



## Cabinet Member report – Leader

Councillor Martin Tett

### **Strategic Finance**

The Q2 budget monitoring position was taken to Cabinet on 14 November. This showed a forecast Portfolio overspend of £15.2m at the end of Q2. This is partially offset by a favourable variance of £6.6m due to factors such as higher interest rates on balances. Although the net forecast of £8.6m deficit is a deteriorating position, the report highlights a range of ongoing actions that have been implemented to mitigate the ongoing financial pressures. In addition, we still hold several unreleased contingencies that could help offset some of the emerging pressures over the second half of the year. These can only be used once and when used are unavailable in future years.

The Medium-Term Financial Planning process for the next period is now well underway with Cabinet Members actively reviewing their budget proposals. This year has again been even more challenging due to inflation and soaring demand pressures, alongside energy price uncertainty. At the same time, the macro-economic position has been volatile, and the global geopolitical position continues to impact on economic performance and prices. These challenges are not unique to this Council, and you will have all seen many other councils predicting the difficult decisions that lie ahead.

Our best predictions are that a significant budget gap will still exist for all years. We can expect to receive Buckinghamshire Council's local government finance settlement in late December. This will support Cabinet Members in identifying what actions are required to set a balanced budget. The draft budget will then be scrutinised by the Finance and Resources Select Committee in January. Cabinet will then recommend a final budget to Full Council in February.

### **HS2**

HS2 has been widely featured in the news recently and it is undoubtedly right that the ill-conceived and vastly expensive Phase Two of the Scheme has finally been cancelled. This announcement comes too late for Buckinghamshire, however. I have written to the Secretary of State for Transport, Mark Harper, to demand that a substantial allocation of the £36bn savings from scrapping the latter stages of this scheme are spent on local transport projects in Buckinghamshire as well as on environmental mitigation for Phase One.

### **South East Aylesbury Link Road**

The Council continues to be involved in discussions with central government regarding the full financing of the project. Securing this funding has taken longer than anticipated, but we recently had the good news that a substantial portion of the funding is agreed, and we are awaiting the paperwork. We continue negotiations with landowners to secure the land for the project and are ensuring that we work to achieve the best value for the taxpayer.

I took a decision on 27 October to progress with delivery of the Wendover Road and Lower Road roundabouts to adhere to the project programme and contractual requirements. In addition to this, approval was granted to acquire further land to enable delivery of the project. The Council remains committed to supplying the required infrastructure to enable growth in the county.

Recent activity on the project has included collaborative working with East West Rail to use 2100m<sup>3</sup> of excess topsoil from SEALR to reinstate their site compound near to Winslow station. This collaboration has saved money on SEALR and reduced the overall impact of lorry movements on the network and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

### **Eastern Link Road**

The planning application for the improvements to the A41 Aston Clinton roundabout is anticipated to be submitted by Taylor Wimpey soon. This is expected to be the first phase of works for both the Eastern Link Road, and the Southern Link Road (through the Hampden Fields development).

### **South West Link Road**

There are ongoing design and land discussions to secure the necessary alignment of the South West Link Road with HS2 and the site promoters for the development site on the West of Aylesbury.

### **England's Economic Heartland**

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) is supporting Buckinghamshire Council to progress the Aylesbury Eastern Link Road, following government funding to progress Major Road Network (MRN) schemes as part of its 'Network North' announcement. Its next two connectivity studies, which focus on north-south movements between Northampton and southern Buckinghamshire and east-west movements between Buckinghamshire and east Hertfordshire, are scheduled to go before its Board in March 2024. On behalf of the East West Main Line Partnership, EEH has commissioned Cambridge Econometrics to build the economic narrative for progressing the East West Rail Aylesbury link. This work should be ready early in the new year. As Chair of the East West Main Line Partnership, Cllr Steven Broadbent spoke at EEH's annual conference on 1 November, held this year in Cambridge and attended by more than 200 delegates.

### **Aylesbury Electricity Grid Reinforcement**

After a change in government legislation in March, there has been a requirement to reassess the delivery of this project. The Council is working closely with UK Power Networks to ensure that a revised delivery approach secures the required electricity capacity for Aylesbury.

### **Buckinghamshire Growth Board**

The Growth Board met in September and included a presentation of the three town regeneration strategies for Aylesbury, High Wycombe, and Chesham. This led to positive discussions on making connections with our partners in health and Bucks New University to deliver regeneration across the county.

The Board received updates from the new sub boards, which are embedding in new governance arrangements. These updates enable the Growth Board to have a more comprehensive picture of the work that is going on in the areas of skills, regeneration, Opportunity Bucks and the LEP (prior to the formation of the Investment Board), all of which will influence the Board's Forward Plan.

The Terms of Reference and composition for the new Growth Board were agreed at Cabinet and should come into effect early in 2024.

## **Devolution**

We have had an indication through the County Councils Network that the Government is planning to pursue devolution deals with all areas that are interested. There is an appetite in Government to roll out these deals to several local areas and Buckinghamshire is expected to be one of these. We are awaiting further details from Government.

## **Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership (BLEP)**

I attended the LEP Board meeting on the 13 October 2023, along with other Cabinet colleagues. The LEP Board unanimously agreed the proposed transition arrangements of functions, resources, and assets moving into the Council by the end of March 2024 at the latest. This was also approved by Cabinet on the 24 October 2023.

The LEP also discussed Buckinghamshire's productivity over the last 10 years. A deep dive is being conducted and a paper will go to the December Growth Board meeting to inform discussions and help inform future Growth Board policy.

Several notable developments have taken place at all the Buckinghamshire Enterprise Zones sites since my last update report.

I attended the launch of the new pedalling efficiency rig at the Silverstone Sports Engineering Hub at the beginning of October. The rig is the latest piece of specialist R&D Equipment supported by the Buckinghamshire LEP through its Local Growth Funding. It has helped establish the site as a major international research centre for professional and Olympic sports. Work has also now started on the swimming flume facility, which will enable the centre to also develop fluid dynamic testing capacity on site.

At the adjacent Lunaz production site, the rapidly growing workforce has been celebrating winning Business of the Year at the Buckinghamshire Business Awards hosted at the Waterside Theatre in September. The company have been supported in its growth through direct investment by the LEP as part of their Getting Building Fund programme and has also worked with the Council in developing electric powered vehicles for our refuse fleet and as part of our Green Skills Challenge.

At Westcott, a bid has been submitted to the £50m UK Space Agency Space Clusters and Infrastructure Fund (SCIF) – the first dedicated fund for UK space infrastructure to develop the R&D infrastructure needed to make space products mission-ready and sell them into commercial markets. A bid of £5.86m has been submitted on behalf of the Westcott Space Cluster by Buckinghamshire LEP for the development of primary new Cluster Hub facilities. These would be equipped with specialist R&D equipment for propulsion and testing while also providing commercial, academic, communal, and social spaces within the Westcott Enterprise Zone site.

