

Borough Councillor Update – January 2017

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Post 16 School Transport Policy Consultation

Sixth Form pupils could be charged £1000 a year to access school transport under plans being considered by the Mayor's Executive.

In a move to save the Council £150k, a public consultation is requesting views on 2 options to amend the Council Post Statutory School Age Transport Policy, namely:

- Provide transport assistance for eligible students of post statutory school age and charge the full cost of transport based on the average cost per pupil (it is estimated that the cost would be approximately £1000 per pupil per year), or;
- Remove all transport assistance for students of post statutory school age.

The Policy will not apply to pupils subject to an Education, Health and Care Plan.

The consultation ended on the 13th January 2017. In my opinion if allowed to go ahead this will unfairly prejudice rural children who do not have the same access to public transport as urban children. All residents in the Ward should have received a letter from me asking you to respond with your views and am grateful to all those who did. I will update you with the results in due course.

Bedford Borough Council Budget 2017/18

The Council's meeting on the 1st February will see councillors vote on the proposed budget for 2017/18.

In September, the Mayor's Executive set out plans to bridge an estimated £21.3m savings gap by the end of the decade, caused to a large extent by increasing demand for social care.

The plans include £9.6m of service efficiencies, £3.7m of which will be delivered in 2017/18. Some of the proposals have been and will be subject to public consultation, such as the proposed end to the school transport subsidy for Post 16 pupils, the cessation of the Council's Out of House Noise Service and the relocation of the Travel and Tourism Centre out of the Bus Station.

Some of the changes have already been agreed, including amendments to the schedule of charges at the Council's town centre car parks, as well as plans to introduce a digitalised / self-service library service. A full list of the budget proposals can be seen at [this link](#) (or via the 'Council and Democracy' section at www.bedford.gov.uk and accessing the Executive papers from its meeting on the 7th September 2016).

In addition, the Executive has commissioned consultants from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) to undertake a comprehensive review of the Council as an organisation. PWC's findings, which it feels will save £10.3m a year by the end of the decade, are to be considered at a meeting of the Executive on the 22nd February.

Autumn Statement

The Chancellor, Phillip Hammond MP, has confirmed Government funding for 2 new infrastructure schemes linking Cambridge and Oxford which will in turn benefit Bedford Borough.

Firstly, around £100m has been guaranteed to deliver the western section of the East West Rail scheme which will link Oxford and Bedford, as well as a number of stops in between, including Milton Keynes. The intention is then in future years to extend the line from Bedford to Cambridge via Sandy.

Secondly, £27m has been set aside to provide a new ‘expressway’ between Oxford and Cambridge. This could be delivered through a number of options including improving existing road links and developing a new road between Oxford and Milton Keynes.

Health and Social Care Review

A committee of councillors from Bedford Borough, Luton, Central Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire had the opportunity in December to question those overseeing a review of health and social care services in Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes.

Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STP) began at the behest of NHS England last year as a means of bringing NHS and social care commissioners and providers together to design the future delivery of services across the country.

The local STP, covering Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes, will include a review of how Bedford, Luton & Dunstable and Milton Keynes Hospitals can work more closely and share services. It is not clear at this stage whether the proposal of the now defunct Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes Healthcare Review to close Bedford Hospital’s maternity unit will be taken forward, although the councillors were told that further details on plans for hospital services will be provided in March.

The STP will also look at closer working between the NHS and local authority social care, as well as GP services. See <http://www.blmkstp.co.uk/> for more information.

Schools Funding

The Government has announced a new funding formula which will see an overall increase in the budget for schools in the Borough from 2018/19.

At present, the Borough’s schools receive £100,585,808, but the new formula, should it be implemented following a consultation, will see the sum rise to £106,913,007.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2017 - 2022

The Council is asking residents for their views on how to improve around 1000km of footpaths, bridleways and byways under its control.

The consultation has been launched with a view towards prioritising maintenance works in the context of the Council’s challenging budgetary outlook.

The online questionnaire can be accessed via <http://www.forms.bedford.gov.uk/row/>

Car Parking Charges

Motorists are now able to park at Queen Street Multi-Storey Car Park (MSCP) for 2 hours free of charge every day as part of an array of changes to charges at the Council’s town centre car parks.

There will also be a number of charge rises, however, as part of a plan to increase parking income to the Council by £60k a year. The standard 2 hour charge at Lurke Street and Allhallows MSCPs will, for instance, rise to £1.90, while the charge for 30 minutes of on-street parking will go up to £0.80.

Broadband

Since 2014 the Council has been working with BT to increase broadband coverage across the Borough. The scheme, which is being funded by both organisations as well as central government, sought initially to increase superfast broadband coverage (speeds of 24 Megabits per second (Mbps) or above) to 90% of properties and the basic provision (2Mbps) to all properties.

A second phase is now underway which will increase superfast coverage to 97% of properties. It may be the case that outlying properties are still without superfast access at the end of the second phase. To address this, the Council says it has identified funding with its partners with a view towards achieving 100% superfast coverage.

For more information, including a 'postcode checker' to see whether your street has or will have access to superfast broadband, see www.bedford.gov.uk/broadband

IVF

The Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG), the body responsible for organising health services locally, has agreed to retain IVF treatment after considering ending the service. Following a public consultation it was agreed that 1 cycle of treatment will continue to be offered.

Bedford Roman Villa

Bedford Borough Council's Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee meeting on the 17th November was entirely devoted to receiving a presentation on the Roman dig on Manton Lane.

The presentation was jointly delivered by Stephen Cockings and Elizabeth Sayer, both part of the Bedford Roman Villa Project team.

The Committee was presented with the story of the excavations as well as a possible scenario as to the role of the site in Roman Britain. Part of this story is developing evidence that Bedford in the later Roman Empire may have been the site of a major administrative centre managing wheat production in the Ouse Valley. Described as the 'bread basket' of Roman Britain, what may have been a large imperial estate could have been responsible for supplying the Roman army defending the frontiers of both Hadrian's Wall and the Rhine.

Winter Weather Updates

The Council has a dedicated winter updates page on its website to keep residents informed of changes to public, school and adult services transport as well as waste collection changes. There is also information on road gritting. The page can be accessed via www.bedford.gov.uk/winterupdates

Residents can also report highways issues to the Council by using the 'ReportIt' tool. Matters can be logged on the system include, but are not limited to potholes, flooding and traffic signals. The issue will then be followed up by Council officers who will provide an update of action taken on the map. You can access the service at <https://highwaysreporting.bedford.gov.uk>

Advice on Keeping Warm in Winter

Age UK Bedfordshire is offering advice to older persons about staying warm this winter. For more information call 01234360510 or visit <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/bedfordshire/>