



Cllr Jilly Jordan

Soulbury Parish Council Meeting Monday 21st Oct 2024

Empowering lives: Access All Areas events return to Buckinghamshire for 2024

Buckinghamshire Council is pleased to announce that its popular Access All Areas events are back for 2024.

Exclusively for people in Buckinghamshire, the free events are aimed at autistic children, young people and adults and/or those with a learning disability. Carers, family members, friends and care workers are also encouraged to attend.

The events are designed to raise awareness of the range of services and support that are available and to encourage healthy lifestyles and wellbeing.

Currently in Buckinghamshire there are over 2,400 people with learning difficulties and over 5,000 autistic people – many of whom are not accessing activities or services available to them.

The Access All Areas events aim to showcase the fantastic range of services which can help support people who are autistic or have additional needs, to live a fulfilled, independent and healthy life. This year's topics are:

- **Staying fit and active** – advice on sport, exercise, and healthy eating, alongside ideas of other activities to get involved in.
- **Education and work** – help and advice to find employment and further education.
- **Health** – information on annual health checks, sexual health services, vision, breast checks and other health services.
- **Community** – housing information as well as advice on how to stay safe when out in the community.

The free Access All Areas events will be held in two locations:

- **Aylesbury** - Friday 25 October between 10am and 4pm
- **Amersham** - Wednesday 30 October between 10am to 4pm

Health professionals will be on hand to talk through what to expect from an annual health check and to answer questions. Other highlights at the event include sporting activities open to everyone and advice on how to get your voice heard to make changes within public services.

There will be designated breakaway areas for anyone needing some time-out and **specific quiet hours between 10am to 11am and 3pm to 4pm.**

With over 40 exhibitors from health, care, housing, fitness, social and wellbeing sectors and plenty of hands-on demonstrations, the events are a must for people with learning disabilities and their carers.

If you, a loved one, or a friend can benefit from the Access All Areas events, please book a place and come along to see what's on offer.

Book your free Access All Areas ticket online by clicking on the links below:

- [Aylesbury - Friday 25 October](#)
- [Amersham - Wednesday 30 October](#)

[Visit the Access All Areas webpage](#) for more information, including a list of all the services and organisations who will be attending the events.

Could you get pension credit?

Following the government's decision to withdraw the winter fuel payment from most pensioners, Buckinghamshire Council is advising residents of pensionable age and their friends and families that it's vital they find out which government benefits they can claim to help them meet their living and fuel costs.

The winter fuel payment is now limited to people over state pension age (currently 66) who are receiving pension credit or a limited number of other benefits.

Older people over state pension age and on a low income may qualify for pension credit – which offers support for a range of household expenses including the winter fuel payment, but many are not aware and are not claiming this support that they are eligible for.

According to the government, only about 60% of eligible people currently claim pension credit countrywide. This means four out of 10 eligible pensioners are missing out on benefits of up to £3,900 a year.

The council is also highlighting that support is still available through its Helping Hand service for people who may not qualify for pension credit but who are still struggling financially. The team can offer emergency support, practical guidance or supply contact details for other organisations that provide food support or specialist advice.

Buckinghamshire Council Leader Martin Tett said:

“With the government's decision to withdraw winter fuel payments from all except those in receipt of pension credit or other means tested benefits, the council estimates 93% of all Buckinghamshire pensioners could lose this allowance, which is so vital to many of our older households.

“A significant concern is that a number of eligible pensioners are not currently claiming pension credit, so will miss out on a winter fuel payment when they are eligible and in genuine need. Please do check if you or someone you know is eligible – it is critical that those eligible for these payments receive them.

“And if you or your loved ones aren't eligible for pension credit, remember you can contact our Helping Hand team to discuss other potential support.”

To find out all about pension credit, including whether you qualify and how to apply, go to [buckinghamshire.gov.uk/pension-credit](https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/pension-credit)

Buckinghamshire Council's Helping Hand team can be contacted at [Help with the cost of living \(Helping Hand\) | Buckinghamshire Council](#) or on [01296 531151](tel:01296531151).

Calling Bucks pensioners – can we help reduce your energy bills?

Buckinghamshire Council has extended the eligibility criteria of one of its key programmes to help lower heating bills, following the government's decision to remove the Winter Fuel Payment from the majority of Buckinghamshire pensioners.