All the units at the Symmetry Park site at the Aylesbury Woodlands Enterprise Zone site are now in occupancy. Up to 150 new jobs are being created following the fit out of the 17,094 sqm (184,000sq ft) new Rexel Aylesbury premises, making it their largest single centre in the UK.

## **Support to Buckinghamshire Businesses and the Buckinghamshire Enterprise Zone update**

The LEP Board considered plans for Enterprise Zones in 2023-24. There will be no new development complete in 2023-24. However, annual income will grow from floorspace completed in 2022-23. It is intended that EZ funds will in future become part of the fund for Economic Development.

### **Homes for Ukraine**

On 23 September, Hilltop Community Group held a Ukrainian Festival at Restore Hope in Chesham, bringing together the local community, partners and Councillors to recognise the support provided to Ukrainian refugees in the area. The Deputy Leader and I attended the event and enjoyed talking to a number of our Ukrainian Guests, discussing the support they receive from the Council as well as the issues they face. The event was also attended by Felicity Buchan, MP, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

### **Afghan Resettlement**

Over the last two months, we have welcomed a further nine new Afghan families to Buckinghamshire as a result of the national closure of the bridging hotels. Working closely with Fairhive, a local Housing Provider, seven of these new families moved into MOD properties. Our initial focus has been to ensure the children all have school places and the families are registered with GPs. The focus is now on helping them settle into their new communities.

### **Local Authority Housing Fund**

We are participating in the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF), a government capital fund that supports local authorities to obtain accommodation for families with housing needs who have arrived in the UK via Ukrainian and Afghan resettlement and relocation schemes. Using this government funding, we will shortly be completing the purchase of six 4-bedroom properties specifically for Afghan families as well as two flat complexes with 1 to 2-bedroom apartments for Ukrainian guests.

### **Disposable Electronic Cigarettes**

On behalf of the Council, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on 13 October. I urged the Government to ban the sale of disposable electronic cigarettes and raised particular concern over the impact of vaping on children and young people, as well as the environmental impact of single use disposable vapes.

On 30 October, I received a reply from Rebecca Pow MP, Minister for Environmental Quality and Resilience who shared that any decisions to introduce new restrictions on disposable vapes will be announced following analysis of the Department of Health and Social Care's consultation. In addition, the Government will consider what changes in legislation are needed to ensure the vaping sector foots the bill for the collection and treatment of its used products.

### **Justice Committee Call for Evidence – Future Prisons Population and Estate Capacity**

Following the Call for Evidence on the future of prison population and estate capacity, I wrote to Sir Robert Neill MP, Justice Committee Chair. In Buckinghamshire, we are directly impacted by plans to create a new prison to increase current capacity within the British justice system and have expressed our objections as the local authority where the new site has been proposed. We do not believe the site at Grendon Underwood is the correct location for the proposed new prison and believe it would negatively impact on the quality of life of residents in the surrounding area. I urged the Justice Committee to look closely at the impact of the proposal on this greenfield site and to consider the use of other more appropriate sites where the local long-term negative impacts would be considerably less and would better benefit the future prison population.

### **South East Strategic Leaders (SESL)**

SESL wrote to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury regarding strategic local authority finance.

Leaders, chief executives, and colleagues discussed, and shared best practice, around the integration of the activities of Local Enterprise Partnerships into strategic authorities. SESL wrote to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Minister for Enterprise, Markets and Small Business setting out ideas and concerns regarding this integration.

Leaders, chief executives and colleagues met with representatives of Leicestershire County Council and Barnardo's to discuss options for, and best practice in, providing children's residential care.

### **LGA Councillors' Forum and Executive Advisory Board**

On 19 October, I attended both the Councillor's Forum and Executive Advisory Board. At the Councillors' Forum, I gave an update on the People and Places Board, looking at the transition to digital technologies, growth and productivity, health devolution, levelling up, and employment and skills. My full report can be found on the LGA website [here](#). At the Executive Advisory Board, we discussed a variety of topics including current issues on Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) and Asylum and Migration.

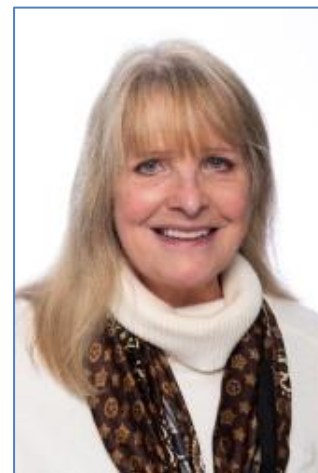
### **Chiltern Rangers 10 Years Celebration**

On 28 September, I attended Chiltern Rangers 10-year celebration. Since its founding on 1 September 2013, Chiltern Rangers have been enhancing the Chiltern's habitats through conservation, education, and community engagement.

### **Headway at Bourne End Community Centre**

On 11 October, I visited the Headway South Bucks Resource and Day Centre in Bourne End and saw how staff work to improve the lives of people who have experience acquired brain injury and support their families. The team organises various social and physical activities for their clients, some of which are funded by Buckinghamshire Council.





## Cabinet Member report – Health and Wellbeing

Councillor Angela Macpherson

### Winter Pressures

At its meeting in September, the Health and Wellbeing Board sought assurance that organisations are as prepared as possible for the challenges of the winter period, by considering the Buckinghamshire health and care [winter plan](#). The plan sets out actions to manage the anticipated challenges across the hospital system, including pathways for people with mental health issues, and the framework for escalation of pressures. The Board was told that, as part of the preparations, Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust (BHT) has again established Olympic Lodge as additional capacity for local hospitals. The Lodge will be available until the end of March 2024.

In October, the health and care system launched a new Transfer of Care Hub (ToCH). The hub, supported by a multi-agency integrated discharge team, is a single co-ordination point for BHT hospital discharges. The development of the Hub means that the hospital discharge process is now more streamlined, improving flow through the system and improving the experiences of those leaving hospital. The council has effective arrangements to support Buckinghamshire residents in neighbouring hospitals, with social workers in both Wexham Park and Milton Keynes hospitals. Council staff work closely with onsite discharge co-ordinators in these hospitals and are actively involved in discharge planning.

In addition, four care home hubs have been established in the county, providing a 'step down' facility from hospital. These care home hubs comprise 26 intermediate beds, which mean that people who need a little more healthcare input after a hospital stay now have access to multi-disciplinary teams in a non-hospital setting for a short period before returning home.

