

News from your County Council –September 2017

For the Gerrard's Cross & Denham Area Forum.

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1. Green light for first satellite school for Buckinghamshire

Buckinghamshire's first satellite school - an extension of St Michael's, High Wycombe - will open in Aylesbury next year.

Mike Appleyard, Buckinghamshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, approved the plan on Wednesday September 6.

St Michael's Catholic School will establish its satellite on the former Quarrendon school site. Building work, expected to start next summer, will not be finished until 2019, so the school will open next September with a Year 7 intake of 120 in the former Berton Hill Day Centre, which will be refurbished, before it moves to the permanent site a year later.

The satellite plan, a partnership between the County Council, St Michael's governors and trustees, and the Diocese of Northampton, would cater for students between 11 and 19, growing over time to six forms of entry.

The decision follows public consultations that generated up to 99% support. Mike Appleyard said: "There has been extremely strong support for St Michael's satellite, a level of response rarely seen in such consultations. Faith schools do deliver good

results and by and large parents like them. We've taken account of the way people in Aylesbury feel and I hope we'll be providing a school they will welcome."

With housing growth in the coming five years, Mike said an additional 12 forms of secondary school entry would be needed in Aylesbury Vale - the equivalent of two schools.

The satellite school would provide half of this need. The £1 million cost of refurbished buildings at Bierton Hill and £22m construction cost of new buildings on the Quarrendon site will come from Department for Education basic need funding and housing developer contributions.

Head teacher Garret Fay said he was very pleased to be in a position to open the St Michael's satellite at Aylesbury, and thanked parents, the Buckinghamshire Catholic Schools Partnership and the County Council's school expansion team for their support.

"The use of Bierton Hill ensures that pupils will be educated in a safe and secure learning environment, while building work at the Quarrendon site progresses," he said. "I'm looking forward to meeting prospective pupils and parents in the near future to share our designs and plans for 2018 and beyond."

2. Celebrating our foster carers

The hard work, commitment and dedication of Buckinghamshire County Council's foster carers was celebrated at a special awards ceremony and dinner on Friday, 8 September.

Organised by the Council's Fostering Team, the awards, attended by over 100 guests, recognised long service and training success and also offered the opportunity to give special praise to individuals and couples for a range of achievements.

The awards are now in their 11th year and give the unique opportunity for the County Council to celebrate the hard work, enthusiasm and commitment to caring for children of all its foster carers.

For the first time this year a range of new awards were introduced including best new-comer, service to disabled children and outstanding contribution to fostering. Also for the first time this year we introduced an award that was voted for by the public.

Six individuals and couples were nominated for the Foster Carer of the Year award with the public invited to vote online for their favourite. The prize went to Gemma and

Adam Butler who became foster parents to their four nieces and nephews following a tragic family event.

Sheila and Alastair Kay won the award for Best Newcomer to fostering. Their first child had no verbal communication and significant special needs. After a year with them, he has made significant progress with his speech and they have made a huge difference to his life.

Chris Driscoll won the award for her Outstanding Contribution to Fostering as she goes the extra mile helping to run the South Bucks support group, is a mentor to other foster carers whilst caring for young babies and toddlers alongside her own four children.

Juliet Cleverdon won the award for Service to Disabled Children for her dedication to caring for these children. Speaking after the event she said: "It was a real surprise, I was not expecting it at all and I'm very honoured and proud. I'm very passionate about working with children with disabilities so it makes the last 30 odd years worth it. I love doing it and I'll continue to do so with my very supportive husband."

The evening also celebrated those for their commitment to fostering.

Ron and Kate Gutteridge received an award for 25 years of respite fostering. Kate said: "We feel it's a real privilege to foster and we gain so much more from it than we give. Giving respite to a family is such a worthwhile thing to do and can be a real life saver to some families."

Keith and Sally Howard have been fostering for an amazing 35 years.

They said: "We do it because the children appreciate what we do for them. We have mainly done long term care and we build up relationships with the children and keep in contact with most of them. One of our foster children visits every weekend with his two children. They're our family."

A full list of the other winners on the night can be found on our website:
www.buckscc.gov.uk/fosteringawards

Could you foster? We are always keen to hear from anyone interested in becoming a foster carer. You really can make a difference to the life of a child or young person and help to make sure Bucks children can stay close to their local community. We will provide you with all the training and support you need.

