



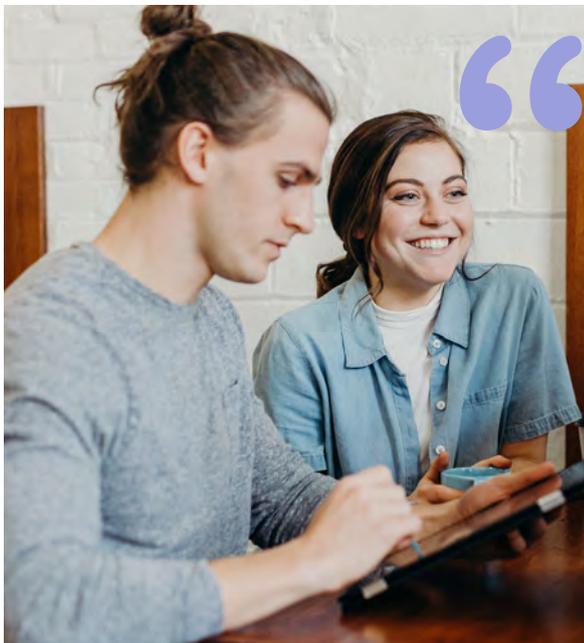
# Introducing Community Boards



*WORKING TOGETHER:*

**local** voices, **local** choices, **local** action

With the creation of the new Buckinghamshire Council we have the opportunity to work with our communities to explore issues that matter most to them and find creative solutions together with those who can make them happen. No single organisation can solve complex issues alone, so we will build strong links with residents and key partners including town and parish councils, voluntary and community groups, police, housing associations and health professionals.



*I really like that Bucks is being ambitious. With the creation of the new council this feels like our one chance to press the reset button, create something really fantastic that's not been done before.*

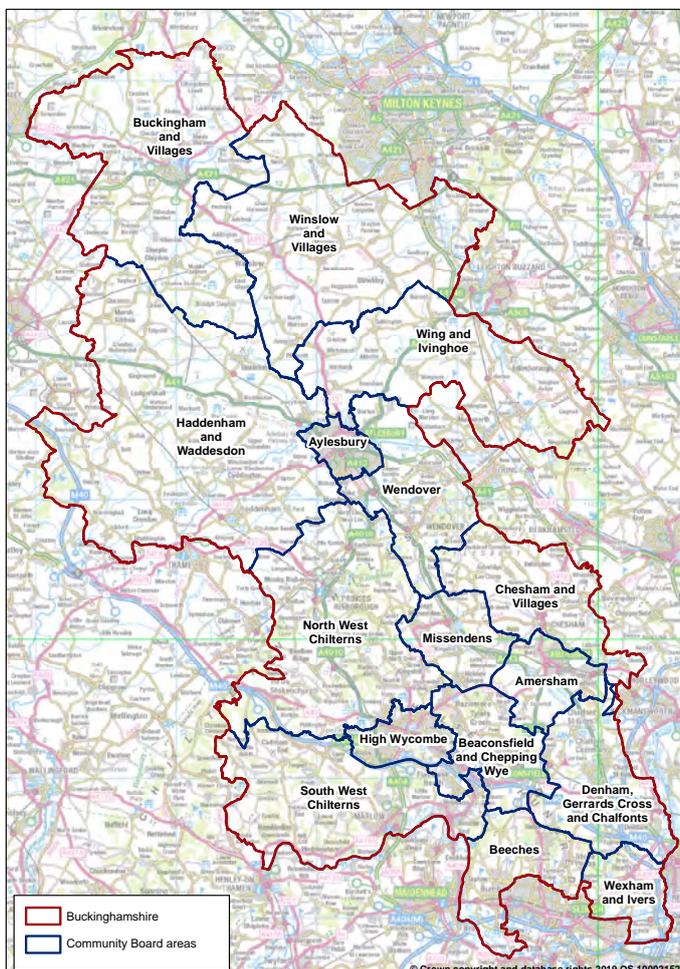
Jenifer Cameron, Action4Youth  
Chief Executive

**16**  
new community  
boards

**£3.9m**  
commitment

The 16 new Community Boards across Buckinghamshire will foster collaborative working in our communities, making the best use of people's skills, knowledge and passions. They will identify opportunities to make a real difference in people's lives.

This exciting new initiative, backed up by a £3.9 million commitment, will strengthen the voices of local people, helping them work with the council, local agencies and other organisations within their communities.





*The principle of working in this new way is exciting, limits the typical council style of boring meetings and gets out there, listening to what people say, what they want and more importantly help deliver what they need.*

Mrs Thompson, resident



### Community Boards will:

- Influence how decisions are made and how services are delivered.
- Represent the voice of local people.
- Capture thoughts, ideas and suggestions.
- Bring together key community partners and residents.
- Identify local needs and work to produce creative solutions.



In response to Covid-19 communities have come together quickly to help solve local problems and to support those in need. Addressing local issues is no longer about traditional structured meetings or endless agendas – now is the time to focus on quickly spotting local issues, listening to people and supporting their ideas, helping everyone come together to create solutions.