### Keeping Vulnerable Adults Safe

The Council is committed to helping all adults to live a safe and happy life but sadly, even in Buckinghamshire harm does take place. With over 12,000 reports of suspected abuse or neglect in 2022/23, it is important that residents know what to look for and how to report any concerns. During this year's national Safeguarding Adults Week in November, staff visited High Wycombe, Amersham and Aylesbury town centres to raise awareness of the abuse of adults and what people can do if they are worried about a friend, family member or colleague. Anyone with any concerns should contact the Safeguarding Adults Team on 01296 383204 or 0800 137 915, or by email at [ascfirstresponse@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:ascfirstresponse@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)

### Adult Social Care Improvement Programme

Pressures on adult social care services in Buckinghamshire are increasing in line with national trends. The drivers include demographic growth including an ageing population; increases in the numbers of people who can no longer afford to fund their own care; and rising costs of care resulting from inflationary pressures on care providers.

We are also seeing increasing numbers of new people contacting the Council for support, many of whom do not meet the threshold for Council services. An internal improvement programme aligned to the Better Lives Strategy has been established to address demand pressures and ensure maximum value from every public pound spent.

The programme will look at improvements to current services, such as transitions and carers support, and a small number of transformational projects focussing on community opportunities, accommodation options and short term interventions to improve independence. The programme will be instrumental in delivering savings allocated through the budget setting process.

### **Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance of Adult Social Care**

Over the summer, the CQC published interim guidance for the assessment of local authorities' adult social care services and for the assessment of integrated care systems. In relation to local authority assessments, the CQC has recently completed pilot assessments of five local authorities and is expected to publish its report on these in the near future.



Although the CQC will be inspecting all local authorities over a two year period, it has not yet announced the programme of formal assessments. However, we continue to focus on ensuring the Council is well prepared for a future visit from the Commission. This includes networking to identify and learn from others, including the Local Government Association and the five pilot authorities.

## **Mental Health and Wellbeing**

### **DPHAR - Mental Health Matters**

Each year the Director of Public Health produces an annual report on the health of the population. The theme of this year's report is 'Mental Health Matters: Be Kind to your Mind.'

Mental health is as important as physical health for our health and wellbeing. It underpins our ability to build strong relationships, to do well at school or in our jobs, and shapes how we interact with the world around us. Good mental health often leads to better physical health as well as a reduced chance of dying at a younger age.

The report describes the things that promote and protect our mental health and the factors that can have a negative impact. It focuses on the ways we can all promote and protect our mental health, such as being more physically active, spending time with family and friends, learning new skills, and volunteering to help others. The report is a call to action for partners in Buckinghamshire. Partner organisations will be asked to reflect the recommendations in existing multi-agency plans.



The Director of Public Health Annual Report was presented to Cabinet on 14 November 2023.

### **Mental Health Training for Hairdressers**

As part of the hairdressers' pilot project, training for hairdressers has been developed with Bucks Mind. Pilot training sessions took place in High Wycombe on 1 November and Aylesbury on 8 November 2023, reaching a total of 25 hairdressers and trainee hairdressers.

Evaluation of the pilot is underway, including the use of an online webpage developed to help hairdressers signpost their clients to existing services.

## Mental Health Community Conversations

In collaboration with Buckinghamshire NHS Talking Therapies, the Community Conversations project involves local communities in developing events designed to raise awareness of how their communities can take care of their own mental health, to help community members support one another and to reduce the stigmas associated with mental ill health.

A total of three pilot Community Conversations have taken place so far: two with the Movers and Shakers Group in Castlefield, High Wycombe and one with the Aylesbury Caribbean Lunch Club, with a second session planned for January 2024.

Several themes have emerged from the events so far, including supporting family members with their mental health, generational differences in attitudes to mental health and worries about burdening others. At all three events, community members were able to find out more about mental health support available from Buckinghamshire NHS Talking Therapies.

Following the successful completion of the pilot phase, the aim is to roll out the programme to more community groups across Buckinghamshire, with a focus on Opportunity Bucks wards.

## Tobacco Control

### Smoke and Vape Free Campaigns

Children are most at risk of taking up smoking or vaping if they grow up in communities where smoking/vaping is the norm. Our current smoke and vape-free campaigns include:

- **Smokefree Parks and Playgrounds** – a voluntary initiative designed to educate the public and promote positive behaviour change through smoke and vape-free signage in parks and playgrounds. Local schools are encouraged to participate, by running a ‘design a sign’ competition with children, with the winning signage placed in the local park. We currently have 14 parks/playgrounds across Buckinghamshire with Smokefree Parks and Playgrounds signage installed.
- **Smokefree Sidelines** – a collaboration between the Council and the Bucks and Berks Football Association aims to introduce a culture of not smoking or vaping on football match sidelines. Smoke and vape-free signage are placed around sidelines and smokers are signposted to local stop smoking services. 11 football clubs have signed up and implemented Smokefree Sidelines initiative at their club.
- **Vape School Resources** – We have shared localised vape resources with schools which provide parents and students with key information on the use of vapes amongst children and young people. The resources also cover myths and facts about vaping.
- **Trading Standards Officer** – Funding has been received to recruit a Trading Standards Officer that will be dedicated to detecting underage sales of vapes, tobacco, alcohol, and nitrous oxide.
- **Schools Survey** – the annual schools survey now includes questions on vaping. It will explore whether children and young people currently vape, where they buy these from and if anyone in their household vapes. Baseline data will enable Public Health to understand local vaping prevalence and spot trends over time.

### Response to Government Consultation

A response is being drafted to the government consultation, “[Stopping the start: our new plan to create a smokefree generation](#),” which aims to end cigarette sales to children aged 14 and under. In support of the government’s proposals to create a smokefree generation the response will focus on the following key points:



- The health impact of long-term vaping is unknown but there is unlikely to be no harm. There is also clear evidence emerging of considerably more young people taking up vaping than smoking; and for some, vaping is a pathway to smoking tobacco.
- There is very clear evidence of the environmental harm caused by disposable vapes (also known as e-cigarettes), which are generally thrown away rather than safely recycled. This creates a fire risk and environmental harm from the lithium batteries, as well as litter in public spaces.

### Tobacco Control Strategy Refresh

The Buckinghamshire Tobacco Control Strategy is currently being refreshed in collaboration with a range of partners and is due for formal decision in March 2024. The strategy will focus on addressing gaps in tobacco control actions in the County. The multi-agency Buckinghamshire Tobacco Control Alliance, chaired by Public Health, will oversee and steer the priorities of the strategy to help achieve a smokefree generation in Buckinghamshire.

An underpinning Vaping Position Statement has also been developed. This document sets out our agreed approach to vapes across the county and the actions being taken to reduce the number of children and young people starting to vape. I will ensure that members receive a copy of this Statement, given the high profile and public concern around vaping, particularly to parents of school age children.

## Physical Activity

### Physical Activity Strategy Refresh 2024-2029

Following formal decision making, the Physical Activity Strategy 2024-2029 will be published in January 2024.

