



Soulbury Parish Council - AGM Monday 20th May 2024

Buckinghamshire Council Update

Cllr Jilly Jordan

Thank you for the opportunity to give a brief update on some of Buckinghamshire Council's activities over the past year.

Buckinghamshire Council shares a common purpose with town and parish council across the county, in improving the economic, environmental, health and social well-being of residents, businesses and visitors. Town and parish councils are a key connection between the unitary council and their communities that help us improve services and foster greater community empowerment.

As an independent, democratically elected body, you, as the Parish Council, represent the community at a truly local level, operating within your own financial constraints, and I value the positive working relationship that we have developed. Buckinghamshire Council remains committed to working together with all local councils to mutual benefit.

The past year has been challenging for us all and this is reflected across the local government sector. Setting this year's budget was the toughest on record. Escalating costs and demand have affected four key areas in particular, namely:

- Children's Social Care
- Adult Social care
- Supporting children with additional needs to get to and from school, and
- Providing accommodation for an increasing number of homeless people.

Notwithstanding these challenges, prudent financial management has enabled us to produce a balanced budget for the next 3 years, taking us to 2027. However, in doing so we had to make some really difficult choices and we are having to find significant savings during that period. It's an incredibly tough environment in which to operate.

Our challenges have not been limited to finances. It goes without saying that it has been a very wet winter indeed, one of the wettest on record. This serves as a further reminder of the need to redouble our efforts to tackle climate change and I am pleased to report that we have made great strides in reducing the carbon footprint of the Council's operations.

That said, the weather has had severely detrimental impact on our road network in terms of potholes and flooding and our teams have been working round the clock to address these issues. Buckinghamshire is not alone in this respect, with national media reporting potholes being at an 8-year high across the country, with councils expecting to fix around two million potholes in England and Wales this year.

Against a background of decreasing resources, we are doing everything we can to improve things, here in Buckinghamshire, including having 29 gangs responding to emergency callouts and repairing defects. After last winter's bad weather, we repaired 30,000 potholes

and we anticipate that number will be even higher this year. We welcome news that nationally, over £8 billion of funds saved from the cancelled section of HS2 is now being re-directed to road repairs. However, we also know this is long-term and we won't see the impact of this investment for some time to come.

We have released an extra £5million from our reserves to spend on the roads which will allow us to add to our programme of 'plane and patch.' We are currently prioritising where these works will be targeted, based on input from local councillors and area technicians.

I will include a list of some of the Council's achievements and developments in the written version of my report. Just by way of example, county-wide, there have been many positive developments over the year, ranging from renovation of children's play areas, provision of free school meals for 14,000 children, to subsidising bus services, supporting the Covid vaccination programme, providing grants for small businesses in rural areas, or supporting communities in developing emergency planning for flooding and other events and investing S106 monies in improved infrastructure.

Finally, turning to specific, local matters, many of the enquiries I receive relate to individual planning applications and I try to assist in conveying and, where possible, resolving concerns. Recognising the challenges parish councils can face in assessing planning applications, Buckinghamshire Council's Planning and Environment teams have established bi-weekly Planning Surgeries. These provide a forum for Town and Parish Councils to discussing planning and enforcement issues and to build up a better knowledge of the planning process.

Through the year, in addition to providing updates on Buckinghamshire Council's activities, I have been able to facilitate and liaise with the Local Area Technician on repairs to potholes, road re-surfacing and clearing of roadside gullies, although work still remains to be done.

I have also helped to resolve many local residents queries including planning matters, home to school transport and flytipping.

In closing, I would like to commend the work of Cllr Wright, all the parish councillors and Wendy Taylor Parish Clerk for their efforts in working with and for the local community and I look forward to a period of fruitful collaboration in the coming year.

The following table provides some key Buckinghamshire Council work from the year 2023-24. The full Buckinghamshire Council Annual Report 2023-24 is now available after full Council sign off on the 15 May 2024.

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES	IMPROVING OUR ENVIRONMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Town & Parish Focus Group was established by the Cabinet Member for Communities to work with a cohort of local councils to work together to understand current issues for local councils, with the first meeting held in February. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six Green Flags awarded for our parks in 2023: Heartlands in Buckingham, Vale Park and Bedgrove Park in Aylesbury, Hughenden Park and The Rye in High Wycombe and Higginson Park in Marlow.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A refreshed Town & Parish Action plan was shared with the Focus Group, picking up actions from the recent town and parish survey, and outstanding actions from the previous Charter Action Plan. The action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new Highways Service was launched - Buckinghamshire Highways - with industry leading delivery partners.