This local energy and collective community problem-solving sums up what successful Community Boards should look like. In the first few months the boards will support the Covid-19 recovery phase and establish good locality working practices for the future.

## Creative approaches

Effective Community Boards are vibrant and creative, bringing together people in the community in a number of ways - and certainly not solely made up of formal meetings. This approach requires a strong commitment to making a difference, doing things differently and being ready to explore new ideas. We know this from talking to other councils where this 'locality working' is already proving effective at creating thriving and empowered communities.

A mixture of core meetings and working groups will complement conversations that could take place in any public areas, including schools, pubs, youth clubs, libraries or sports clubs. The boards will embrace technology (Facebook Live, Instagram polls and questions, online forums and video conferencing) to maximise and sustain public engagement, participation and accessibility. Alongside these conversations, fun exercises and creative engagement and surveys will help to collect ideas and form community budgeting exercises or actions plans. Operational discussions about issues like potholes and planned road maintenance - that often take up much of the time at local meetings - will be addressed through a separate focused group to ensure sufficient time to go into the detail required.



Everyone is welcome to be a part of their Community Board. Best practice from elsewhere shows it is important that anyone, whether a resident, a business owner, a town or parish councillor, a charity representative or statutory partner should be able to sign up for updates on the Community Board and help shape it.



*The best thing we ever did - it needs a creative approach and the whole council to have passion, belief - the board coordinators are the most sought after jobs in our county.*

Gordon Elliott, Head of Community Engagement, Durham County Council

## In practice

The boards will develop their own rhythm and evolve over time. This moves away from traditional structured approaches to more open, responsive and inclusive discussions.

There will be many ways the boards will work with the community to identify what is important in each area and take action together. The boards will use local data, intelligence and the views of people and partners in the community to identify key areas of focus and priorities for the board. These priorities will help determine where the boards take action and allocate funding to improve the local area.

## Working groups

The boards are all about taking action and making a difference. Working groups will explore the local priorities, set up local projects and find creative ways to improve local services and the lives of people in their community.

These groups will draw in people from across the community who want to get involved and have the skills and passion to help on those specific projects. They will then feed into the core board meetings on progress.

The wider membership provides valuable intelligence, helping the council and partners understand and respond to local need.

### Potential areas of focus



Support for  
older people



Opportunities  
for children and  
young people



Tackling crime



Health and  
wellbeing



Transportation



Addressing  
environmental  
issues



Improving  
Community  
Facilities

## Community Board meetings

Five core meetings will be held per year to identify local priorities and bring together the work of the numerous informal working groups, as well as agreeing to the setting up of new ones.

Following the fantastic local collaborations made through the response to Coronavirus we need to take a pragmatic approach and recognise that we have some wonderful connections that are already in place with local groups and residents, as well as solid partnerships with parish and town councils. Although we still need to continue to work with other partners to help establish strong mechanisms for representation and involvement in the boards, it is essential not to hinder recovery planning and this will be a key priority for the boards in the first few months.

The core membership of the board includes Buckinghamshire Council councillors, town and parish councils and co-opted stakeholders – this could be chairs of working groups, local community groups and partners, at the chairman's discretion. The board will have a wider membership, including all those on working groups, residents, voluntary and community groups, local businesses, schools, Thames Valley Police, Fire Services and health partners.

Everyone's voice is welcome. The emphasis will be on hearing everyone's perceptions, furthering the board's understanding through innovative indicative voting and creative ways for communities to express themselves are essential.

It is vital that we support the community conversations that are already happening – the board meetings and membership will grow over time and the service will continue engagement plans. Most important is the mechanism to swiftly allocate money, and share local intelligence or data and concerns from working groups.

### Who is involved?



Young people



Fire service



Police



Healthcare professionals



Town and Parish Councillors



Buckinghamshire Council Councillors



Residents



Voluntary and community sector groups

## The role of the chairman

The role of the Community Board Chairman and the Vice Chairman is key in bringing together the right people – those who have local knowledge and relevant experience and expertise - to tackle local issues, to focus on how to achieve priorities, and to develop a board in which everyone feels heard, and able to voice their opinions. The Chairman is a Councillor of Buckinghamshire Council, and is appointed – normally on a two-year basis - by the Cabinet Member for Localism.

Our chairmen are 'visible' leaders who are committed, open minded and are able to demonstrate their commitment and passion by consistent involvement with the people that make up the Community Board. They are skilled at managing meetings, they inspire people to participate and build consensus by indicative voting.

They are active leaders who have good strategic oversight of the board. Developing an inspiring action plan, exciting agendas for meetings and reporting back to the Cabinet Member and council is the cornerstone of the role.



## The role of the coordinator

The energy and driving force behind each Community Board will be a dedicated coordinator.

They are the networkers and the fixers, responsible for developing the action plan with the chairman. They will make it 'come alive,' linking key stakeholders and partners within the board and outside to identify priorities, unpick complex issues and find creative solutions.