Developed with partners and community organisations, this multi-agency strategy aims to provide clear guidance to strategic leads, policy makers, commissioners and providers about how they can help increase movement and physical activity amongst Buckinghamshire residents.

The strategy focuses on four key principles for embedding activity into everyday life across the life course:

- Active Communities
- Active Environments
- Skilled Workforce
- Working Collaboratively



### BetterPoints Bucks

Since its launch at the beginning of the year, the Council's [BetterPoints Bucks app](#) has gained over 2000 registered users, with 31% of these registered users coming from Opportunity Bucks wards. To date a total of 44,343 active and sustainable journeys have been recorded, saving over 56,000kg of carbon dioxide emissions. 71% of participants who self-reported being physically inactive on the baseline survey are now achieving the Government's recommended 150+ minutes of activity per week, showing lasting behaviour change is being established.

The BetterPoints workplace challenge ran from 2 October to 26 November 2023. The eight-week challenge was open to employees of Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, the Integrated Care Board, and Oxford Health Foundation Trust who competed to see which organisation could get the most colleagues involved. The top three teams on the leaderboard at the end of the challenge will win a cash prize for their chosen charity.

BetterPoints Bucks was recently shortlisted as a finalist at the industry of UKPHR Innovation for Public Health Awards for 'Best Digital Initiative Award.' As the awards received a record number of entries this year, I am delighted that the Council's Public Health team was a finalist.



**Cllr Angela Macpherson attending our lunchtime promo walk for the workplace challenge**





## Cabinet Member report – Homelessness and Regulatory Services

Councillor Mark Winn

### **Environmental Protection**

The team continue to work in partnership with planning policy on the Luton Airport Development Consent Order. This has included significant scrutiny of the proposals and attendance at Planning Inspectorate hearings in Luton. We are working with key stakeholders to minimise potential impact.

The team are also digesting emerging neighbourhood plans and making comments regarding air quality and noise. The team has also hosted DEFRA officials at a recent environmental permitted site with a view to improving the government sector guidance with a team member directly contributing to the development of new crematoria process guidance.

The team continue to respond effectively and efficiently to service requests for noise and other forms of statutory nuisance.

### **Housing Standards**

The team have continued to undertake visits as part of the Opportunity Bucks programme to identify unlicensed HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation) including following up with around 200 door knocks to properties in the Wycombe wards.

The team have successfully prosecuted a landlord for poor standards in an HMO which resulted in a substantial fine for a Wycombe based landlord.

An awareness campaign is underway to give advice around prevention of damp and mould in homes ahead of the usual peak season for requests for assistance approaches. Officers are gearing up to take enforcement action where a landlord does not properly address property issues, and a referral pathway for health and other professionals to support vulnerable tenants will be implemented under the Opportunity Bucks programme.

### **Commercial**

Environment Health Commercial Team Officers carried out a successful gas safety project in catering businesses with 26 inspections carried out. Whilst the majority of gas appliances were found to be safe and in good order, some critical safety issues were identified and dealt with using a range of enforcement powers. These included Flame Suppression Devices on cooking ranges found intentionally overridden or stuck and inoperable with grease/dirt due to a lack of maintenance, ignition switches inoperable or not working resulting in an unsafe method of lighting and a lack of appliance maintenance or gas safety inspection.

A response was submitted to the first of the Government's consultations on the introduction of a licencing regime for non-surgical aesthetic treatments.

The team continue to receive a high number of new business registrations, receiving nearly 400 registrations in the first six months of the year. These are triaged in relation to the potential risk the business may pose, with the high-risk businesses being prioritised for inspection. In the first six months of the year, 766 food hygiene inspections were carried out overall and 219 food safety and food hygiene complaints received.

The team is also working with colleagues across other departments in relation to a number of concerns being raised about pest control issues within Wycombe town centre.

## **Trading Standards**

### **Electric Blanket Testing**

Following high failure rates found in Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Buckingham last year and the increased use of electric blankets to keep warm whilst household finances are stretched, Trading Standards have again been testing residents' electric blankets at two libraries in Buckinghamshire (Chesham and Burnham). 71% of the blankets tested were found to be unsafe. Because of the risk of fires all dangerous blankets were replaced using new electric blankets supplied free of charge by Dreams. Further testing is being arranged for different locations in late February next year.

### **Underage Sales Test Purchasing**

Trading Standards continues to use young volunteers to check local retailers are not selling age restricted products to under 18's. Recently this has included fireworks (no sales were made) and vapes. Vapes remain a priority for the service with concerning levels of under 18's vaping even though vapes cannot legally be sold to them. Around 15% of businesses tested are selling to under 18's locally. These sales are followed up with advice and some are under investigation which may lead to prosecution. The Service is discussing with the Public Health Team an appropriate response to the government Consultation on "Creating a smokefree generation and tackling youth vaping". This consultation closes on 6 December 2023.

### **Scrap Metal Policy**

On 5 September, the Licensing Committee agreed the content of the first Scrap Metal Licensing Policy for Buckinghamshire Council. The policy sets out the Council's approach to licensing both fixed sites and mobile collectors of scrap metal, and the approach to decision making, compliance visits, partnership working with other agencies and intelligence sharing, as well as signposting interested parties to sources of guidance. A final decision on adoption of the new policy has been referred to the Cabinet Member and Leader for Key Decision.

### **Charitable Collections Policy**

The Licensing Committee (5 September) also agreed the content of a new Charitable Collections Policy, covering the activities of house to house and on the street charitable collections. To regulate charitable street collections councils must adopt the Model Street Collection Regulations. Whilst each former District Council had historically adopted these regulations, it has been recommended that Full Council is asked to make a resolution adopting these regulations for Buckinghamshire Council to safeguard against risk of legal challenge.

### **Animal Licensing Policy**

On 7 November, the Licensing Committee approved the first Animal Activity Licensing Policy for Buckinghamshire Council. The policy covers commercial activities involving animals such as dog

breeding, boarding cats and dogs, selling pets, hiring of horses, exhibiting animals, as well as zoos and keeping dangerous wild animals. To help promote the highest standards of animal welfare and public protection, all licence holders will be required to provide a basic DBS certificate. Additionally, where the activities involve contact with children and vulnerable persons, applicants and licence holders will be expected to ensure that they have safeguarding policies in place, provide appropriate staff training and have a vetting procedure for any staff that have unsupervised contact with children or vulnerable persons.

### **Pavement Licensing**

Following the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill receiving Royal Assent on 26 October 2023, the temporary pavement licensing regime, introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, will now become permanent. The legislation provides a fast and efficient route for hospitality businesses to place furniture on the public highway for eating and drinking. The Act also contains enforcement powers for officers to serve notice and remove furniture from non-compliant businesses. Implementation of the permanent scheme requires a commencement order, which is anticipated ahead of the temporary scheme coming to an end in September 2024 and the Licensing will work to produce a new policy to set out the Council's approach to licensing in this area ahead of the implementation date.

