

## Cllr Jilly Jordan update Feb 2023

### Buckinghamshire Council Cabinet approves 2023-24 budget plans

Buckinghamshire Council's Cabinet has today approved the draft budget plan for the financial year 2023-24, pending a final decision by full Council at a meeting next week. (Wednesday 22 February).

The Cabinet considered the overall income and spending plans for 2023/24, which cover how the council will raise enough money to cover the costs of providing its essential services such as social care, as well as how it will pay for big projects like improvements to roads and schools, as well as further investment in waste services, environmental projects and tackling homelessness.

High inflation and added demand mean that, in spite of ongoing savings from becoming a unitary authority, the council needs to find an extra £63 million to cover its costs for the coming year. Like most councils with responsibility for social care, it means that, to raise enough money and to present a balanced budget, the Cabinet has agreed to put forward to Council a **2.99% rise in the base rate of council tax** and a plan to take up the Government's proposal for a **Social Care Precept of 2%**, meaning a **total rise of 4.99%** in bills.

This equates to a rise in council tax of **£1.61 per week for the average home** (Band D) in Buckinghamshire.

Speaking after today's meeting, Martin Tett, Leader of Buckinghamshire Council, said:

"I first want to highlight that this budget has been shaped by residents and fully scrutinised by a cross-party group of councillors. Our spending proposals were informed by responses we had to our 'Money Matters' budget consultation at the end of last year, and once the plans were shaped, they've been heavily reviewed by scrutiny committee, and we've considered that feedback during today's meeting.

It means we've arrived at a budget to put forward next week for a final decision at Council, and this year has probably been the most challenging on record in which to make these choices. Global and political turbulence, high inflation and cost of living pressures are impacting us all and as an organisation running public services, we are not immune to rising prices, yet we have to protect our residents from swallowing all that inflationary pressure. However, as almost all of our income (93%) now comes from council tax and business rates, with the rise in the costs of providing our services, it means we've had to propose a further rise in council tax this year.

I do not take this lightly and want to urge any household concerned with meeting their costs to contact our council tax team direct and if needed, to also take a look at the Cost of Living advice on our webpages. You can also look to spread council tax payments over the full twelve months so as to lower the monthly cost.

Amidst such a difficult context, with some councils even declaring bankruptcy, I'm pleased that Buckinghamshire Council remains financially prudent. My biggest priority of all is to continue to be a value for money authority – vital in light of the hardship we know many people are experiencing. I'm pleased we are still able to dedicate spend on the services and projects our residents tell us are most important to them. All members of the council will make a final decision on this budget this week

## Council offers 12-month Council Tax payment option for residents

Residents in Buckinghamshire can choose to pay their 2023-2024 Council Tax in 12 monthly instalments, instead of the standard 10 instalments. To take advantage of this option, all residents need to do is [complete and submit the online form](#) available on the council's website by Saturday 15 April.

“Buckinghamshire Council understands that the current cost of living pressures can be challenging, and this flexible payment option is designed to help residents manage their finances more effectively and conveniently,” said John Chilver, Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources. “By spreading the cost of Council Tax over 12 months, residents can better plan their monthly expenses and hopefully help avoid any financial difficulties.”

So, if you're looking for a more manageable way to pay your Council Tax in the next financial year – which starts in April 2023 – then you might want to consider opting for Buckinghamshire Council's 12-month instalment plan.

Requesting this payment option is simple and straightforward, just [complete and submit the council's online form](#).

## **Proud of Bucks Awards: Nominations Still Open**

Who has gone above and beyond in 2022? Are there community groups or volunteers that deserve recognition?

The Proud of Bucks Awards will soon be back again, celebrating local community contributions during 2022 across our 16 Community Board areas. Nominations opened on 9 January 2023 and the categories for this year are: Local Community Champion, Young Community Champion (under 21s) and Community Group Contribution.

**Meet The Carers and start your fostering or adoption journey**

Anyone interested in finding out more about fostering or adoption in Bucks should take advantage of a unique opportunity to chat directly to those already doing it, as part of a new Meet the Carer event being hosted by Buckinghamshire Council later this month.

Taking place in Aylesbury on Wednesday 22 February, the event is open to anyone who may be thinking about either fostering or adoption. In addition to the opportunity to meet some existing foster carers and people who have adopted children in Buckinghamshire, the event will be attended by staff from the council's fostering and adoption service who will be on hand to offer information and advice.

Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Children's Services explained the purpose of the event. She said: "We know that anyone thinking about fostering or adoption will have many questions to ask. What better way of getting answers to those questions and finding out more detail about the whole process and experience, than speaking directly to those who have already been through it?"

The event is open to anyone who would like to find out more about the process of fostering or adoption. The aim is to give people a valuable insight into the journey, details of both the challenges and also the joys of helping a child or children to grow and develop in a new home as well as give those interested in finding out more, the opportunity to ask whatever questions they have, direct to the experts.

