



## **An update for Community Boards from Buckinghamshire Council Late Summer (September 2022)**

### **Buckinghamshire Council Update September-November 2022**

#### **Help in these difficult times**

As we move into autumn there's one issue above all others that stands out and that, of course, is the current cost of living pressures, especially where energy and food bills are concerned.

This is impacting everyone; businesses, residents and particularly those who are already struggling. For some households the prospect of what winter will bring is extremely worrying. Many people are in need now and want to know what extra support is coming in the winter months.

The council is taking a range of actions to help residents with the cost of living and it's a package of support that will continue to develop over the coming months.

The community boards have a critical role to play in this, both in helping to identify areas of need and supporting the provision of help. Work is already underhand looking at how best boards where it is appropriate can help with this work.

#### **Support available to those who need it:**

##### **Helping Hand**

The council's Helping Hand team offers advice, help and information to people who need it, including financial help to cover the food and energy costs to households in crisis, as well as helping with paying for other essentials like sanitary items and nappies. The team is available to help individuals or families in need, those on low incomes and those who are experiencing a financial emergency or crisis.

Our Helping Hand programme provides support to local individuals and families who are experiencing financial hardship. They can call the team on 01296 531 151 or use the [online contact form](#). You can read more about the help available on the [dedicated section of our website](#).

The Helping Hand team is issuing Post Office vouchers to some 8,000 pensioners in Buckinghamshire who are in receipt of Council Tax reduction or who have previously been supported by Helping Hand; this will ensure there is support available to those who need it most.

##### **'Welcoming Spaces'**

We will be joining forces with other organisations across Buckinghamshire to create a network of welcoming spaces this winter, to assist when the weather turns colder.

Starting with council libraries, these locations will provide a warm, welcoming and supportive space for anyone who needs it. Anyone who comes in from the cold will be welcomed and will be guaranteed respect, dignity and warmth; the aim is to offer a friendly ear and, overall, to create places that help people save on their heating bills and that also offer advice and support. This is an example of an area where community boards can play a key role in working within their communities to identify potential welcoming spaces and help set them up.

### **Information and advice**

Our fantastic network of volunteer groups and charity organisations plays a vital role in providing community support and specialist advice and information. We have created a '[Cost of Living' section on our website](#) to make it easier to find advice and information. You can also search our [Family Information Service website](#) for more information on the wider support and advice available to any households that need it.

There are a number of great community projects that offer help in different ways. For example, take a look at the '[Grow It, Cook It, Eat It' project](#) that the council supports and we have already seen being developed through community boards. This includes a range of initiatives that help with the cost of food, ensure food isn't wasted and has a number of health and environmental benefits. Local initiatives like this play a vital part in the overall general support available to residents who need a helping hand.

There is also the support on offer from central government this winter. This is the current package:

- Eligible residents in receipt of disability benefits will receive a £150 cost of living payment from 20 September.
- All households in Great Britain will receive a £400 discount on their electricity bills this winter, applied in six monthly instalments, automatically coming off bills, starting in October.
- In addition to this, households on means tested benefits including Universal Credit, Pension Credit and Tax Credits will receive a Cost of Living payment of £650 this year.

**You can find out more about these payments on the government's website [here](#) and access wider information about the overall support available to households via [their website](#) – this contains information on transport and childcare costs too.**

In addition, the websites of the main energy providers contain valuable tips about how to save energy in the home.

### **Highways – a new contract and what it means for community boards**

Maintaining and improving the roads in the county is one of the issues that matter most to residents and is a top priority for Buckinghamshire Council.

As you will be aware, Buckinghamshire Council will be starting new highways contracts in April next year and this will have an impact on community board projects currently in the pipeline. It is also an opportunity to build in a delivery model with community boards in mind.

### **The current situation**

Across all the community boards there are currently about 58 projects which have been agreed and funding committed but are yet to be completed by the outgoing contractor (Transport for Bucks, TfB). The status of these approved projects is as follows:

- 22 projects are rated Green and are scheduled to be completed by the end of March next year
- 10 projects have been rated as Amber and delivered to a gateway stage ready for the new contractor to take forward eg. design, feasibility
- 26 projects are rated as Red and are under review but may not be started at all because of their complexity or the time to implement overlaps with the change in Highway's service provider.

All Amber and Red projects continue to be reviewed with TFB to determine if any can be delivered under the current contract by March 2023. Updates will be provided if the situation changes. Furthermore, the Highways service will work closely with our new service provider to determine if they are able to deliver any amber and red projects prior to the contract start date in April 2023.

There are also about 55 projects that have been proposed with PIDs drafted for which no decision to proceed has yet been taken. These projects will not be taken forward until the new contract has started to ensure that they are priced correctly by the new service provider and firm timescales can be agreed for implementation.