### **Taxi and Private Hire Licensing**

The recent [annual report](#) to Licensing Committee (7 November) highlighted the important work that Service do to protect public safety and maintain high standards when licensing taxi and private hire drivers, vehicles and operators. Between October 2022 and September 2023, the team followed up on 335 complaints, carried out 116 investigations and checked over 50 vehicles while working with TVP roads policing team. They also continued to engage in proactive enforcement and compliance activities, including joint visits with the Client Transport Compliance team to schools at contract drop off/pick up times, regular town centre visits, and attendance at major events including Silverstone, Penn Fest and Oktoberfest.

### **Homelessness Prevention**

The number of households approaching the Council for assistance with their housing, particularly avoiding homelessness, continues to increase. Between July and October, the Council saw 1546 households, 189 more than the previous quarter. The Council supported 458 households to avoid homelessness, which is similar to last quarter. Thirty-one people were identified sleeping rough (19 in the South, 12 in the North) during the last quarter. Arrangements are in place to support those sleeping rough into accommodation during the winter.

### **Temporary Accommodation**

The cost of providing temporary accommodation is a major financial pressure for local authorities across the country, and Buckinghamshire is no exception. A plan is in place to manage the increasing cost, with a focus on reducing the use of costly nightly paid temporary accommodation. The current weekly cost of nightly paid temporary accommodation is about £16,367, down from £29,279 in March 2023. Also, the number of households in nightly paid temporary accommodation is currently 170, down from 246 in March 2023. The Council had 395 households in temporary accommodation as at the end of September 2023.

Bridge court, in High Wycombe is now fully in use as temporary accommodation. Bridge Court accommodates 58 households. The Council continues to work on arrangements like Bridge court, which will reduce its reliance on nightly paid accommodation. Discussions have started with Housing

Associations with a view to achieving quicker turnaround to properties used for temporary accommodation when they become void.

### **Disabled Facilities Grant**

In the last quarter, 60 adaptations to homes were completed through the Disabled Facilities Grant. These adaptations will make these homes suitable for these households with disabilities.

### **Bucks Home Choice**

Demand for social housing through Bucks Home Choice continues to increase. As at the end of September 2023, there were 6041 live applications on the housing register; an increase of 241 compared to June 2023. During the quarter, the Council let 266 social housing properties through Bucks Home Choice.

### **Registration Service**

The service is now planning for the busy winter season with the increase in deaths as we head towards the winter. The room at Buckingham Library is almost operational for the service to use once a week registering births and deaths and attesting notices of marriage. The safe has been moved from Amersham to Buckingham to ensure stock and certificates are held securely without the need to travel back to a base office which has happened pre-covid. This will allow for more appointments for customers to book. The service plans for the Buckingham office to be open from the end of November and information on dates open are being placed in the library, on our website and a notification to local members will be sent shortly.

Bookings for ceremonies for the current year stand at 1634, with the total for last year being 1851. The service has been working on some marketing ideas to encourage customers to book a date before the end of the year and it is hopeful this will bring in some more income. Another 188 ceremonies have been booked this past quarter for 2024/25 bring the total to 730 for next year so far.

### **Coroner's Service**

The service continues to be extremely busy investigating unnatural deaths in the county. Unregistered deaths remain a problem for the team and work is being done within the Government to address this. With the winter approaching this is the Coroner's Office busiest time with the extra deaths.



## Crematoria and Cemeteries Service – Stoke Poges Memorial Gardens

We have been busy working on several projects. In order to provide burial space for many years to come, we are landscaping a two-acre extension to the gardens which will provide further burial plots. This new area and some of the established gardens, which were built in the 1930's and are Grade I listed, are part of a Bereavement Trail; a walk through the gardens, which explains that everyone's journey of grief is different and there are no right or wrong ways to live with loss. Garden features



and sculptures are used to illustrate this, such as the Butterfly Stones pictured. The Bereavement Trail will help visitors explore some of the emotions which are often experienced after a loss. This will be illustrated in a guide to help navigate your way through the gardens.



We have also recently built a Covid Memorial Garden, due to be opened later this year. Our hope is that this space will give visitors an opportunity to explore and process some of the emotions linked

to the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic and the effects it had on individuals, their wellbeing, their work, and their support needs. This was felt especially during a bereavement when funerals were not able to take place in the traditional manner.

## Unauthorised Encampment Report

Unauthorised encampments over the summer months in Buckinghamshire have been quieter than previous years, this has been highlighted by Thames Valley Police in the "TVP and Local Authority Unauthorised Encampment Annual Review meeting" where they confirmed that there has been an overall reduction compared to previous years in Thames Valley.

To date, on local authority land, there have been thirteen unauthorised encampments in Buckinghamshire, four of which relate to the occupants being from the settled community choosing to leave their fixed abode and take to the roadside. This generally presents more of a challenge for the local authority as the occupants have effectively made themselves intentionally homeless meaning that there is little in the way of assistance that the local authority can provide, often resulting in an on-going problem of trespass on local authority land and little chance of being offered alternative accommodation.

We are now entering what is normally a quieter period for the Buckinghamshire Gypsy and Traveller Service, many Traveller children have returned to school and families have settled down for the Autumn and winter months.



## Cabinet Member report – Climate Change and Environment

Councillor Gareth Williams

### Annual Climate Change and Air Quality Report

We published our second Annual Progress Report in November documenting the activities we have undertaken against the actions and objectives outlined in our Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy. The last 12 months have seen us plant over 145,000 trees and create three new woodlands. Our anti-idling campaign, using funding secured from DEFRA, has seen air quality toolkits provided to all 16 community boards. Over 200 households benefited from energy and carbon saving measures through the Sustainable Warmth scheme, and we have commissioned the upcycling and electrification of our first refuse collection vehicle. Our own operational emissions have seen a 73.4% reduction against our 1990 baseline meaning that in 2023, we are already near our target of a 75% reduction by 2030. This is the essence of the Bucks Climate Challenge; tangible actions delivering results on the ground – our local response to the global challenge of climate change.

### South Waste Collection and Street Scene

Continuous affective contract management activities and ongoing work with Veolia has resulted in the first two quarters of 2023/24 (April - September) KPI target of 0.20% for missed bins being achieved. Veolia continue to meet the contractual target for container deliveries, residents receiving bins within 10 working days.

Garden waste subscriptions remain stable in Chiltern and South Bucks areas with 43% and 37% participation respectively. We have just completed the first year subscription renewals for Wycombe residents with other 25,000 renewals sent out. We are currently reporting participation for the Wycombe area at 42% which is a drop from the last report (49%). However, we are seeing this increase weekly and confident participation levels will continue to increase back towards the 49%.



