

Cllr Jilly Jordan update March 2023

Buckinghamshire Council Full Council approves 2023-24 budget.

Buckinghamshire Council have approved the budget plan for the financial year 2023-24, at a full Council meeting on . (Wednesday 22 February).

The full Council 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.

The agreed budget also includes the following investment:

- nearly **£143 million** for improvements to schools
- **£20 million** on housing and tackling homelessness
- **more than £14 million** to tackle Climate Change and prevent flooding
- **more than £20 million** towards our waste and recycling facilities

To see the full budget-setting meeting, please [view the webcast for the 22 Feb Full Council meeting](#) via the council's website

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](#).

Buckinghamshire Council announces extra investment in county's roads

Buckinghamshire Council is investing an extra £5 million in the county's road network, on top of £100 million it's already committed to spending on the roads over a four-year period.

The announcement was made at a meeting of full Council last month, where the full budget for 2023/24 was set. Council Leader Martin Tett made the extra funds for roads available from our Reserves acknowledging the heavy toll of wet and freezing conditions this winter plus increased HGV traffic from HS2 and East West Rail.

It means that in total, **£105 million** is now allocated directly to maintaining and improving the county's road network. Overall, **£130 million in funding** is being dedicated to roads and other highways infrastructure in Buckinghamshire including pavements, drains, street lighting and bridges during the council term.

Buckinghamshire Council announces new highways contractors

Buckinghamshire Council have announced the 12 approved contractors who will be working on highways, maintenance and infrastructure projects within the county from 1 April 2023.

The announcement completes all elements of the transition of the council's highways and maintenance contract work to new partners, as part of a planned move as the contract with current partner, Ringway Jacobs, comes to a close at the end of this month.

Last year Balfour Beatty Living Places (BBLP) were awarded the council's Term Maintenance Contract and the Term Consultancy Contract was awarded to Atkins, starting from 1 April 2023. The 12 newly-appointed contractors will work alongside BBLP and Atkins to carry out the works needed, under new Framework 1 and Framework 2 contracts which will run for a period of four years.

The 12 contractors have been appointed following a procurement process and will operate as follows:

Buckinghamshire Highways Framework One - Minor Works

Lot 1: Conventional Surfacing Work

- Balfour Beatty Living Places Limited
- Eurovia Infrastructure Limited
- O'Hara Bros Surfacing Limited

Lot 2: Surface Treatments including Surface Dressing

- Colas Limited
- Eurovia Infrastructure Limited
- Kier Highways Limited

Lot 3: Minor Works (under £500K)

- Balfour Beatty Living Places Limited
- J McCann and Co Limited
- O'Hara Bros Surfacing Limited

Buckinghamshire Highways Framework Two - Major Works (over £500K)

- Balfour Beatty Living Places Limited
- Keltbray Highways Limited
- Tilbury Douglas Construction Limited

The frameworks have been set up in this way to deliver value for money and to allow the council to align delivery of highways and regeneration infrastructure projects under a new delivery model. The new model will mean other council services such as Flooding and Development, Transport Strategy and Rights of Way teams can benefit from the wide range of expertise and experience provided by the range of contractors.

Council joins forces with Forestry England to create new woodland in Wing

Plans to plant a brand-new woodland in Wing have been given the green light in a joint project between Forestry England and Buckinghamshire Council. The new Wing Wood will see 132,000 trees planted on land owned by Buckinghamshire Council, creating an inspiring green space for local people, a valuable habitat for wildlife and a sustainable source of timber.

The decision to create the new woodland on the 51-hectare site follows a public consultation last year and local and national organisations were also involved in discussions over the woodland plan. Wing Wood will include a mix of tree species suited to the locality, five new wildlife ponds and a community orchard as well as accessible paths for walking and cycling. As part of the woodland design, Forestry England hope to link the new Wing Wood with Long Spinney Wood, creating clear paths and an easy connection between the two areas.

Forestry England will begin planting this year and aim to get most of the trees in the ground before the end of April with the rest planted in the autumn and winter. The 132,000 trees will form part of the council's pledge to plant 543,000 trees, one for every resident in Buckinghamshire by 2031, as part of its Climate Change Strategy.

Gareth Williams, Buckinghamshire Council's Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment, said:

"We are really pleased to be able to join forces with Forestry England to develop this new countryside space in Wing. Not only will it provide an additional green space for people to enjoy, but it will also create a welcome new haven for wildlife, enhance and enrich the existing countryside and help us to work towards our net zero carbon goal for the future."

Bethany Cambridge, Head of Woodland Creation at Forestry England, commented:

"Expanding the nation's forests is an important part of Forestry England's work and is supported by the Government's Nature for Climate Fund. We are delighted to be partnering with Buckinghamshire Council to grow an inspiring woodland for local people to explore and enjoy.

