

Borough Councillors Report – September 2023

High level Borough Items

- **Bedford Borough Council Rural Support**

Bedford Borough Council has launched a rural grant programme that is open for applications from both businesses and community groups located in an eligible rural area to help improve productivity, connectivity and boost prosperity.

For more information about the UKSPF programme in Bedford Borough, visit <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/business/invest-bedford/rural-england-prosperity-fund>

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 (13) 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.

- **Caterlink**

To address possible confusion about the Caterlink contract, please see a summary of the Council's decision.

Through finding an affordable provider, the Council offers a buyback school meal service to help schools procure affordable school meals – this contract ended at the end of the previous school year which required the Council to find a new provider.

The original tender was agreed by the previous administration – this tender received no bids as potential contractors cited issues with the price cap and costs as barriers to bidding. This left the Council in a difficult position as there was insufficient lead-time afforded to make it viable for the Council to re-tender the contract or for schools to undertake individual re-tender.

Instead of ceasing the service, which would result in schools struggling to meet their statutory duty to provide a school meal service, the Council renegotiated with the incumbent contractor Caterlink to continue to offer the school meal service. The Council sought to negotiate the best price possible for schools however, due to increases in food costs and other factors the price of school meals had increased slightly.

There have been suggestions there are reserves which can be used. The reserves mentioned are there to be used for the maintenance and upkeep of the kitchens equipment of the schools that are part of the service as well as pay for the administration and oversight of the service. If these reserves are used to try and decrease the cost of school meals, this would leave schools in a vulnerable position if their equipment had broken down as there would not be sufficient funding to support with replacement and repairs.

There have also been comments made about the legality of schools using their pupil premium for meal provisions. The Guidance is very clear that the Pupil Premium can be used for “Breakfast clubs and meal provision” under the ‘Wider Strategies’ section – schools have done and continue to use their pupil premium for meal provisions and this isn’t illegal as per the guidance from the Government.

- **Town Centre**

In the last 3 month 8 new store have opened which included:

- Kokoro
- Tops Pizza
- Ruby's Aesthetics
- FAD3D Studio
- ADORN
- Squires Barbershop
- Mercy In Action
- Edinburgh Woollen Mill

The Council have also revamped their clean-up efforts with a more comprehensive cleaning plan now in place to keep our Town Centre looking smart. These are modest improvements but one of a number of factors at play in influencing footfall and Town Centre vitality.

- **Family Hubs**

The Council opened a new Family Hub in Queens Park this month. Family Hubs provide assistance to families from conception right through to age 19, and up to 25 for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Their aim is to offer every child, young person and their family the best start in life.

There are plans to also open a brand-new hub in the centre of Bedford and one in Kempston which will appeal more to older children. More information on these projects will be released in due course.

Wider Borough Items

- **A428 Turvey**

Phase one of work on the A428 through Turvey, aimed at improving local road surfaces while addressing local flooding issues, began on Monday 18 of September and continue until Friday 13 of October. During this period there will be a full road closure, 24 hours per day.

Phase 2 will commence on Monday, 16th October and conclude on Friday, 3rd November – there will be a full road closure from 8pm to 6am, between the Bedford Borough Council's boundary and Jack's Lane, allowing for the resurfacing of the road.