

## **Borough Councillors Report – July/August 2023**

### **High level Borough Items**

- **Councillor Jane Walker tables motion to give care leavers 'protected characteristic' status**

Councillor Jane Walker moved a motion with full cross party support at Full Council on July 12, 2023

The motion solidifies the Council's commitment to prioritising the well-being of care-experienced young people at the heart of everything the Council does. The motion allowed the council to become one of only forty in the country to recognise care-experienced people as a group who are subject to discrimination and protect them from this.

- **Rural Affairs Grant**

A friendly reminder that the Rural Affairs Grant is open for applications. The Scheme invites applications from rural organisations or rural Parish Councils for capital expenditure for projects that are in the interests of their local inhabitants.

Further information can be found on the Council website here: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/benefits-and-support/grants-and-funding/grants-and-funding-towns-and-organisations>. If you have any problems accessing your saved form or any other problems with the form, please email [CommunityWelfare@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:CommunityWelfare@bedford.gov.uk)

The Council has also streamlined how it determines Rural Affairs Grants. The previous Rural Affairs Committee that had been responsible for determining grants meet only 12 times in the last 10 years, with an equal number of meetings (12) being cancelled. During 2017 until late 2021 no meetings were held – the current executive determined the committee had not been functioning at a sustainable level to support residents and thus the process has been streamlined.

- **Kerbside glass collection scheme**

The Council is looking to trial kerbside glass collection in a number of different areas of the borough.

The Council is currently looking into the rounds and types of vehicles/containers that this trial will need – alongside a plan to have collections taking place with different containers and different [collection] frequencies within the trial period. A precise date has not been set but we expect that the trial period may start this year.

- **Local Plan 2040 hearings**

The hearing sessions of the Examination of the Bedford Local Plan will be held in two blocks and opened at 12 midday on Monday 12 June 2023. Block 1 hearings have concluded, the 2<sup>nd</sup> block will take place:

- Week 3: Monday 11 September to Friday 15 September.
- Week 4: Monday 18 September to Friday 22 September.

- **Bedford Borough Council to invest into Homeless service**

Bedford Councils Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation service does not have the staff to meet service demands.

The number of homeless families or individuals needing temporary accommodation has increase by 181%, going from 220 in April 2020 to 620 in April 2023. The missing resources mean the Council now face £5.7m in potential overspends in order to keep the service running for the next financial year.

The current administration is outlining a plan to invest in this service to address the issues.

- **Caterlink**

Bedford Borough Council offers a buyback school meal service which is contracted out to Caterlink. The contract ended at the end of the 2022/23 academic year requiring the Council to either retender or cease the service.

The original tender, agreed by the previous administration, received no bids with potential bidders citing contract length, capped meal price, meal transport & waste costs as barriers to bidding. As a result, the Council was left insufficient lead-time to re-tender the original contract or make it viable for schools to undertake individual re-tendering processes. Instead of ceasing the service the Council has re-negotiated the contract with incumbent provider Caterlink so the Council can continue to operate this service on behalf of the schools.

The most financially sustainable option negotiated means the school meal price is now £2.72 for primary and £2.82 for secondary schools which is an increase of (22p) £2.40 for Primary and (12p) £2.60 for Secondary.

- **Leisure Contract**

Fusion Lifestyle have been informed that the Council do not intend to trigger the clause in the contract that would allow the contract to be extended beyond that expiry date [31 January 2024].

More information on the Council's leisure strategy will be released in the later part of this year.

- **Council Overspend**

Under the previous administration the Borough Council has a £2.269 million budget overspend for the financial year 2022/23. The Current administration is working to balance the books and keep the Council financially resilient.

### **Wider Borough Items**

- **Greyfriars police station redevelopment**

Planning permission has been secured for the redevelopment of Greyfriars police station by DLP Planning Ltd behalf of the Police and Crime Commissioner of Bedfordshire.

The redevelopment could see 105 new homes plus 'town centre uses' on the ground floor of the building.

- **RAAC**

Over the Summer, the Department for Education instructed surveyors to undertake site visits to all state schools in Bedford Borough.

Following those site visits, no state school was identified as requiring closure due to the presence of RAAC. As a precaution, Bedford Borough Council are instructing their own team of surveyors to

undertake intrusive surveys over the next few weeks across all maintained schools to fully eliminate any possibility of RAAC being present in these buildings.

The Chief Education Officer has written to all academies to request that they also undertake these intrusive surveys if they have any building that was constructed prior to 1995. Should RAAC be identified in any building then we will work with those schools to ensure there is a clear plan in place that prioritises staff and pupil safety as well as minimises any disruption to learning.