The second 'Community Action Day' under the Opportunity Bucks Programme took place in September in the Micklefield and Ryemead Wards. The day was a success with community and staff volunteers and operational support teams from Veolia clearing litter and areas of fly tipped waste. Work will continue in this ward area to



improve community areas through engagement and



work with stakeholders, such as Red Kite Housing and local businesses. Plans are now in progress for the next set of action days scheduled for later this year.

### **North Waste and Street Scene Services**

Subscriptions to this year's garden waste collection service are now closed and residents will be able to sign up for the 2024 garden waste service from 8th December 2023. The service is launching a rolling 12-month subscription period rather than a fixed calendar year sign up period for 2024 to ensure that all residents, no matter what time of year they subscribe, will receive a full 12-month period of service for the same cost. This is of course excluding the six week winter suspension period. Due to the warm and wet weather this year, 50% more garden waste was collected from a similar number of garden waste subscribers in comparison to last year which saw hotter and drier conditions.

This summer also saw the Street Scene team welcome five new employees via the pioneering BC Horizons programme. This programme aims to introduce recently released prisoners or those on temporary licence back into the workplace. The Street Scene team became the first in the Council to successfully and safely recruit current prisoners on temporary licence from HMP Springhill. The opportunity provided to these prisoners by the service area has allowed for permanent employment up to and beyond their release date which results in fewer obstacles upon their release into the community, including receiving a stable income and completing rewarding public facing work.

### **Fly-Tipping Enforcement**

Investigation work against fly-tipping offences has followed a consistent pattern for some years – since Buckinghamshire Council adopted powers to issue fixed penalty notices (FPNs) for offences of fly-tipping and of failure by householders in their 'duty of care' responsibility for how they dispose of that waste. Fixed penalties are used for small scale offences and where a person has no history of offending. They are not usually used, for instance, where an offender works within the wider 'waste industry'.

In Bucks, offences are fully investigated to the extent that any non-payment of FPN can be prosecuted at court. 143 FPNs have been issued since adoption in August 2020 at the maximum level allowable of £400 (discounted to £300 if paid within 10 days).

UK Government has recently increased the maximum level at which these offences can be dealt with by fixed penalty and Buckinghamshire Council will decide whether to reflect the new levels by amending the levels at which it issues its FPNs for these offences. The new maximum fixed penalty allowed in England for a fly-tipping offence is £1,000 and for a householder failure in duty of care is £600.

Responses to littering offences have seen 8 fixed penalties issued since 1 Jul 2023. These FPNs have been fully investigated under the restrictions of criminal law. Buckinghamshire Council will consider adopting powers to follow up offences of littering from vehicles under civil law provisions which will streamline the investigation process.

### **HRC Charging – Government Announcement**

The Council notes the Department Environment Farming Rural Affairs (DEFRA) announcement on charging arrangements at Household Recycling Centres. The announced changes still need to go through the legislative process so it's important we are all aware that these changes are yet to come into effect. The current charging system for non-household waste, is outlined in detail on our [website](#), is still in place at all Buckinghamshire HRCs.

If the policy needs to change to reflect updated legislation, this will happen in due course, and we will keep residents fully informed as to the timetable and any changes to charges. We continue to await the publication of the draft legislation. It is important to note the proposed changes allows some chargeable waste in for free and the remaining can be charged as we do now. The detail of the draft legislation is needed to inform the control measures and practical changes needed and when the change in legislation applies.

The Council has five recycling centres which accept commercial / trade waste. Before 2019, there was a limit threshold accepted per month for free for small scale works. In practice this was abused and the volumes of all waste types including construction and demolition increased significantly, the consequence was increased cost for managing commercial waste which local authorities have no duties to do so. The proposals are highly likely to increase taxpayers paying for the disposal of commercial waste. Based on past experience the Council does not expect to see a decrease in fly tipping with the Governments proposed charging changes.

The Council has an extremely strong track record with regard to tackling fly tipping and has implemented a number of successful initiatives with government. Furthermore, in June 2021 WRAP published a report, 'The relationship between fly-tipping rates and HWRC charging' which concluded there was no link between charging and fly tipping at recycling centres. The research also considered a range of other factors such as deprivation and again did not find evidence that HWRC charging is associated with higher rates of fly tipping. In April 2022, the National Audit Office (NAO) called on the government to "better understand the relationship" between landfill tax rates and incentives to commit waste crime.

We continue to await the publication of the draft legislation and the date it applies.

### **Project Groundwater**

Project Groundwater is an externally funded six year project aiming to use innovative methods to reduce ground water based flood risk and the impact of this on our communities. The three pilot communities within Buckinghamshire (Chesham, Marlow and Chalfont St. Peter) have been working with us on new improved groundwater flood risk maps. The next phase will see groundwater flood risk maps for the entire county produced and made freely available. Further work will look to improve how this data can be incorporated into the planning system, both locally and at a national level.

The project has also commissioned new research into the use of cutting edge military drone technology to better monitor and understand the water table through ground penetrating radar. This could provide a previously unheard of level of understanding of groundwater levels. We are also working closely with Project Groundwater-Lincolnshire to establish a new significant and long term academic based research partnership to investigate the mental health impacts of flooding and determine what improvements can be made in flood risk management approaches. The aim of the research partnership will be to address the question of 'how do we change our approach to focus on people not property?'

## Tree Planting



33,708 trees were planted on Council Land in 2022/23 against a target of 21,000. This includes trees planted at Bury Farm, Grange Farm, Platinum Park Way and one of Buckinghamshire's first Miyawaki forests at Princess Risborough School. Two grant awards (£110,186 for Grange Farm; and £105,693 for Bury Farm) were secured to support the establishment and maintenance of trees

following applications to the England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) scheme.

The Council established a significant partnership with Forestry England to create Wing Woods, a brand-new woodland just outside Wing. 132,000 trees will be planted across a 51-hectare plot of council-owned land (previously used as farmland) by the end of the 2023/24 planting season.

Tree planting projects have been supported on land outside of the Council's land holding as well - 1,423 trees have been planted and 1,000 trees have been given to local organisations in 2022/23. The Council was successful for a second year regarding its application to the Local Authority Treescapes Fund (LATF) to support this work, securing £184,401 for tree planting and up to three years of maintenance support payments while the new trees become established.



## 'Energy Doctor Scheme' (Domestic Resource Efficiency Service)



Over 180 home visits have been completed by Energy Doctors since the scheme was launched in March 2023, and it is estimated that this is saving each household on average £113 on their energy bills and reducing their greenhouse gas emissions by 0.6 tonnes a year. We have achieved 39% of the CO<sub>2</sub>e saving target for the Scheme (N.B. 300 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e saved per annum as a result of all visits made by 31st March 2025). Just over half of these visits have been made to homes in Opportunity Bucks areas and the average savings per household in these areas is even higher at

£117 and 0.7 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per annum.