Teams and carers will be available at the following times:

- 12 to 2pm – Meet the adoption team and Bucks adopters
- 10am to 4pm – Meet the fostering team and Bucks foster carers

Anita added: "At any one time we have several children and young people in need of a loving home, either in temporary foster care or those looking to be adopted into a permanent new family. We also know there are many people out there who may be thinking about fostering or adopting but haven't yet taken that first step, so this is the perfect opportunity to put those thoughts into actions and find out more."

The Meet the Carer event is open to anyone with a genuine interest in knowing more about fostering and adoption in Buckinghamshire. To register your interest and get full details of the event contact:

- The adoption team on: [adoption@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:adoption@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)
- The fostering team on: [fosterwithbucks@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:fosterwithbucks@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)

Buckinghamshire Council has developed two handy online tools to help people create a personalised plan for things to do to get ready for their fostering or adoption journey.

- Use our [FosteringReady](#) tool
- Use our [AdoptionReady](#) tool

**Digital tools help speed up the planning process in  
Buckinghamshire**

A government minister has been to Buckinghamshire to see how the council is trialling innovative digital tools aimed at speeding up the planning process.

It's part of a government project funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – Buckinghamshire is one of three councils already using the pioneering approach to co-design, build, test and launch more efficient software for planning.

As part of the project, Buckinghamshire residents can use this prototype software to check if they need planning permission using [an online tool on the Council's website](#). Buckinghamshire residents can also [apply online for a lawful development certificate](#) – which certifies works they're undertaking don't need planning permission or to certify that past works are lawful.

The new software under development will help manage cases and applications more quickly and efficiently, ultimately helping planning officers to reach decisions more quickly. The new systems will also help planning officers and applicants to communicate directly more easily.

It's all part of a national project to simplify and modernise the planning process. Housing and Planning Minister Lucy Frazer came to Buckinghamshire this week to meet Buckinghamshire Council Leader Martin Tett, Deputy Leader Gareth Williams and Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration, Peter Strachan, to see how the new digital programmes are being used in practice.

**Martin Tett said:**

*"We're proud to be working with government to pilot new prototype software which will streamline and simplify the planning process for applicants and the council alike – and we've been delighted to welcome the Minister to Buckinghamshire today so show her this software in action."*

*"As a new council, we're proud to be at the forefront of developing and trialling new ways of working for councils that ultimately bring big benefits to our residents."*

**Don't pay cash to remove your trash, council urges**

Buckinghamshire Council is renewing its call for residents not to pay in cash when employing someone to take away their waste.

However big or small the amount, if dumped illegally, the original owner of the waste can be liable for prosecution.

Gareth Williams, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment, explained: “We know that generally, most people who pay someone to take away their waste, do so in good faith, trusting that the person they pay will dispose of it responsibly. They may be tempted to pay cash as a cheaper option but sadly, speaking from experience, we know that it is statistically more likely to be dumped illegally and the fly-tipper is less likely to be caught without any electric or paper trail available, proving their involvement. In these cases, if the waste can be traced back to the original homeowner, they are then liable for the offence and can be prosecuted.”

To report fly-tipping anywhere in Buckinghamshire visit: [www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/fix-my-street](http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/fix-my-street)

## New food waste toolkit launches for Buckinghamshire residents

Buckinghamshire Council has introduced a new '[food waste toolkit](#)' to help local households get the best value for money out of their food shopping. The new toolkit is

part of a package of wide-ranging support the council has put in place to help counter the impact of high costs, high inflation and high energy prices that are affecting everyone.

For those facing hardship targeted help is available through the council's Helping Hand service – measures like the new food waste toolkit are designed to help everyone to make their money go further.

Estimates show the average family of four could save £60 each month by reducing food waste, as well as lowering the negative impact that food waste has on the planet. Buckinghamshire homes produce at least 30,000 tonnes of food waste every year, enough to fill 250,000 wheelie bins, and two thirds of that is edible!

The food waste toolkit gives some simple facts and advice about food waste and how to reduce it in your home, ultimately to help more local people save money and make their food shop go further. The new toolkit is now live on the council's website within the dedicated 'cost of living' section, which gives full information on what help, advice and support is available around the cost of living, and how to access it.

Importantly too, the toolkit includes information on where residents can find their nearest community fridge – a space with fridges and freezers where local people and businesses can donate fresh, good quality surplus food that would otherwise be wasted; the donated food is then made freely available for local people to collect.

The toolkit also tells people how to set up a community fridge in their area, including how to access food to fill it, for free.

- The food waste toolkit is live on the council's website under [www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/cost-of-living](http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/cost-of-living)
- It's part of a wide range of measures in place to support Buckinghamshire residents facing rising costs and bills; these include:
  - Digital food vouchers for eligible people including nursery and school children
  - Further targeted support for priority groups through digital vouchers and other schemes
  - A unique 'Crisis Fund' with the charity 'Heart of Bucks', which has raised more than £180,000 already for local residents – offering another valuable pot of funding to help people struggling to cover their bills
  - A network of 'Welcoming Spaces' for people to come into safe, inclusive spaces that offer warmth, support and company
- A wide range of support can be accessed via the council's Helping Hand service