

# Cabinet – Tuesday 2 February 2021

## Agenda Item 8 (References from Other Bodies)

### Notes:

1. Only the Chair of the referring body / motion owner may speak on a referral from Council, a Committee, or Scrutiny Committee (Cabinet Procedure Rule 2.3 (d) & (e)).
2. Referral from Budget and Resources Scrutiny Committee (26 January 2021) will be considered and published with Item 9.
3. Referrals from Council on 20 January 2021 and Strategic Placemaking Scrutiny Committee on 13 January 2021 are deferred until the next Cabinet meeting.

Referring Body	Page Nos
<b>(a) Council (25 November 2020)</b>	
(i) Motion – Mass Testing for COVID-19 in Milton Keynes (Councillor Walker)	2
(ii) Motion – The Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health and Mental Health Services (Councillor Jenkins)	2 – 3
(iii) Motion – No Child Should Go Hungry (Councillor Carr)	3 – 4
(iv) Motion – Keeping Affordable Homes Affordable (Councillor Ferrans)	5 – 6
<b>(b) Budget &amp; Resources Scrutiny Committee (26 January 2021)</b>	
Report on the Draft Budget for 2021/22 (Councillor R Bradburn)	N/a (see note 2)

**(a) Council (25 November 2020)**

(i) Motion – Mass Testing for COVID-19 in Milton Keynes

*That this Council resolves to call on the Leader of the Council to apply for inclusion in the mass testing programme as quickly as possible for the benefit of the people of Milton Keynes in line with advice from the Director of Public Health.*

Response from Councillor Marland (Leader of the Council):

In addition to the PCR (lab) test sites that are available in the Borough, the Council requested a supply of the Lateral Flow Tests offered by government and around 20,000 test kits were received just before the new year. Lateral Flow Tests produce a result within 45 minutes. They are less good at picking up cases than the PCR tests however they can identify people who are infectious when used for screening people without symptoms.

A lateral flow testing centre in the Central Library opened as a pilot in the new year, aimed at key workers (people who have contact with the public or have to come into a site to work during lockdown). More than 700 rapid tests were administered during the first full week of operation and more key workers are taking advantage of the testing. Staff from the following groups have used the tests: police, fire, adult social care, waste & recycling and early years settings. Every positive asymptomatic case we've found means that person is now isolating instead of passing the virus on without knowing it to colleagues and the public. The centre is open from 9.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday.

Capacity for the standard PCR testing has continued to increase, and we have made greater use of this additional capacity to undertake targeted testing. For example, in December we encouraged secondary school children and their families to get a postal PCR test. We have also organised for mobile testing to come into workplaces where we have had large outbreaks in workplaces. Several companies in the area are now undertaking lateral flow testing of their employees.

---

(ii) Motion – The Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health and Mental Health Services

*That this Council resolves to:*

- (b) *request that the Cabinet member responsible continue to prioritise mental health services; and*
- (c) *make representations to the Minister for Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Patient Safety, to ask that the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) review resources that will be needed for mental health services as the impact of Covid-19 on mental health grows.*

Response from Councillor O’Neill (Cabinet member for Adult Services):

I remain fully committed to prioritising support to people with mental health needs and the services that support them in Milton Keynes.

It is accepted that COVID-19 has had a detrimental effect on all, however as reported by the NHS confederation (2020), there is an increase in people accessing mental health support due to the wider impact of the pandemic i.e. self-isolation, financial insecurity, bereavement and increases in substance abuse and domestic violence. The study goes on to report that a substantial proportion of these people were not previously known to Mental Health Services. A Rethink Survey completed with around 1500 people with pre-existing Mental illness found that 79% reported their mental health had got worse or much worse as a result of the pandemic (NHS Federation, 2020).

This national picture mirrors the situation in Milton Keynes; the Mental Health (social care) Team have experienced a 58% increase in referrals (compared to the same period in 2019) for people where there is so much concern that the police have used the Mental Health Act to take them to a place of safety.

Between April 2020 to September 2020 the Mental Health (social care) team received 387 referrals for Mental Health Act assessments compared to 292 during the same time period in 2019.

Good partnership working has never been so important and engagement between health, social care, housing and drug and alcohol services focussed on supporting vulnerable individuals has improved during the COVID pandemic period. This is seen as positive step forward.

We have invested £283K to establish the MKC Community Support Team as a permanent resource to provide support to individuals who have multiple complex needs including mental health, drugs and alcohol and entrenched rough sleeping.

I will write the Minister for Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Patient Safety to ask that the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) review resources that will be needed for mental health services as the impact of Covid-19 on mental health grows.