The council's 'Energy Doctor' scheme involves a home visit from one of their Energy Doctors to assess 'easy interventions' to lower energy bills, funded by the council, such as fitting LED light bulbs and draught proofing.

Now the council has extended the scheme to include all residents of State Pension age whose homes have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rated D-G.

It's part of a range of help the council wants local pensioners to access if losing their Winter Fuel Payment leaves them struggling to meet heating costs. The Winter Fuel Payment will only be made this year to pensioners receiving Pension Credit or another related benefit. It means some 95,000 pensioners in Buckinghamshire will no longer receive this payment so Buckinghamshire Council is working hard to remind those residents about what other support is available.

The council's Energy Doctors have visited more than 800 Buckinghamshire homes in the last 18 months, and the energy saving measures they have put into those homes are saving each household on average an estimated £129 on annual energy bills.

The Energy Doctors use low-cost 'retrofit' measures to reduce energy costs, such as:

- draught proofing
- installing LED lightbulbs
- installing secondary glazing
- providing heated throws
- installing aerated shower heads and shower timers

As a council we have made clear our extremely strong objections to the government removing this critical support for pensioners and have written directly to the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to ask that this policy is reversed. We are also doing all we can to support our local pensioners as we move into the colder months and expanding our Energy Doctor scheme is one way we can help.

"Please find out from our team if you're eligible for a visit as our Energy Doctor could make a real difference in helping to make heating the home more affordable. I also urge family and friends of local pensioners to make sure they're aware of our Energy Doctor scheme which has already helped so many local households – please spread the word!

Buckinghamshire Council is also urging local pensioners to check if they're eligible for Pension Credit to enable them to claim the Winter Fuel Payment. Find out more at: www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/pension-credit

Any Buckinghamshire household facing financial hardship can contact the council's Helping Hand service. Find out more at: www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/helping-hand

Tell us how we can help everyone in Buckinghamshire to age healthily

Helping Buckinghamshire's residents to live healthy, happy lives for longer is the commitment set down in the council's Healthy Ageing Strategy (2024-2029). As the programme enters its second year, people are once again being asked to share their opinions on what is most important to them to help shape priorities for the coming year.

In 2023, based on the feedback received in the first consultation, the key priorities of 'participating in society' and 'outdoor spaces and buildings' were identified as being of most importance to those who took part in the survey. In response to this, in partnership with Heart of Bucks, the Healthy Ageing Fund has been set up, supporting 11 projects to increase social connectedness of older people across the county. A range of Age Well activities have also been delivered as part of the [Healthy Libraries](#) programme.

Zahir Mohammed, Deputy Cabinet Member for Public Health said: "We really want to hear from people about what is most important for them to enable them to live well as they grow older so we can move forward with our aims for the coming year.

"To really make an impact we need to understand what is most important to our residents so we can target our efforts."

The survey is open to people aged 40 years and over who live, work and/or study in Buckinghamshire. It runs until 4 November 2024. To take part visit: <https://yourvoicebucks.citizenspace.com/public-health/ageing-well-2024/>

Household Recycling Centres switch to winter opening hours

Visitors to Buckinghamshire's Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) are being reminded that from Tuesday 1 October, opening hours at all 10 centres across the county will be switching to the winter hours of 9am to 4pm.

The change in opening hours occurs every year, in line with shorter days bringing fewer visitors to the sites after 4pm.

Thomas Broom, Buckinghamshire Council's Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment said: "During the winter months we find far fewer residents visiting our HRCs after 4pm therefore we change the regular opening hours to reflect this."

Thomas continued: "All other site opening arrangements remain unchanged, so centres are open on the same days, it is just the hours that change between the beginning of October and the end of March."

To find out which days your local HRC is open and also further details of what can and cannot be taken to a centre, visit: [buckinghamshire.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling](https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling)

If you are worried about the site being busy you can check ahead and view live webcam footage via the council website and plan your trip accordingly.

Thomas added: "Don't forget, any items such as furniture, garden equipment, bicycles and household equipment in good condition that you are looking to get rid of, can be taken to any HRC where they are collected for reuse."

Items donated are sold on by South Bucks Hospice which runs the reuse shops in High Wycombe and Aston Clinton HRCs. Items for resale can be taken to any of the 10 sites and will be transported to the reuse shops.