"As it grows and matures, Wing Wood will bring health and wellbeing opportunities to local people and benefits to the wider landscape by providing thriving wildlife habitats to boost biodiversity, improving air quality and helping prevent soil erosion and flooding."

Forestry England will hold volunteer planting days in the autumn for local people to help plant the community orchard trees and learn more about the woodland design and plans. News and updates on Wing Wood will be shared at: www.forestryengland.uk/wing-wood-community-woodland

Funding available to support Bucks charities impacted by rising costs

Charities and community groups across Buckinghamshire can now apply for grant funding to help with unexpected and unmanageable costs through the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector Resilience Fund.

The £230,000 fund has been established in partnership with [Heart of Bucks](#) and funded by Buckinghamshire Council, The Mulberry Trust and [The Rothschild Foundation](#). This funding is on a one-off basis, recognising the exceptional circumstances organisations are in this year.

The new fund is designed to support organisations suffering from increased operating costs due to cost-of-living pressures, which they have not been able to manage in other ways.

Steve Bowles, Buckinghamshire Council's Cabinet Member for Communities, commented:

"The voluntary sector plays a crucial role in supporting our local communities, but we know that many organisations are currently struggling with financial pressures. This new fund will provide a lifeline to those groups most in need, helping to ensure they can continue to make a positive impact on the lives of residents across Buckinghamshire."

Grants of up to £10,000 are available, and priority will be given to organisations aiming to reduce inequalities amongst residents living in the most disadvantaged areas of the county. The funding can be used to support operating costs, including one-off salary payments to help staff with the cost-of-living pressures.

Henry Allmand, CEO at Heart of Bucks, said:

"Across the county, there are hundreds of charities and community groups carrying out vital work to support our communities, and the cost-of-living crisis is impacting their ability to deliver vital services. We are pleased that this partnership has enabled us to launch a fund dedicated to helping local organisations during this difficult time."

Applications for funding are open from now until **28 April 2023**.

For more information on the VCSE Sector Resilience Fund, and to apply, please click here: <https://heartofbucks.org/voluntary-sector-resilience-fund>

Free, fun and flavourful – Buckinghamshire Council continues support and countywide holiday clubs for eligible families this Easter

This Easter, Buckinghamshire Council is continuing its support for eligible children and families during the Easter Holidays as part of its ongoing Helping Hand and Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programmes. These services provide a range of assistance, including food vouchers, holiday clubs and hot meals. There is also a range of support and advice available to help with the cost of living for families in Buckinghamshire.

Thousands of HAF holiday club places are on offer in over 45 locations for eligible children and young people in Reception to Year 11. There is a fantastic range of high-quality activities for all ages and interests including day trips, adventure activities, sports, dance, cookery and more! Each child or young person can attend up to four HAF sessions over Easter and a healthy hot meal is provided at each activity. The HAF programme is funded by the Department for Education and coordinated by the council.

Details of all the HAF holiday activities are available on [Buckinghamshire Council's website](#).

"Each year, the HAF programme is a great success in Buckinghamshire, and I am pleased that we have once again been able to provide such a great free resource for eligible children and young people. I am hoping that even more children will make use of this fun-filled programme this year, as they can enjoy a fun activity and a healthy meal, as well as learn new skills and make new friends.

"There are many fun activities running in Buckinghamshire during the Easter holidays, and if the popularity of the clubs during the last few years has been any indication, I'd urge parents and carers to use their HAF booking codes and book their children on as early as possible to avoid any disappointments."

In addition to the holiday activities, Buckinghamshire Council's Helping Hand scheme is providing eligible families with a digital £30 food voucher code to use during the Easter holidays. Children and young people who receive free school meals are eligible for a £30 voucher code, as well as those receiving early years' pupil premium or 2-year-old funded

free education places. These digital voucher codes will be distributed through schools ahead of the Easter holiday. This scheme is funded from the Department for Work and Pensions Household Support Fund. The vouchers can be used in most major supermarkets in Buckinghamshire and instructions will be provided by schools when vouchers are issued.

Buckinghamshire Council is also offering a wide range of support and practical guidance for residents who might be struggling with day-to-day issues such as the cost of living. You can view the council's [Money Problems webpage](#) or our [cost of living pages](#) to discover the help and support available.

“As we are facing significant rises in the cost of living and many families are feeling the pinch, I'd encourage eligible families to take up the digital food vouchers on offer. As a council, we always want to do as much as we can to help, especially during these difficult times. I hope the voucher recently changed voucher providers, but they are still as simple to use as before - just remember to redeem them before they expire.

“I know many of our residents are experiencing varying amounts of financial pressure and I urge anyone facing difficulties to get in touch with our Helping Hand team. We are there to help if you are struggling to afford basic necessities such as food, fuel and other household costs. All residents can contact Buckinghamshire Council's Helping Hand team on 01296 531151 or complete the [online contact us form](#) and someone will contact you.”

For further support, advice or further activities and events for children this Easter, you can search the [Bucks Online Directory](#).