Boards can still reserve funding for these schemes from the current 2022/23 budget, but the final prices will need to be confirmed with our new service provider. You can also continue to discuss highways priorities and solutions.

Balfour Beatty Living Places has already been awarded the new highways maintenance contract and the new consultancy contractor will be announced in late September. The council will be working with the new contractors and outgoing contractors Ringway Jacobs to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements under the name Buckinghamshire Highways.

### **Looking Forward**

As advised already, given the changes to the highway service, Boards should not accept any additional applications highway schemes in 2022/23 and no further projects should be submitted for consideration for 2023/24. Community Boards will be consulted on the development of a new protocol and process for Highway schemes during the transition to the new contract ready for April 23, please therefore keep any new schemes on hold pending the new process for taking these forward.

The new highways working arrangement will include a community-based design delivery model for small schemes specifically for Community Boards to develop their local highway schemes. We will also provide greater clarification on which highway schemes are appropriate for Community Board to bring forward.

Additionally, and to further help support Community Boards, a 'menu of options' will be developed for small highways schemes that show the indicative prices and implementation timescales for a range of suitable small local highways schemes to better inform the Boards in decision making.

Any partners currently with a live scheme on the RAG list will continue to receive communication from the TfB/project technician and their Community Board Manager, and community boards, Highways and TfB will continue to work closely during the transition.

While we appreciate the delay to delivering schemes will be disappointing, the new approach being adopted does highlight the commitment to the work of the Boards in delivering local highway improvements in the new contract.

## **Support for Ukrainian guests continues across the county – further help is still needed**

Arrivals from Ukraine are still coming into our county with 700 hosts now offering accommodation to over 1,200 Ukrainian guests.

We continue to work hard to make sure the families can access schooling, work, finance, practical items, English language lessons and emotional support through our Helping Hand for Ukraine scheme – further details at [A Helping Hand for Ukraine | Buckinghamshire Council](#).

We recognised the significance of Ukraine Independence Day (24 August) as everyone reflected on their personal journey and loss. The summer break also brought the challenge of keeping our younger guests occupied and this year we offered free holiday activities and food on the HAF scheme and Boredom buster bags from our partners LEAP.

We also continue to work with our voluntary sector colleagues and local community groups, now with an eye on the new challenges coming up. We also have over 150 staff in sponsor liaison roles, in addition to their day jobs, who keep regular one-to-one contact with sponsor households.

We recognise that Ukraine families living in Buckinghamshire will be concerned about what happens when their current sponsorship arrangements come to an end. This is especially a concern for those families that have settled into communities and schools. In some locations, it will be challenging to find alternative accommodation locally due to a lack of availability and high housing costs. We want to help our guests from the Ukraine as much as we can and are looking at solutions which will require all tiers of government, the private and voluntary sector to work together. Options being considered include:

1. Extend with sponsor – If both parties are happy to stay together then once agreed the guests can continue living in the same area and keep their local support network.
2. Rematch with a new sponsor – The Council will help the guests rematch with a new sponsor home or the guests can find their own rematch, although this could mean they would need

to move to a different area which would impact on their support networks including schools/employment.

3. Private rental – Guests can look at renting privately if they can afford this. High rents across the south east make finding affordable housing difficult for many. Some guests may be eligible for a Local Housing Allowance to help meet rental costs and we will help them find out if this support is available to them. The Council may also be able to help with a deposit guarantee and one month's rent upfront. Again this could mean guests having to move to a different area if there is no affordable private rental accommodation locally.
4. Social housing – All guests are eligible to apply to join the Council's housing register. However, there is a very high demand for social housing in Buckinghamshire, so depending on the type and size of property they are looking for, there is likely to be a long wait for a property.

On top of the housing issue, there is the cost of living crisis hitting us all – the impact on both hosts and guests is already evident so we are working with central Government to make sure Bucks' residents' voices are heard; tangible, long-term solutions are found; and we can continue to support both our residents and our guests.

## **Waste and recycling missed bins and garden waste charges**

### **Missed bins**

Unfortunately, in some pockets of the former Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe district areas of Buckinghamshire, disruption as a result of re-organising waste rounds continues. Although on average 99.6% of bins are being collected successfully every day since the start of the reorganisation, there are still a significant number of bin collections being missed every week.

Our contractor Veolia continues to work at bringing service levels up to the standard that we expect. The council is continuing to hold Veolia to account for delivering greater progress and meeting the required standard and is closely monitoring the service.

We continue to ask any residents experiencing pockets of poor service to report missed bins on the council website ([www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/missed-bin](http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/missed-bin)) as soon as they can.

### **Garden waste charges**

New garden waste subscription arrangements began on Monday 26 September. A campaign has been running to raise awareness of the change and the need to subscribe to the service to have garden waste collected from this date. The service is now a single chargeable 'opt-in' garden waste collection service, at a cost of £50 per bin per year (or reusable bags for properties not suitable for wheeled bins).