Foster carers can be of any age over 21 years old, homeowners or tenants, employed or unemployed, single or in a relationship. There really is no typical foster carer.

Anyone wishing to find out more about fostering, contact the council's fostering team on 01296 382555 or email fostering@buckscc.gov.uk

3. Select Committee probe into modern slavery

It's a hidden crime that slips under the radar and on to the secret pages of the illicit dark web. But the evils of modern slavery in Buckinghamshire are about to come under the full glare of public scrutiny.

County Councillors are launching an inquiry into the scale of modern slavery in Buckinghamshire and how the County Council can help tackle it. Modern slavery traffickers and slave drivers coerce, deceive and force people into a life of abuse, servitude and inhumane treatment.

Research across the county last year by University College's Jill Dando Institute, warned there was potential for exploitation of workers in isolated agricultural jobs, remote factories, and in caring for an increasing ageing population.

And researchers identified focal points for the County Council to target in the fight against modern slavery: liaising with public transport providers to watch for victims who might be fleeing from slave masters, asking delivery drivers who visit remote locations to look out for tell-tale signs of exploitation.

Since then the County Council has worked on an adult exploitation strategy, which will be presented to the Safer Stronger Bucks Partnership Board next month.

However, as members of the County Council's Transport, Environment and Communities Select Committee heard at a special briefing last week (Tuesday, September 12), people's awareness of the problem is limited, and exploitation could be much greater than figures show.

At the briefing, addressed by the police and Rahab, an agency from Reading working with modern slavery victims, Select Committee members heard how Thames Valley Police were one of only three forces now taking part in a cyber trial, logging references on Facebook, adult sites, and the dark web, where victims are recruited, to advance their investigations.

Police recorded 150 Buckinghamshire victims between February 2016 and March 2017, highlighting that females are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and domestic servitude, whereas males are targeted for labour and forced criminalisation.

So the Select Committee has set the wheels in motion for an inquiry to understand the extent of criminal activity in Buckinghamshire. It will also explore and test how effective the County Council is in training and awareness raising, working with partner agencies, and in supporting victims - all responsibilities it has under the Modern Slavery Act.

4. Bid for Government grant for road improvements

A bid for £2.1 million of Government funding for road improvements in Aylesbury has been made by Buckinghamshire County Council.

If the bid to the National Productivity Investment Fund is successful, the improvement plan in Oxford Road will help to ease traffic queueing at the Fowler Road junction and the Hen & Chickens roundabout.

Upgrades to walkways and cycleways, an improved college bus stop and installation of synchronised traffic light controls are included in the bid, along with new pavements by the Ellen Road roundabout and at Fowler Road.

Mark Shaw, Deputy Leader and Transport Cabinet Member, said the scheme would help to relieve pinch-point congestion and reduce air pollution.

"It's important that we continually look for opportunities to bid for Government funding to invest in our roads, to help deal with the impact of housing growth," he said. "This is a great opportunity to make life a little better for our residents."

The County Council will add around £500,000 of developer contributions to fully fund the scheme, and expects a response from Whitehall around the time of the Chancellor's autumn budget.

This round of National Productivity Investment Fund bids aim to help councils relieve congestion, unlock economic growth, and enable homes to be built.

5. Advocacy Service contract announced

Vital support for people to resolve issues or concerns about their NHS care and treatment will continue in Buckinghamshire.

Buckinghamshire County Council has announced it has awarded a new three year contract to seAp advocacy to continue to deliver the Independent Health Complaints Advocacy (IHCA) service. seAp has been delivering this service in Buckinghamshire since it began in 2004.

Noel Brown, Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health said: "When someone has concerns about the NHS treatment they have received they want answers. This service is all about helping them to get those answers. IHCA is a free, independent service that can help people to make a complaint about any aspect of

their NHS care or treatment – and get the answers they need to understand what went wrong.”

IHCA is a statutory service delivered throughout England and seAp is an independent charity that provides advocacy, mainly in the South of England.

Advocacy is about supporting people to exercise their right to be heard. Advocates help people express their wishes and views, secure their rights, represent their interests and obtain the services they need. seAp has the QPM, Quality in Advocacy award and the four stars recognised for excellence, EFQM quality mark.

Lin Hazell, Health and Wellbeing Cabinet member said, “Most people are happy with the care they receive from the NHS, but things do go wrong sometimes. When they do, people are often at their most vulnerable, so it is vital that they can access and receive the right support to get their voices heard.”