In mid-October three new low cost easy retrofit resource efficiency (LCERRE) measures were introduced that will help reduce water consumption:

- Aerating shower heads
- Shower timers
- Toilet cistern water displacement bags

Both the aerating shower heads and shower timers will also help reduce energy consumption by reducing the amount of water that needs to be heated. We expect these additional measures will be welcomed by residents who are experiencing rising water bills.



### **The Strategic Environmental Protection Team**

The Strategic Environmental Protection Team received very positive feedback from Defra on the 2023 Annual Status Report submitted in June. The concluding remarks were: “Overall, the report is detailed and concise, providing a good overview of the work the Council is undertaking to improve air quality within their area, and satisfies the criteria of the relevant reporting standard. The Council should continue their good work.” A bid has also been submitted to Defra for the Air Quality Grant 2023 to 2024 and we are expecting to be informed if the bid was successful around March 2024.

The Clean Up Our Air Initiative is going well with the final few sensors being installed across the County.



## Cabinet Member report – Education and Children’s Services

Councillor Anita Cranmer

### **Children’s Services Transformation**

As previously reported, there is corporate and political recognition that we must work differently in order to realise our shared ambition to deliver good quality services to children and young people in Buckinghamshire. Earlier this year the service embarked on a transformation programme which aims to:

- Enhance the effectiveness of support provided to children and young people by improving collaboration. This will be achieved through better sharing of information and increased system-wide multi-disciplinary ways of working.
- Develop responsive localised interventions specific to the needs of those families living within our communities.
- Ensure children and families are supported at the earliest possible stage through effective partnership interventions that improve outcomes without the need for escalation to more intrusive statutory support.
- Rebalance from a model of process and performance to enhance availability of system-wide support that can reduce avoidable demand by focusing on the most prevalent presenting needs.
- Develop a sustainable approach to placement sufficiency in response to unprecedented challenges arising from changes within the external placements market.
- Develop a highly skilled, Children’s Services workforce where staff feel valued and supported and are encouraged to develop their skills and capabilities in order to secure good quality outcomes for children and young people.

Over recent months, the service has been developing a new operating model focused on ensuring children and young people benefit from integrated services and seamless transition at all points of their journey. On 16 November 2023, formal consultation with staff commenced in relation to the front door, early help pathways, the initial child’s journey and prevention of escalating need.

The proposed changes to the service will be implemented in April 2024 and will involve the reorganisation of relevant staff into Locality Family Support Teams and into a Family Hub model. The model for the Locality Support teams will be configured and shaped by intelligence about the presenting needs and vulnerabilities within local communities across Buckinghamshire, demand for services, throughput and caseloads, and the financial viability and sustainability of the proposals. This initial change will support the strengthening of relationships between professionals (local authority, partner agencies and the VCS) at a lower geographical footprint, focused on the needs of children and young people in that given area and responding pragmatically to varying need without process led, artificial hand offs between services. The model will also promote ease in identifying the most trusted lead professional to work with a child and family to achieve success. The initial phase will be

an alignment of internal services only, but the long-term aim is to secure a more integrated approach with other partner agencies and the voluntary and community sector to bolster the range of support available within a locality.

### **Buckinghamshire's Care Leavers**

During National Care Leaver's week (25 October 2023 to 1 November 2023) the service held a Care Leaver employability event at The Gateway in Aylesbury. The aim of the day was to ensure that any care leaver who attended would be able to access an employment, apprenticeship or training activity which would further their career goals and/or maximise their income.



A range of organisations were invited including John Lewis Partnership, Sport 4 All, Department of Work and Pensions, Talkback, NHS, Caudwell Youth, Get Ahead and the Karima Foundation. Our Human Resource Team and Occupational Development team were also in attendance throughout the day and offered one to one coaching sessions with young people to help them work on their CV, practice interview skills, prepare for employment and apply for live vacancies within the council, including the new Horizons scheme to provide additional support to new recruits in entry level roles in the Council. The feedback from young people was positive, they enjoyed spending time together and the stall holders were able to link young people directly into employment and training opportunities.

As corporate parents, it is important that we are ambitious for our care leavers and provide them with the support they need in order to thrive in life. Recent successes also include the significant increase in the number of our care leavers studying at university. We currently have 43 care leavers at university compared to 20 young people in 2019. They study a vast range of courses including sports therapy, law, nursing, physics, politics, teaching, and criminology. More recently young people have successfully gained places at the top red brick universities including York, Nottingham, and Royal Holloway. We also have four young people engaged on a mentoring scheme at Oxford University. This is run by ex-Oxbridge students to support disadvantaged young people into the university of their choice. They are supporting with applications, academic rigour, personal statements, CVs, and interview practice.

Our Virtual school continue to give advice and guidance to all care leavers at university. Part of this strategy is developing a best practice guide to university support. As part of this work, the service has enlisted the help of a young care leaver currently studying in his 6th year of a medical degree at Nottingham. The aim is to widen participation and to ensure the package from each university is inclusive, with an emphasis on emotional well-being and understanding of trauma.

Having 43 care leavers at University is something we should be very proud of in Buckinghamshire and with on-going support we can ensure future cohorts can experience the same fantastic opportunities, raising aspiration and improving their life chances through the best education we can provide them.

## Visit from the Department for Education

On 10 October 2023, Dame Kate Dethridge, Regional Director, and other DfE colleagues visited Buckinghamshire. During their visit, DfE colleagues attended a number of themed sessions that included:

- Buckinghamshire Overview and Children's Services Transformation
- Placement Sufficiency – overview of the current position, the associated pressures and our plans to increase the availability of local placements and services for Buckinghamshire's looked after children.
- Social Worker Recruitment and Retention – the challenges we face and our local response.
- Buckinghamshire SEND Services working within a national SEND System.
- Site visit to the Kingsbrook School and their SEMH unit.
- Focus group with Headteachers on narrowing the gap and improving educational outcomes for children and young people in Buckinghamshire.

Please see the feedback from DfE following the visit below:

"I am writing to thank you for hosting our visit. We really enjoyed our day and the opportunity to see the many improvements you have made, are currently working on and the impact of these. It was lovely to meet your Senior Leadership Team and hear about the things they're focussing on to improve outcomes for children and young people in Buckinghamshire. Their passion and positivity was delightful to see. Please do pass on our thanks to all the team who took time out of their busy schedules to talk to us, it was great to hear from your social workers and the challenges they face but equally how enthusiastic they are about what they do. It was wonderful to finish the day at such an impressive new school building and to spend time hearing from local Headteachers. Thank you again for arranging such an insightful day and making us feel so welcome, please do pass on our thanks to everyone involved."