This means anyone who has previously received free collections of garden waste will now have to subscribe, paying an annual fee to continue receiving fortnightly kerbside garden

waste collections from the council. Our household recycling sites continue to provide free disposal of garden waste for anyone not wanting to pay for the subscription service.

More information on how the service works can be found at [Buckinghamshire Council's Arrange a garden waste collection web pages](#).

### **New on-demand PickMeUp service for Wycombe**

Described as a cross between a bus and taxi service, a new 'demand responsive' service was launched by the council and Carousel on 27 September in the High Wycombe area as part of a pilot scheme funded by the Government's Rural Mobility Fund. The trial service will run for three years, with scope to run for longer if successful, and an Aylesbury pilot is due to launch later in the autumn.

Sitting under Carousel's 'PickMeUp' brand, the Wycombe pilot will serve several communities, including Booker, Daws Hill, Wooburn Green, Wycombe Marsh, Loudwater and Downley. These either have a limited bus service or a route which only serves part of the community. The PickMeUp service will also improve access to areas with steeper gradients.

Users will be able to book one of five fully accessible minibuses to collect them either directly from their home, or from one of the 500+ pickup points in the local area. Ideal for those who may not have access to a bus stop either by their home, or a service that operates direct to their desired destination, the DRT service is quick and easy to use for commuters, students, and people with accessibility issues.

Buses can be booked in advance of a trip via an app (through which passengers can also pay for tickets and track buses in real time) or by calling 01494 296021. Buses can be booked in advance, or on the day of travel, and will run from Monday to Friday, 6am-7pm. Journeys will only cost a little more than a local bus service – between £2 and £3.50 per trip depending on distance travelled, and concessionary bus passes will be accepted for free travel.

### **Community boards success at county show**

The county show was a fantastic success for the community boards, it was a great opportunity to reach a huge number of residents and also other organisations that we could network with in the future.

The main themes coming through were lack of activities for young people, better bus services including community buses, speeding and litter issues. In addition, we managed to sign up more residents to receive our newsletters.

In summary, it was a great event for us to attend.

### **Town and Parish Charter**

Buckinghamshire Council's Town & Parish Charter was agreed and published on our website in July. This charter is founded on our respect for all councils in Buckinghamshire as independent, democratically accountable bodies and has one simple aim – to articulate and demonstrate our commitment to working together to serve the people of Buckinghamshire.

Community boards have a great record of working with our local councils and this charter is essential reading – you can view it at [Town and Parish Charter | Buckinghamshire Council](#)

### **Better enforcement for moving traffic offences**

Buckinghamshire Council is one of a handful of local authorities in England outside of London to have successfully applied for powers to enforce moving traffic offences (MTOs) that were previously only enforceable by the police. These offences are where drivers ignore restrictions in place at a location – for example driving through a no entry sign, making banned turns, entering a yellow box junction without a clear exit or driving on bus or taxi routes.

The new enforcement powers will make use of automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) technology at 14 locations across Bucks. The locations were listed as part of a consultation about support for the council’s plan to apply for the powers from February to April 2022; they are places where restrictions have been in place already for some time for road safety reasons or to prevent traffic congestion.

The locations where cameras will start to be installed from December will be highlighted through council communications. Signage will be erected well in advance at the camera locations to give drivers plenty of notice of the enforcement powers.

The cabinet decision can be seen at

<https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MIId=17388&x=1>

### **Local Heritage Listings**

Buckinghamshire Council is one of 22 local authorities to receive funding to develop a Local Heritage List as part of a national initiative to improve the provision and standard of locally held Lists of Non-Designated Heritage Assets (NDHA). The list seeks to identify locally significant assets and celebrate their contribution to local identity and character.

Developing this list provides a rare opportunity for Buckinghamshire residents to nominate important assets around the county that are not currently listed but that have significant heritage interest. By adding these heritage assets to a Local Heritage List we can ensure their local importance is recognised and taken into account in the planning process.

Once on the list, these assets become known as Non-Designated Heritage Assets (NDHAs). They differ from those sites that have statutory protection and national designations, such as Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments and Registered Parks and Gardens.

Working with a team of volunteers, we are currently assessing over 2,000 nominations ranging from mileposts, street art and open spaces to historic buildings, water mills and chapels. We intend to adopt a phase one local list this winter, with a phase two in 2023. For more information visit [Home - Buckinghamshire's Local Heritage List \(local-heritage-list.org.uk\)](#) or email [localheritagelist@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:localheritagelist@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)

## Current and upcoming consultations

### **Buckinghamshire Council consultations**

Current consultations and surveys from Buckinghamshire Council are available to view on our website <https://yourvoicebucks.citizenspace.com/>

Where appropriate, we also list NHS consultations and surveys as well.