She added, “If someone is ill, undergoing treatment or grieving it can be really hard for them to express their feelings and have the strength to raise it. Raising concerns in this way also enables the NHS to learn so that it continually improves.”

seAp supports people to put in a complaint about a service through the NHS complaints process. The service is available to all Buckinghamshire residents and covers all NHS services including:

- GP surgeries
- hospital trusts
- mental health services
- dentists
- ambulance services
- pharmacies

All other services funded by the NHS, including those by private providers

The new service started on 1 September 2017 and the contract is for three years. For more information please call the seAp contact centre on 0330 440 9000 or visit www.seap.org.uk for more information and for a self help information pack.

6. Public feedback sought on school's future plans

New up-to-date teaching areas at Pebble Brook Special School, Aylesbury, could be created if proposals to close its boarding block next February are approved.

They could enable Buckinghamshire County Council to provide more places at the school and meet an increased demand for specialist teaching.

The County Council is running a first-stage public consultation <http://ow.ly/TWmH30fieio> until October 13 on its plans to close the 12-place boarding wing, currently used by nine pupils. A public meeting in the school hall has been arranged for 4pm on Wednesday 27 September.

The County Council says the boarding wing could provide new teaching space and open possibilities for improvements to the sixth-form facilities, although this would depend on the outcome of a county-wide Special Education Needs and Disabilities review, and available resources.

Mike Appleyard, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, (pictured) said: "It's important that we consult fully before making any decision on what we provide for vulnerable young people, so that we're sure it's right to meet their needs."

Following the consultation the Cabinet Member will review the feedback and decide whether to publish a Statutory Notice proposing closure of the boarding wing, which would trigger a four-week representation period for people to comment.

Pebble Brook caters for children and young people from 11 to 19 with moderate learning difficulties, and difficulties with communication, interaction, social, emotional and mental health.

7. Scams champion Barry gets parliamentary platform for his plea

Memories for veteran Aylesbury soldier Barry Atkins are still vivid - but not of war. They're of a mail scam that sucked almost £3,000 from his life savings a few years back.

Since then the one-time victim has become an enthusiastic advocate for scam busting and a passionate campaigner against financial abuse of vulnerable people.

And last week Barry found himself on a parliamentary platform urging movers and shakers of the finance and security industries to wage war on the scammers.

He was telling the story of how he was conned by a bogus Spanish lottery to more than 100 leading stakeholders at a House of Commons reception. It was hosted by Conor Burns MP, Bournemouth University and the National Trading Standards Scams Team, to combat cyber scams and financial fraud targeting vulnerable adults.

Barry, who now works closely with Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards, and is a Mail Marshal with Friends Against Scams, scanning the post for scams, told the reception: "The problem is that scams come from all over the world, so they are hard to find and it's getting harder and harder to get rid of them.

"I've already worked to help six people in the area with scam mail," he said. "All it takes is somebody that is slightly confused, or elderly, to be tempted."

Barry urged MPs to support the work of anti-scam campaigners.

Mr Burns praised the victims and organisations working to detect and deter scammers, but said more could be done by banks and building societies to increase financial security against scammers.

Noel Brown, Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Public Health, (pictured) said in the two years to March 2017 Trading Standards received 204 reported doorstep crime incidents and 223 scam reports in Buckinghamshire. The average loss per victim was around £1700, and some have been scammed of more than £300,000.

"Scams Champions like Barry do a great work in helping people understand the problems created by scammers, what to watch for, and the importance of telling someone else if they have any doubts," said Noel.

"This helps our Trading Standards team to take early action and gather evidence which can lead to successful prosecutions. Sadly it's the vulnerable who are often targeted and we want to be at the forefront of protecting them from these criminals.

"If we can catch them, we'd love it. And we can make a lot of people feel much better and safer."

8. Winter times for Household Recycling Centres as October arrives

The arrival of October means that Buckinghamshire County Council's Household Recycling Centre services are moving to their winter opening hours of 9am-4pm, seven days a week.

The earlier closing time in winter makes the service more cost effective, as winter evenings are the least popular time for people to visit their Centre.

All the Household Recycling Centre services usually on offer are still available seven days a week, which means residents can still drop off unwanted items to be re-used by the South Bucks Hospice Shops, or dispose of their garden waste and other items. All ten sites will see the opening hours change on Sunday 1st October and the sites will close at 4pm until April 1st when they go back to the summer opening times of 9am-6pm.