

Meeting: Council

Date: 29 November 2023

From: David McMullan, resident

To: Councillor Wright, Executive Member for Adult Services, Health & Housing.

Question:

Could the Council please let us know what information and support will be available to the approximately 2030 households currently receiving either legacy benefits (Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support) and/or tax credits during the first stage of the upcoming managed migration to Universal Credit, when people living in the Bracknell Job Centre area receive their Migration Notices from the DWP and has the Council plans to update its website to include information advising people to complete a benefit calculation to ensure they are getting their full entitlement to legacy benefits before moving onto Universal Credit and stressing when residents receive their Managed Migration Notice they need to make a claim for Universal Credit themselves by the 3-month deadline giving in this Notice or their benefits will end.

Answer:

The move from legacy benefits, such as Housing Benefit, onto Universal Credit, is being led by the Department of Work and Pensions rather than Bracknell Forest. The DWP will be the lead agency for providing advice and support to residents about the move, but we have been informed that anyone in scope will receive a leaflet to advise about the change in the first instance. This will then be followed with a migration letter, setting out the timescale that a resident would have to make an application for Universal Credit.

It is very likely that many of those who receive legacy benefits and so are in scope to move over to Universal Credit, may feel anxious about the change, but a high number may also not be known to the Council. As we do at present, where a customer reaches out for assistance, we refer into the Citizens Advice Help to Claim service for new claims to Universal Credit. All staff within the Housing Benefit team and wider Welfare Service are aware of the change, and the process that residents will need to follow and will be available to assist with any queries regarding the benefits that we administer.

Our website has been updated and includes information to signpost people to the government information on migration to Universal Credit.

In many cases, those who are in scope to move, may receive a benefit such as Housing Benefit and may already have been advised to complete an online calculation, as many who are in work, are better off on Universal Credit, than the legacy benefits it replaces. We will maintain our commitment to provide guidance and support to residents in the borough who reach out for assistance, and to seek to support those in scope to move, during this challenging period.

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Meeting: Council

Date: 29 November 2023

From: Councillor C Eberle

To: Councillor Gillbe, Executive Member for Planning and Transport.

Question:

Can the Executive Member give an update on the Council's plans and progress in increasing the use of public transport, both in pursuance of the Climate Change Action Plan, and also to help those residents who do not have access to car transport; particularly in relation to bus transport to and from Crowthorne and Sandhurst railway stations?

Answer:

Bus patronage within Bracknell Forest is continuing to grow back following the COVID pandemic. Data from Thames Valley Buses, who operate 80% of routes within borough, shows that overall patronage is up 17% since the start of 2023 and up by 26% compared to this time last year. Whilst patronage on individual services will vary, these figures show that travel by bus is broadly 3% down on pre-pandemic levels.

Commercial services are performing better than council supported routes, and fare paying passengers have returned in much greater numbers than bus pass holders. In part this is due to the positive impact of the national £2 single fare cap, but also the national change in travel habits of our older population.

Promotion of bus travel by operators is key, but the council can also play a part. Next month we are promoting bus use on our supported services through a free bus offer for journeys heading to the town centre on the first four Saturdays in December. We hope to encourage non-bus users to leave the car at home during this busy period and instead enjoy the experience of modern bus travel. Hopefully for many this will be an introduction to the range of benefits that bus travel has to offer.

We will also continue to work closely with bus operators to identify how bus travel can be made easier and more convenient. Technology has its part to play, not only on the bus but also through the use of real-time information for bus arrival and departure times and to simplify how passengers pay for their fare. I am pleased to say that local bus operators are equally keen to drive these improvements forward.

However, it is important to encourage our residents to use their local bus services. The contribution that bus travel can make to the environment is clear, but for those without any other form of transport it can also be a life-line. Alongside our work with community transport providers, and voluntary groups such as the Arc, (who run a voluntary car scheme), the Council continues to fund a network of bus services that keep the borough connected. But the cost of these services continues to grow.

Against the back-drop of local authority funding pressures, providing new bus services that cannot otherwise be provided commercially by operators is now unaffordable. Therefore partnership working with local town and parish councils will be key in order to share the challenges of keeping our communities connected. This is a conversation which I hope can take place with regard to connecting people and facilities within Crowthorne and Sandhurst, for example, and I know that officers are continuing to explore the practical opportunities available.

In closing, I would like to encourage our residents to support their local bus services in the best way possible – and that is to travel by bus whenever they can. Not just to enjoy a journey that helps the environment, but also to help maintain the viability of those services for those who rely on them.

Meeting: Council
Date: 29 November 2023
From: Councillor Harrison
To: Councillor Jefferies, Executive Member for Culture, Delivery and Public Protection

Question:

Following the agreed motion of the Council on 12 July 2023, when the Executive was called on to consider additional CCTV cameras to detect and deter fly tipping in the Borough, how many new CCTV cameras has the Council acquired for this purpose?

Answer:

I thank Cllr Harrison for the question.

The council's Officers in the Public Protection Partnership, continue to successfully target Envirocrime, including flytipping. When last the issue was presented to council, there was broad agreement that the service has been effective in this area of work using their "intelligence led" approach . This success is based upon using CCTV as part of their approach, in addressing antisocial behaviour. Therefore there has been no call from the service to ask for additional CCTV cameras to meet their objectives, so none have been purchased.

The relevant section of the motion calls on the Executive to commit to a "...review of the most effective use of the funds available due to any budget underspend in 2023/24, with specific consideration of whether additional CCTV cameras to tackle fly tipping represents value for money for residents".

I remain committed to doing this review when the financial outturn of the council is known at the end of the financial year.

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