

Question 1

An additional question from Robin Stuchbury for the Cabinet meeting on 16 June 2020.

“When the Buckinghamshire County Council put forward its business case to the Secretary of State, a large part of the premise behind that business case was building future close working relationships with Town and parish councils.

Within the consultation with parishes, in advance of the Secretary of State’s decision for a single unitary council, a Great deal of energy was put into the future opportunities and discussion around devolved services and building partnerships with parish councils to deliver services with those elected bodies within the new Buckinghamshire Council.

At what point will Buckinghamshire Council be in a position to enter into discussions with parish councils allowing and enabling those councils to discuss and enter into new opportunities or renewing present/historic partnerships and any financial packages supporting those devolved services so Buckinghamshire Council can be assured parish councils have enough time to take these partnerships through internal consultation/agreement in advance of Parish Councils agreeing and setting their local precepts?”

Response

Close partnership working with partners, especially Town and Parish Councils is at the heart of the new Council’s localism agenda. Given the need to focus resources on responding to the coronavirus pandemic and conscious of the key part played by Town and Parish Councils, work on establishing community boards and progressing the devolution agenda were paused but we are pleased to confirm that this is now progressing at speed. We successfully recruited to community board coordinator posts last week, these will be critical in developing the community boards, drive forward localism, support local devolution conversations and have close working relationships with parishes.

We are working to deliver a phased devolution approach, helping Town and Parish Councils build capacity and expertise over time, and ultimately deliver sustainable agreements leading to better outcomes for residents. Phase 1 of our devolution approach called for expressions of interest for pilots. we received an overwhelming 120 Expressions of Interest covering a diverse set of assets and services. This has necessitated robust evaluations and conversations with services across the Council to ensure we understand all considerations and develop a collective view of the most suitable pilots for Phase 1. This will be a multi-year process. The work is ongoing and will need formal decisions in accordance with the constitution, but we will soon be able to confirm devolution pilots together with the publication of the Council’s Community Asset Transfer List. In-depth conversations will be held with Town and Parish Councils to ensure the transfers are suitable and they feel fully prepared and supported to take on assets and services.