitions and cosplay activities.



- 4.3 **Together We Celebrate – Paralympics 2024:** Our collaborative approach aims to bring like-minded partners, organisations, and communities together to celebrate and take inspiration from the county's unique and proud Paralympic heritage. A series of activities and exhibitions themed around diversity, inclusivity and accessibility have been taking place throughout the summer under the banner 'Together We Celebrate'. Schools in Opportunity Bucks areas signed up for



Creative Champions artists workshops, run by two fantastic disabled artists, Rachel Gadsden and Dave Steele, at the end of June/early July (see photo). They shared how their experiences of living with visual impairment and disability had influenced their creative practice, and helped pupils create their own art/poetry to celebrate Stoke Mandeville's role as the

birthplace of the Paralympics. Around 685 children from Opportunity Bucks schools took part.

- 4.4 **Buckinghamshire Archives:** The service's outreach programme has included various events across Aylesbury, Wycombe and Chesham, including drop-in sessions at High Wycombe and Micklefield libraries, Heritage Open Day events at Aylesbury library, poster making and story writing at Chesham library and schools visits/careers talks at Cressex Community School and Chesham Grammar. In addition, the Archives team have attended wider community events such as Pride in the Park and St George's Day events in Aylesbury and 'Wycombe Celebrates' in High Wycombe to engage with local communities.

4.5 **Rekindle:** A national programme funded by Arts Council England, aimed at enhancing creativity and culture in libraries, has hosted 20 events in Aylesbury, Chesham, and High Wycombe libraries since August 2023, attracting over 700 attendees.



The Head Gardener brought performances to libraries about gardening and mental health

4.6 **Learning opportunities for young people:** Our major theatres and museums in Aylesbury and High Wycombe run a range of creative learning programmes, including work experience, schools workshops and some free project opportunities for young people.

5. Strengthening Community Engagement, Partnerships and Collaboration

5.1 As can be seen from the above, the Opportunity Bucks programme is delivering enhanced collaboration, partnership working and coproduction with local communities. The programme has facilitated the service to establish new relationships and increased engagement with local communities to develop deeper understanding and insight into their needs and challenges to inform our collective work.

5.2 Some additional examples:

- Buckinghamshire Libraries have partnered with a local business to provide a new book collection called Parenting and Childcare Topics (PACT): 170 different books designed to help parents and carers of children and young people navigate a variety of topics, from pregnancy to approaching university. This was launched at High Wycombe Library.
- The Art of Ageing Well Project engaged over 100 residents aged over 65 in creative activities exploring what it means to age well in Buckinghamshire, to inform the Public Health Ageing Well Strategy.
- Support to the Buckinghamshire Culture Social Prescribing pilots that took place throughout 2023, including pilot projects run by Queens Park Arts Centre in Aylesbury (Singing for Health) and Wycombe Museum in High Wycombe (Music making/connecting with Nature).
- A programme of resident engagement in High Wycombe between November 2023 and February 2024 to understand current cultural participation of different



groups and barriers to participation. Through workshops, focus groups and street surveys, 521 residents were engaged. This research has informed a submission to Arts Council England to their Place Partnerships fund, which aims to deliver a step change in cultural provision through place-based cultural interventions.

- Supporting projects in Opportunity Bucks ward areas in High Wycombe and Aylesbury to introduce socially engaged public art initiatives.

6. Conclusions

6.1 The various initiatives outlined above have provided positive impacts through:

- Better targeted programmes, successful in providing more activities and facilities for local communities.
- Increased opportunities for people to participate in cultural, sporting, and leisure activities.
- Strengthened coordination and shared commitment to the objectives of the programme.
- A better understanding of and connection with our local communities and organisations.

6.2 The service will continue working with partners to develop further opportunities and initiatives as the Opportunity Bucks programme progresses. As an immediate next step, we will be contributing to the programme's upcoming discussion around early years, and considering opportunities to build upon our existing support to this agenda.