They are also be the 'eyes and ears' of the organisation locally, swiftly identifying and resolving local issues to enhance the reputation of the council. In times of crisis they coordinate and mobilise local resources, both for an immediate urgent response and for a long term recovery

## Community Board Coordinators

Each board will have a dedicated coordinator championing the local area. They will be the driving force for this new style of collaborative working which stretches far beyond traditional meetings.

They will support local devolution conversations, act as a connector with local partners, get creative at collating local voices, support informal discussions, and develop a board action plan that helps tackle issues. They will energise the board and working closely with the chairman, harness ideas and keep the momentum going.



Coordinators are the first point of contact for town and parish councils and other key stakeholders, developing working relationships across the Community Board area. They proactively explore opportunities to improve service delivery, build local capacity and support local devolution where appropriate.

They will also manage the local delegated budget, ensuring that applications meet the criteria and funds are allocated in line with the agreed priorities.

## Funding allocation

Community Boards have been allocated a budget of £3.9m to support their work in tackling and solving local issues.

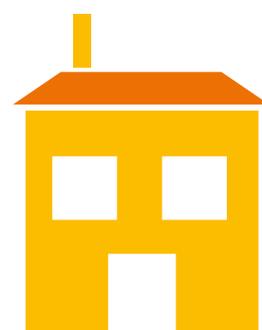
The budget for each board is allocated based on:



**Population**



**Levels of deprivation**



**Proposed housing growth**

By consulting widely with residents and board members on what the key local priorities are, the budgets will be targeted where they will make the most impact.

Local groups, voluntary sector organisations and town and parish councils will be able to apply to the Community Board for funding to deliver projects that address the agreed local priorities.

In early April, £250k of Community Board health and wellbeing funding was allocated as a Councillor Crisis Fund to meet urgent coronavirus need. This demonstrated the importance of releasing funds quickly. The boards will continue to have access to a proportion of their budget to support the coronavirus recovery phase, while continuing to consult on the wider local priorities.

## Community Board coronavirus reset and recovery

Before the coronavirus outbreak, the original plan was to engage with communities, residents and partners to gather intelligence for each Community Board area. This would in turn help to identify local priorities for the year ahead. A detailed action plan would have then been shaped and taken to each first Community Board meeting as a 'big bang' launch in June.



*The community spirit that has been fostered in response to the coronavirus crisis is something that we were incredibly proud of in Bucks. Community Boards are a vital part of the recovery phase and we are keen to continue harnessing that great collaborative way of working.*

Gareth Williams, Cabinet Member

However, in response to the virus outbreak, eight support hubs were set up to ensure residents being 'shielded' had basic food and medicine, which required an intense amount of council staff resource. In addition, the volunteering cell we put in place created links with hundreds of community groups and charities supporting vulnerable residents and kept in touch with 1800 volunteers. Through this work great local connections and relationships have been made that will continue to be built on through the Community Boards.

The boards will be at the forefront of developing localised coronavirus recovery plans with their communities and local partners, with their focus on understanding local needs.

## Coronavirus working groups

Coronavirus is not ending any time soon. Working groups will support those communities and groups that have been supporting people locally throughout the lockdown, to continue to make sure vulnerable people get food, medicine or befriending calls. This coordinated approach, working closely with partners, will help as we step down the eight temporary support hubs, while enabling the localised volunteering associated with them to continue. Research from Citizens Advice highlights warning signs around mental health and financial insecurities for the population as a whole, with 'debt' being their most looked at web page. These conversations, as well as the sharing of insight data through community profiles and dashboards, will help inform a strategic and collaborative approach to the recovery.

# Principles of the Community Board

Here's a handy summary of the Community Board principles. The full policy document and terms of reference can be found on the Buckinghamshire Council [website](#).

## 1. INCLUSIVE

Everyone within the local community is welcome to be part of their Community Board, with no limit to membership as there will be no need for all to attend the meetings.

## 2. IDENTITY

Although the core principles are the same for all boards, each will develop their own look and feel over time.

## 3. INVOLVED

Community Boards place greatest emphasis on working groups made up of local people who have the resources and knowledge to contribute towards work and ideas that will benefit them and others.

## 4. IMAGINATIVE

The board coordinator will help ensure information is shared effectively and that local views and ideas are heard. This could be via social media, chairman's blog, online forum, at a school or college, via an existing club, at the pub, by attending a specific community event or in other ways.

## 5. INFLUENCE

Five core public meetings will be held per year, where funding is allocated and feedback shared on the action plan with updates from the working groups. Minutes and agendas will be published on the council website.

## 6. INFORMED

Action plans will be based on evidence. Area profiles and dashboards provide facts, along with local knowledge to help build the full picture of local issues.

## 7. IMPACTFUL

All council directorates should interact with the Community Boards, planning work in advance and ensuring that boards are a key part of public consultations. Boards will schedule regular reports back to Cabinet and full Council.

## 8. INSIGHT

Working with partners will be essential to share knowledge and expertise in order to contribute to local priorities and working groups and importantly, to avoid duplication. Board coordinators will gather views on agenda topics or potential decisions to ensure views are widely known should there be a need for formal voting (indicative voting) and not restricted to who attends the meeting.