

Renhold PC: Borough Councillors' Update – October 2017

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 is to 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.

Our understanding is that Bedford will continue to be served by the same number of trains during peak hours, but these will begin their journey at Corby rather than further north as at present. Nevertheless, no decisions have been made so it is important that service users give their views through the consultation. Along with Alistair Burt MP, we cannot support any reduction in the East Midlands service for Bedford Borough and will be responding accordingly. The consultation ends on the 11th October. You can view the document and details of how to respond at this link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-east-midlands-rail-franchise>

Library Services

On the 4th September the Council changed 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 also 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 overall 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

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 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 to differentiate the brightest pupils, with fewer attaining the highest grade of 9 compared with 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.
- Details of Mark Rutherford's performance can be seen here: <http://www.markrutherford.beds.sch.uk/>

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 Borough 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.

Ward Fund

We have now received notification of our Council Ward Funds for 2017/18 which allows us 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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