

Borough Councillor's Update Harrold Ward – July/August 2017

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Post 16 Transport

I have written in recent months about my total opposition to the increase in school transport costs for Post 16 (sixth form) pupils which will apply from September 2017. This was agreed by the Mayor's Executive in March of this year following a public consultation.

Those Post 16 pupils who are eligible to use school transport will now have to pay £890 per year to travel to school, as opposed to the previous charge of £381. The current subsidy for low-income families will be retained and will see these pupils charged £190 a year, although I am concerned that many families may not fit into the 'low income' bracket and could find it extremely difficult to meet the cost of travel, or else be forced to take their children to school via car which will increase congestion and pollution.

Parents or carers have the right to appeal if they are refused free or subsidised transport to college. There is a two stage appeal process; the first stage of the appeal is heard by a senior officer of the Council and if that appeal is not successful appellants can proceed to a stage two appeal which is heard by a panel of three councillors. The appeal form can be submitted on line at <http://bit.ly/2iFdYtV> Alternatively a hard copy of the appeal form is available by calling the Council's Democratic Services department on 01234 228523.

Below is a link to the Transport Policy page; on that page you will find a further link to the Post Statutory School Transport Policy for 2017/18. This includes details of the policy and the appeals process (at Section 2): <http://bit.ly/2vAIOH9>

General enquiries, including about charges, can be directed to Customer Services on (01234) 718004 and further enquiries about appeals can be directed to Democratic Services via the number provided above.

Healthcare Review

A report has been released summarising the work to date of the Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Sustainability and Transformation Plan (BLMK STP), which is reviewing the future of health and social care services in the area.

STP processes are being undertaken at the behest of NHS England in 44 areas across the country with a view towards improving service quality and reducing costs. The BLMK STP has been looking, therefore, at reconfiguring services in accordance with 5 priorities, as per the below table taken from www.blmkstp.co.uk:

- **Priority 1: Illness prevention and health promotion:** Preventing ill health and promoting good health by giving people the knowledge and ability, individually and through local communities, to manage their own health effectively
- **Priority 2: Primary, community and social care:** Delivering high quality and resilient primary, community and social care services across Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes
- **Priority 3: Secondary care:** Delivering high quality and sustainable secondary (hospital) care services across Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes
- **Priority 4: Digital programme:** Working together to design and deliver a digital programme, maximising the use of information technology to support the delivery of care and services in the community and in primary and secondary care
- **Priority 5: Demand management and commissioning:** Working together to make sure the right services are available in the right place, at the right time for everyone using health and social care in Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes

The BLMK STP's latest report, 'What We've Heard So Far', was published on the 30th June 2017 and summarises feedback received following engagement with the public as well as NHS staff and clinicians.

There has been particular concern from Bedford Borough residents around Priority 3 which is assessing the possibility of reconfiguring services between the 3 hospital sites in Bedford, Luton & Dunstable and Milton Keynes. This apprehension follows the verdict of the former Bedfordshire & Milton Keynes Healthcare Review, which ended last year and was not taken forward, that maternity services should be transferred from Bedford Hospital to Milton Keynes Hospital.

The June report states that there is support for the general principle of more services being specialised on certain sites and care provided closer to home (by GP services in particular). It also acknowledges, however, concerns around transport issues for patients should particular services be centralised, particularly with regard to maternity, A & E and paediatrics. The report can be read in full at <http://www.blmkstp.co.uk/what-weve-heard-so-far/>

The findings from the engagement process will now be taken forward by the BLMK STP in drafting a 'Case for Change' which will provide further details of proposed service amendments. It was also announced in June by NHS England that the BLMK STP is 1 of 8 areas across the country which will become an Accountable Care System; the exact details of this arrangement are as yet unclear, but it will likely involve healthcare commissioners and providers working collaboratively to a greater extent, particularly in managing services and budgets.

Borough councillors from all parties agree with the general aim of the STP to integrate services as a means of securing service improvements, but are united also in their view that the key services of maternity, paediatrics and A & E must remain at Bedford Hospital.

East Midlands Trains

A consultation is being held by the Department for Transport (DfT) on proposals to amend the East Midlands rail service which currently provides fast trains from Bedford to London St Pancras.

The consultation will inform the drafting of a contract for the new East Midlands rail franchise from March 2019. Bedford is served by the Intercity (between London St Pancras and Sheffield / Derby / Nottingham / Leicester) and London Commuter (providing trains stopping at stations closer to London) lines.

In launching the consultation, the DfT stated that changes need to be made in order to address issues such as crowded trains and long journey times. It was identified, in particular, that these problems are evident on the Intercity route travelling from the midlands into London.

You may have seen there has been coverage in the local press around potential changes to the East Midlands service stopping at Bedford. It is proposed that Bedford will no longer be served by the Intercity service (as set out above) during peak hours, although trains travelling from Corby to London St Pancras will continue to stop here. Recent correspondence from the Department for Transport to our MP, Alistair Burt suggests that there are plans to put on more trains from Corby to Bedford which would make up for the shortfall should trains from Leicester / Derby / Nottingham / Sheffield no longer stop here. The Department for Transport has said:

'The plans that we are currently consulting on will mean that Bedford will be served by the same number of East Midlands trains during peak hours, but these trains will start at Corby – rather than Sheffield or Nottingham – meaning that there will be more seats for passengers at Bedford during the rush hour. We understand the importance of these services to commuters in Bedford and our plans will enable them to keep benefitting from fast trains to London during busy periods. As you know, the consultation has not yet finished, so no decision has been definitively made .

