

Borough Councillor's Update

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School Structural Review

Plans were approved in January for the Borough to move to a 2 tier education system following a public consultation and negotiations between the Council and schools over admissions arrangements.

Despite strong Ofsted ratings, the Borough has consistently struggled in recent years when it comes to GCSE performance. Some have pointed the finger of blame at the current 3 tier system, arguing that the extra transition is unnecessarily disruptive to a child's education and that it is harder to attract and retain teachers as the system is different from most areas. The Council has, therefore, set aside £25.566m to make the necessary changes to school sites over the period 2016/17 – 2018/19 to allow for the implementation of a 2 tier system.

Sharnbrook Upper School's GCSE results have been consistently very strong in recent years, with 74% of pupils attaining 5 A* - C grades including English and maths in 2015; well above the national average of 53.8%. The Sharnbrook Academy Federation (made up of Sharnbrook Upper and its feeder middle schools) is, however, of the view that a move to a 2 tier system would provide the best opportunity of maintaining high standards in the coming years.

As a result, Sharnbrook Upper will convert to a secondary school from September 2017, extending its age range from 13 – 18 to 11 – 18. This means that both Harrold and Margaret Beaufort Middle Schools will merge with their respective village lower schools to form two primary schools feeding into Sharnbrook. Harrold will, therefore, have a primary school catering for Years Reception to Year 6. Pupils will thereafter move to the secondary school in Sharnbrook. Lincroft Middle School is to convert to a secondary school, extending its age range to 11 – 16.

School Transport

The Borough Council is undertaking a public consultation on a proposal to amend its School Transport Policy from 2017/18.

As it stands, free school transport is offered to pupils attending their catchment area or nearest school if they meet specified eligibility criteria. It is proposed that the Policy is amended so that free transport is available only for those travelling to their nearest school, subject to criteria. This means that free transport will no longer be provided on the basis of catchment areas. Pupils who are eligible under the current Policy will not, however, be affected until they leave their current school.

Details of how to respond to the consultation, which ends on the 31st May, can be seen at the Council and Democracy' and then 'Consultations' pages of the Council's website.

Bin Collections

The Borough Council operates weekly black bin collections and alternate weekly collections for recycling and green waste. The service is at present funded partly through a £2.3m grant received from the Government in 2012 which was provided on the basis of the Council maintaining weekly collections until 2016/17.

As the grant is set to run out, the Council's Executive has said it intends to launch a consultation in the spring on moving to fortnightly collections.

Dog Control Consultation

The Borough Council has launched a public consultation on the proposed implementation of a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) relating to dogs. The PSPO will replace all dog control orders currently in operation in the Borough and will, according to the consultation document, provide a more 'consistent' approach covering 4 areas as reproduced below:

- *Exclusion of dogs from certain areas – this includes all outdoor enclosed children's play areas*
- *Failure to clear up your dog's mess on public highways and other publicly accessible land across the Borough*
- *The keeping of dogs on leads in specified areas*
- *Leads by order - this covers the need for people to put and keep a dog on a lead when directed to do so by an authorized officer on all public highways and other publicly accessible land across the Borough*

The geographical areas to which the Order will apply are listed in the document which can be seen under the 'Council and Democracy' and then 'Consultations' pages of the Council's website. The consultation will end on the 31st May.

Western Bypass

The extension of the Bedford Western Bypass, linking the A428 at Biddenham with the A6 at Clapham, opened on the 25th April. It is hoped that the new road, costing £18.6m, will alleviate traffic congestion in Bedford by taking vehicles out of the town centre.

East West Rail

It has been announced that Sandy has been included in a planned rail link between Bedford and Cambridge.

The western section of the East West Rail scheme will connect Oxford, Milton Keynes and Bedford with works set to begin by 2019. In addition to this, a central section is planned which will extend the line to Cambridge.

Overall, 20 options were considered for the extension between Bedford and Cambridge, with the Sandy option being taken forward. The exact details of the route are still to be determined; for example, it is not yet clear whether the route will pass to the north or the south of Bedford though it seems more likely that it will be the latter. Network Rail has indicated that there will be a consultation on the proposed route in May of this year at which time the identity of the villages most likely to be affected will be known. For more information see <http://www.networkrail.co.uk/east-west-rail/>

Potholes

The Borough is set to benefit from a Government fund investing £250m to repair potholes across the country. The Council is to receive an extra £137k to fix an estimated 2585 potholes.

Customer Service Centre

The Council's Customer Service Centre, situated at 2 Horne Lane, has from April had reduced opening hours following a decision as part of the budget setting process for 2016/17.

The Centre allows residents to make enquiries and payments in relation to a range of Council services such as planning, Blue Badges, housing and Council Tax. It will be open from 8.45am to 5pm Monday to Thursday and 8.45am to 4.45pm on Fridays. The Payments Office will operate from 8.45am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Both offices will now be closed on Saturdays.

Bedford River Festival

The River Festival attracts around 250,000 people with a fun fair, stalls, entertainment, music and fireworks. It is to be held on the weekend of the 16th – 17th July. For more information visit www.bedfordcornexchange.co.uk