---

(iii) Motion - No Child Should Go Hungry

*That this Council resolves to request Cabinet to:*

*(a) reaffirm its own commitment to fight child poverty; and*

*(b) lobby the Conservative Government and the Milton Keynes MPs for:*

*(i) Free school meals to every pupil whose parents or guardians are in receipt of Universal Credit;*

- (ii) Food vouchers for every one of those pupils in every school holiday and during any period of lockdown; and*
- (iii) Free school meals to pupils from low-income families whose parents or guardians have no recourse to public funds and destitute asylum seekers under s4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.*

Response from Councillor Nolan (Cabinet member for Children's Services):

I was pleased to receive the second report of the Child Poverty Commission at Cabinet on the 15 December, which contains three important recommendations.

The Council has a major role in delivering these recommendations. In responding to the Covid-19 Crisis, the Council made strides in setting its delivery and recovery actions to challenge child poverty. Its long-term plans through the Covid-19 Recovery Plan, Town Bid and the Futures Strategy set goals within the areas of skills, homes, and jobs.

Tackling inequality and poverty is an important part of our Council Plan. This year we have set aside a significant investment of £200,000 in MK Food Bank, including providing cash and in-kind support, such as free use of warehouse facilities at Saxon Court. This has led to over 9,000 food parcels being distributed. Other local action has continued and has included 8,500 free lunches distributed through our children's centres, targeting young children from low income families, particularly two-year-old funded children.

We will continue to work hard to fight and reduce child poverty by:

- establishing a Child Poverty Challenge Partnership in Milton Keynes;
- making work to challenge child poverty flourish by challenging all organisations, business, services and agencies in Milton Keynes to have a Child Poverty Challenge Plan based on the Commissions' reports and establish a new funding trust for MK; and
- using the Council's influence over its own services, its role in informing national policy agendas and work with its partners, to develop initiatives that directly contribute to the alleviation and reduction of poverty.

Part of our work will be to lobby government to play its part, by reducing the waiting time for universal credit from 5 weeks to 2 weeks, in order to ensure that changes in employment do not lead to persistent child poverty. I will of course therefore be delighted to write to the Minister and two Milton Keynes MP's in line with the motion.

(iii) Motion – Keeping Affordable Homes Affordable

1. *That the Council resolves to request that Cabinet:*
  - (a) *investigates whether the planning system, either by conditions on permissions, or by policy in the next Local Plan, can be used to outlaw such premiums or to restrict their value;*
  - (b) *investigates whether the Council, when selling new shares in Council properties, can outlaw such premiums or restrict their value; and*
  - (c) *investigates whether the Council, when handling requests to sell existing shares, can outlaw such premiums or restrict their value.*
2. *That this Council then requests Cabinet to do all it can to stop the practice of charging, via any mechanism, amounts excessively beyond the value of the homes and contents being sold, when shared ownership properties are sold on, striking a balance between compensating the owner for the share of the market value of improvements made that they will not retain, and keeping the home affordable for subsequent owners.*

Response from Councillor Darlington (Cabinet member for Public Realm and Housing Services):

This motion raises important issues. When Shared Ownership properties are sold on it can be difficult to strike a balance between compensating the owner for improvements made to the property and ensuring the resale value is affordable.

The actual rules for resale used by both the Council and many Registered Providers are contained in the lease and can vary greatly.

Where the leaseholder is purchasing additional shares, valuations are by way of Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) valuation.

However, when an existing shared owner has staircased to 100% ownership and sells, or where they undertake a so-called back-to-back (or simultaneous staircasing) transaction (which is where an owner who currently owns less than 100% of the property sells 100% of the property, effectively purchasing the additional shares immediately before selling the whole property), the Council or Registered Housing Providers cannot currently prevent a premium being charged.

On a case by case basis, we may be able to restrict premiums depending on the existing lease drafting. Most leases, however, do not have a clause permitting this as the leases are old and have come to Milton Keynes Council from predecessors in title.

Unfortunately, it is not currently possible for the Council to control the practice of additional premiums on Shared Ownership properties, either through the grant of planning permission (including the use of conditions and/or Section 106 agreements to prohibit the practice) or through planning policy (either current policies within Plan:MK or new policies in a new Local Plan).

I will work with officers to understand if there are any practical steps we can take to ensure a better balance moving forward, both in terms of leases issued by Registered Housing Providers and the Council itself. In reality, the only way to vary existing leases is if both parties to the lease agree to permit additional restrictions, which is unlikely. When new Shared Ownership properties are added to our housing stock, we will review whether we can add a clause into a new lease to restrict such premiums.

However, these schemes sit within a national framework and we will also need to consider the final details for the Government's proposed national model for Shared Ownership, which is likely to be implemented later this year and will include a new model lease that will in all likelihood mean that more power and control will be transferred to the seller. I will write to the Minister with the points raised in this motion and hope that they consider these points within the implementation of the new framework.