'The growth planned in Bedford and the surrounding area in the coming years will play a vital role in contributing to the country's economy – and transport infrastructure will play a vital role in supporting this growth. Passengers on the Thameslink route are already starting to see the benefits of the £7billion Thameslink Programme with longer platforms and new, modern trains, offering greater capacity. From 2018 the Thameslink route will also include new destinations providing new direct links and better connections to and through London. We are also delivering a new East-West Rail line, providing Bedford with direct rail services to Cambridge and Oxford for the first time in half a century.'

I would encourage all residents to participate in the consultation in the coming weeks.

You can view the consultation document and details of how to respond at this link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-east-midlands-rail-franchise> The consultation will end on the 11th October.

Library Services

From the 4th September the Council is to change the way its library services operate through establishing a 'Library Plus' model. This was the subject of a public consultation last year as the Council sought to realise efficiencies within the service to meet financial pressures.

Library Plus will see the introduction of self-service hours at Bedford Central Library, Wootton and Bromham with users accessing the services without assistance from staff. Core, staffed opening hours will be reduced. During the consultation, users of the libraries at Putnoe and Kempston made clear their desire not to join the Library Plus scheme, which means those facilities will see their opening hours reduced instead.

More information on the changes can be seen on the Council's website at the following link: http://virtual-library.culturalservices.net/webingres/bedfordshire/vlib/0.beds_libraries/bbc_changing.htm

Changes are also to be introduced for the Council's Mobile Library and Library Link services. The Mobile Library currently visits 40 communities with 182 stops per month. The Library Link service has 20 routes and visits housebound individuals' homes, residential homes and sheltered accommodation units.

Following a public consultation earlier in the year, the timetable and routes for both services are to be amended from October. For more details see: http://virtual-library.culturalservices.net/webingres/bedfordshire/vlib/0.beds_libraries/mobile_libraries.htm

Rural Crime

A scheme tackling rural crime has been deemed a success since its inception earlier in the year.

In March, the Bedfordshire Police & Crime Commissioner, Kathryn Holloway, announced the establishment of Operation Sentinel Rural. This has seen a team of an Inspector, Sergeant, 4 Police Constables and 4 Police Community Support Officers focus solely on rural policing issues.

Since the initiative was launched, the rural crime team has been involved in a range of operations including 900 speed checks, the seizing of 39 vehicles and carrying out 9 arrests.

The rural crime team can be contacted via opsentinel.rural@Bedfordshire.pnn.police.uk

A-Levels and GCSEs

In August pupils around the country received their GCSE and A-Level results.

GCSEs

Pupils undertaking their GCSEs this year did so under a new system which has reduced the emphasis on coursework. It also introduced a new grading system for English Language, English Literature and Maths with numerical grading of 1 (lowest score) – 9 (highest score) replacing the traditional A* - U grades (which remain for all other subjects). This new system is said to be more suited in differentiating the brightest pupils, with fewer attaining the highest grade of 9 compared with those achieving A* under the old system.

In the Borough:

- 62.24% of Bedford Borough students attained Grade 4 or above, the required standard, in English and Maths.

- 37.87% of Bedford Borough students attained Grade 5 or above (strong pass) in English and Maths.
- The Borough's average 'Attainment 8' score was 46.04 (this is the average score obtained by a student for their best 8 GCSE results). It is unclear as yet how this compares with the national average in 2017, although the Borough's average in 2016 was 49.4 against a national average of 48.5. This would suggest, therefore, that results are slightly down compared with last year, although this is in line with the national trend.

A-Levels

In the Borough, provisional figures showed that 78% of pupils achieved 3 or more A-Levels graded A* - E.

Careers Advice

The Jobs Hub, based in Bedford and established by the Council and the Jobs Centre, provides 1 to 1 support and careers guidance. It also has links with local businesses looking for new staff.

This may be of interest to anyone seeking an apprenticeship or employment and possibly those who are thinking about their next steps following education or training. For more information search 'Bedford Jobs Hub', call 01234 223510 or email the.jobshub@bedford.gov.uk

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Free School

Bedford Bedford is one of twenty local authorities selected by the Government to establish a new free school for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

The Council is now searching for a partner to work with to establish the school, as well as to determine its size and location. It is unclear at this stage as to when the school will open.

A free school can be set up by community groups such as parents, teachers, charities or businesses where a local need for places can be demonstrated.

Riverside North

The Riverside North development in Bedford, including the cinema and restaurants, opened at the beginning of September.

Ward Fund

I have now received notification of our Council Ward Funds for 2017/18 which allows me to make a financial contribution to local schemes benefitting the community.

If you feel you have a scheme you feel could benefit, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

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