<p>plan will form part of the activity in the Focus Group.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our 16 Community Boards have continued to bring together local communities to tackle local issues and improve local place. In the year 2023 to 2024, they have funded over 200 projects with c230 anticipated by the end of the year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Buckinghamshire Streetworks Permit Scheme's holds public utilities to account for their work on our road network and our 'zero tolerance' approach has seen us more than double the issuing of fixed penalty notices this year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each £1 spent of Community Board funding has secured £1.80 in contributory funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued the successful delivery of our 4-year £105 million improvement programme to our highways network including 209 carriageway schemes this year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awarded a contract to deliver five of our leisure centres. As well as bringing positive financial benefits, the arrangements will continue to provide benefits for local residents including concessionary membership rates, close working with health partners to encourage healthy and active lifestyles, and an apprenticeship programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 200,000 extra pieces of litter binned as a result of our partnership with LitterLotto and the Council brought in £70,000 from the external Innovation Fund.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £966k invested in replacing and improving children's play spaces across seven sites in 2023/24, with all new play areas including accessible play equipment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secured Government grants have led to over £1.9m from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for the 'Energy Doctor' scheme; which has made functional improvements to over 110 properties in Opportunity Bucks wards.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Changing Places accessible toilet installed at Black Park Country Park, part-funded by a grant from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 49 public bus routes subsidised with a £2.05m budget annually.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 64 activities, events and campaigns were held in libraries with over 1,300 people participating as part of the Healthy Libraries pilot in partnership with Public Health. Healthy Libraries is now being rolled out across all libraries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered over 5 miles of new active travel routes including Platinum Way, Waddesdon Greenway School Link, Berryfields to Buckingham Park, Aylesbury canal towpath, and Wendover, including 3 parallel crossings to prioritise people cycling and walking.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established Buckinghamshire's Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) team, to enable our approach of targeting support to people in the county who are the most in need. The team has already enabled 3 rough sleepers to secure accommodation and improved the stability of accommodation for others. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just under 400 nominations received for our Proud of Bucks Awards across 274 different people/organisations, with 48 	

winners and 48 commended recognising individuals, local groups and organisations.	
PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE	INCREASING PROSPERITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 14,000 children and young people eligible for free school meals, early years pupil premium or 2-year-old funded early education received additional support through the Department of Work and Pensions Household Support Fund grant in the form of supermarket vouchers for each of the school holidays. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopted the Skills and Employment Strategy which sets a clear direction for increasing access and provision of in demand skills and qualifications to enable our residents, communities and employers to thrive. The Strategy was launched with a Bootcamp at Buckinghamshire College Group in Aylesbury, giving 30 people the opportunity to learn new skills to enter the construction sector.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed 7 community resilience evening workshops to support local communities to develop emergency plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched an employment programme supporting people with barriers to employment with a target of up to 30 people to receive employment and development support (20 from Opportunity Bucks wards).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 300 and 500 students were engaged with at each of the Freshers Fairs at Bucks New Uni, Buckingham Uni and Buckinghamshire College Group campuses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Rural England Prosperity Fund has been used to launch the Bucks Rural Business Fund which allocates grants to local businesses.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 133 vulnerability packs were distributed to late night venues across Buckinghamshire, produce advice and guidance to staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopted the Buckinghamshire Regeneration Framework & Strategies, which will maximise the potential of Buckinghamshire's three larger towns, Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham alongside enhancing the strengths of the county's network of towns and villages as well as its extraordinary natural environment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Stayok.uk website was launched for those with learning disabilities (and/or autism) providing safety advice. It is the first site in the country of its kind and uses photo symbols and easy read text. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secured £14.1m of S106 contributions from new development and £6.4m in Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support has been provided to the NHS to see over 81,000 people receive a covid autumn booster vaccine within Buckinghamshire. This is more than 73% of the eligible population. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council have spent £17.4m of S106 funds on infrastructure to mitigate development impact.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have accommodated 123 adults and children within 25 families from Afghanistan who now permanently reside in Buckinghamshire and we are supporting to gain employment and access education. We've also accommodated over 1,800 guests who have fled the war in Ukraine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An estimated £10.2m was spent with local businesses in Buckinghamshire through location filming, where the Film Office has provided a service to the production.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have supported residents to stay warm during the colder winter months, including through the continuation of 'welcoming spaces' in libraries and other community venues, and have distributed 640 warm packs to residents via partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 63% of 19-21-year-olds who have left care were in education, employment or training.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported 7,500 financially vulnerable residents with essential white goods and furniture and emergency food and fuel support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 210 employees are taking part in on apprenticeship programmes across council services and maintained schools.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided over 58,000 digital food vouchers for eligible families during the school holidays. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through Opportunity Bucks we have established Personal Career and Apprenticeship Mentors at Buckinghamshire College, who have contacted over 400 students from the target wards.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided funding of over £400,000, via the Household Support Fund from the Department of Work and pensions to support Voluntary and Community Sector initiatives/schemes for residents across Buckinghamshire through the Household Support Fund, including over £220,000 to organisations supporting within Opportunity Bucks target wards. 	