

Buckinghamshire Council Report

Spring 2022

As you are all aware, elections took place in May of last year for the election of Councillors to form the new Buckinghamshire Council. The new Unitary Council is formed by the amalgamation of the County Council and four District Councils; Chiltern District Council, South Bucks District Council, Wycombe District Council and Aylesbury Vale District Council.

The boundaries of the existing Wards of the County Council were used. Three Councillors represent each Ward. The Grendon Underwood Ward, which this Parish is part of, is represented by three Councillors: Frank Mahon, Angela Macpherson (also Deputy Leader to Martin Tett and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing) and me, Michael Rand.

As the Ward is one of the largest in area of the Council, spreading from Brill to Steeple Claydon and East Claydon to Boarstall, the three of us agreed that the day-to-day workload be divided up into three areas. My area is south of the A41 and the remainder north is split between Frank and Angela.

I am involved in certain work and representations such as HS2 and East West Rail and was involved in the successful opposition to the proposed expansion of Grendon Underwood Prison. This would have included staff and accommodation for another 1400 prisoners.

The leadership and responsibilities of the Council consists of The Leader, Martin Tett, and nine Cabinet Members each supported by a Deputy.

Martin Tett does have the lead on certain responsibilities such as support of the refugees from Afghanistan and, most recently, working with the Government to accommodate refugee families from Ukraine.

Martin also keeps a close eye on the intensity and activity of HS2 and East West Rail. HS2, of course, is driving through the County from the south to the north. The greatest intensity is, as far as I am concerned, the Calvert, Steeple Claydon, Twyford area where East West Rail crosses HS2. The intensity of the HGV traffic forming the enabling works with Compounds, Haul roads and formation works is causing, not only congestion, but extensive damage to the local road infrastructure.

The following is an insight into some of the responsibilities of Cabinet Members' Portfolios:

Health and Wellbeing Portfolio

This covers subjects such as Adults Safe-Guarding Campaign, which is just being launched headed "*See Something, Say something and Do Something*" to raise awareness of adult safe-guarding and convey the message that safeguarding is everyone's business across Buckinghamshire. The campaign will seek to raise the awareness of the different types of abuse and how to recognize the signs as well as encouraging residents to report any suspected case of suspected abuse and the process to do so.

This Portfolio has a annual budget for the year of £164,421,000 mostly for Adult Social Care.

Climate Change and Environment

Flood Management:

The Floodmobile is an innovative mobile demonstration community outreach vehicle that has been designed to bring Property Flood Resilience to life. It is packed with around 50 different property flood resilience measures, to show homeowners and businesses what property-level adaptations can be introduced to a property to help reduce the impact future flooding can have.

Tree Planting:

We are undertaking several areas of work to support tree planting in Buckinghamshire as part of our work to address climate change and recognizing the wider biodiversity, air quality and amenity benefits these deliver. We have bid for £200,000 in the Local Authority Treescapes fund to support tree planting in non-forest locations. It is to help fund the Queen's Green Canopy; a project marking the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June.

Other subjects include Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy, Energy Supply Contracts and Green Home grants/domestic energy initiatives.

Culture and Leisure

This Portfolio covers culture, libraries, leisure, Country Parks and Play Areas.

Planning and Regeneration

The Planning and Enforcement responsibilities for the previous four Authorities are being amalgamated into one Buckinghamshire Council. This will include the launching of a new website. As you are all aware, Planning Enforcement and Planning have been under great pressure for the last few years. Now we have the stability of the new Council, we have commenced a successful recruitment drive for staff. Unfortunately, the backlog that has accrued is being exasperated by a 40% increase in new applications.

The VALP (Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan) has now been adopted after six years of consultation and inspection and will, hopefully, be supported by the 28 Neighbourhood Plans in place and another 17 Neighbourhood Plans in progress to ward off the speculative Planning Applications that we have been experiencing over the last seven or so years.

Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services

The environmental health service has seen an increase in workload during the pandemic. There was a large increase in the number of food businesses being set up. To help deal with the demand of inspection and registration, the service has obtained funding from Food Standards Agency to assist in triaging and assessing these new businesses. Other services to suffer variation in workload are the Coroner's Service, the Registration Service, Housing and Trading Standards, Cemeteries and Crematoria.

Fostering and Adoption Services

Buckinghamshire Fostering and Adoption teams have become “Friends of WWSET” a partnership with the official charity partner of Wycombe Wanderers Football Club, Wycombe Wanderers Sports and Education Trust. This partnership is to deliver projects and activities that educate, motivate and inspire the community through the power of sport.

Buckinghamshire Adult Learning (BAL) adapted and responded extremely well to the unprecedented challenges created by the pandemic by moving most classes online offering virtual tuition and learner support. This has enabled them to achieve strong performance and retained their allocation of grant funding.

Communities

This Portfolio consists of supporting Armed Forces, Community Safety, Community Boards, Town and Parish Communication, Financial Insecurity Partnership and Food Partnership.

Transport

HS2 and East West Rail, as I have mentioned before, take a lot of time and resources monitoring and marshalling these major projects that appear to be dividing up our County.

A major involvement and reorganisation of the school children’s transport started at the beginning of last Autumn Term. This involved the planning of new bus routes to suit the demand for all schools and their students.

Investment is still increasing for road maintenance and capital expenditure. A commitment by the Council at the beginning of the last financial year was for all road gullies to be cleaned within the year. This has involved slightly more work than was initially expected as cleaning of some gullies highlighted the fact that some of the drains and culverts that the gullies emptied into were blocked also some of the gully gratings were jammed and a new grating and frame has had to be fitted. So you can imagine this has not only involved extra work but secondary visits. In places hinderance has also happened by unattended cars being parked over the gullies. Extra workforce and equipment was deployed which will catch up with the few weeks’ programme slippage.

The total Highways Budget for the coming year is £18,124,000.

Finance and Resources, Property and Assets

This Portfolio includes the running of Council property such as Theatres, Community Centers and other Council buildings. One example is the vacant Aylesbury Courts Complex which generates income from recently being used as filming locations for the productions made by Amazon and Netflix and a number of other productions in the pipeline for both BBC and ITV.

Michael Rand - April 2022