## Buckinghamshire Family Information Service - winners of the NAFIS Award for 'Best Use of Social Media'



On 15 November 2023, our Family Information Service received an award from the National Association of Family Information Services (NAFIS) for the Best Use of Social Media. This award is voted for by parent champions and NAFIS trustees and is a testament to the team's hard work and dedication in providing good quality information through social media to help children, young people, and their families to access local support and services in Buckinghamshire.

The NAFIS Awards are an annual ceremony designed to recognise the excellent work of Family Information Services around the country and to celebrate their remarkable contributions to local communities.

Our nomination included details about the use and reach of the various social media channels, co-produced content on key topics like childcare funding, youth support and health information campaigns and the different types of stories, polls and videos created to engage with different audiences.

This is a fantastic achievement - thank you to all involved.

## **Buckinghamshire 's Adoption and Fostering Teams - winner of the Digital Transformation in Social Work Awards**

I am also delighted to report that the service has recently won the silver award in the Digital Transformation category was given to the council for its work in developing a series of online tools to help people thinking about adoption, fostering or special guardianship.



The prestigious Social Worker of the Year Awards promotes positive stories from the profession and give recognition to those improving the lives of the people they support. There are a total of 18 categories and each is judged by an independent panel of social workers, people with lived experience, and senior figures from the world of social work.

Our Adoption Ready and Fostering Ready tools are easy to use online applications that allow those who may be contemplating adoption or fostering, to check their eligibility and suitability, to find out more about the process and to plan and prepare ahead. Alongside these tools, the service has also created a Guardians' Guide, a website full of practical guides and expert support for special guardians. This, along with the hard work and dedication of our specialist teams, is what makes our adoption and fostering service deserving of such an award. Well done to everyone.

To find out more about adoption and fostering in Buckinghamshire visit the websites [www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/adoption](http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/adoption) and [www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/fostering).

### **Help Make a Child's Wish Come True this Christmas**

Christmas is a magical time for children. Whatever their age, every child is excited to find a present under the tree with their name on it. Sadly, not all children are guaranteed a gift to open on Christmas morning, but that is where residents of Buckinghamshire are being asked to assist, if they can.



Local charity, Inspire Bucks, is once again running its Christmas Gift Appeal which aims to ensure that some of the most disadvantaged local children and young people get at least one gift to open this Christmas.

The appeal seeks donations of new toys and gifts for children and young people ranging in age from babies to care leavers aged up to 25. Those who prefer can give a monetary donation which will be used to buy suitable gifts for the children and young people.

The gifts are given to local children and young people in need, including those in care and others whose families are facing severe financial difficulties and simply cannot afford to spend money on toys and gifts. Inspire Bucks works closely with our social workers, schools and food banks to identify recipients and everyone will receive at least one gift.

Last year we were overwhelmed by the generosity of local people who donated gifts to nearly 3,500 children in Buckinghamshire. This support makes a huge difference to so many disadvantaged children across the county. I know we are all still facing high cost of living pressures but I would ask those who are able to support this cause, to contribute with either a gift or monetary donation. Every gift and all the money donated goes directly to the children and young people to help give them the Christmas they deserve.



This year's appeal will also include young people who are leaving the care system to take the next steps into their adult lives. We want to make sure these young people, who may not have families of their own, do not miss out.

To find out more about where to drop off gifts or how to make a monetary donation, visit the [Inspire Bucks Gift Appeal website](#).

### **Opportunity Bucks Support for Schools**

One of the key objectives of the Education and Skills priority area within the Opportunity Bucks programme is to reduce the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils residing within the ten wards. The Education Endowment Foundation have stated that the socio-economic gap nationally is wider than before the pandemic and that reading skills in particular have been affected.

The Buckinghamshire Challenge is a programme to support all schools in Buckinghamshire to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils through undertaking research, analysis and the establishment of key Buckinghamshire principles for schools to effectively address this issue. The Buckinghamshire Challenge is now targeted at schools with a high number of Opportunity Bucks pupils with a focus on strengthening essential literacy skills and improving literacy attainment outcomes for disadvantaged pupils at all age phases in Opportunity Bucks schools. Strong literacy skills are essential to enable pupils to access all areas of the curriculum and are therefore the foundation of all future learning.

The Buckinghamshire Challenge Literacy Project will encourage collaboration between schools to identify excellent literacy practices which can be shared, whilst also identifying key areas for development. A bespoke improvement programme will be developed to meet the identified needs and training provided for all staff across the targeted schools. The learning from this project will then be shared with all schools across the county.

Two additional projects are being undertaken to enable Opportunity Bucks pupils to engage with future careers opportunities within the county:

The Opportunity Bucks Schools' Short Film Competition is a collaboration with Pinewood Studios to highlight the importance of film and TV as an employment sector and is designed to spark pupils' curiosity for a future career in the industry. All schools with a high proportion of pupils residing in the Opportunity Bucks wards have been invited to submit a 3-minute short film on the topic 'School Life', the planning, production and editing of which will be supported by Pinewood Studios and partners. A celebration event, attended by a delegation from each school and where submitted films will be screened and winners announced, will be held at Pinewood Studios in May 2024.

The App Accelerator Project is being delivered by Buckinghamshire-based Microsoft Partner, The Cloudy Foundation, and is designed to support and challenge young people in years 9-13 with an interest in a career in business and IT. The students are working collaboratively to design a Microsoft PowerApp to develop a project management reporting system for the Chesham Community Board. Support for the students is provided by The Cloudy Foundation, together with local businesses and educational mentors, to help student design, create and deliver the project. Students will gain valuable work experience, increased digital skills and the development of a network to support their future careers.

## **Young People Share their Experiences to Raise Awareness of Special Educational Needs**

On Wednesday 15 November 2023, a group of young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) took part in an event earlier this week to help raise awareness of SEND and increase understanding and acceptance more widely in the community.

Around 50 secondary school aged pupils attended the Shout Out for SEND event at the Stoke Mandeville Stadium in Aylesbury. Organised by our Youth Participation Team, the event, now in its fourth year, is designed to give children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities the opportunity to give their views and relay their experiences with the aim of helping to better shape services and support for their needs.

The theme of this year's conference was on increasing understanding and acceptance of SEND. The theme was chosen by young people who are members of the Shout Out for SEND Reps group, part of our Youth Voice Programme. They feel passionately that more needs to be done to help all young people better understand their lived experience, and to tackle the bullying and discrimination they experience. The event was timed to take place during National Anti-Bullying Week.

Pippa, the young person who compered the event, said: "Working as a member of the Youth Voice Bucks Executive Committee and as a Shout Out for SEND Rep has given me a tonne of confidence and a bunch of new skills. Now, when I meet new people, I can explain my disability clearly and help others to understand why I might act a bit differently. Before I started, it felt like I was the only one fighting against a world that didn't work the same way I do. I felt really isolated from everyone around me because I knew they didn't see the world the same way I did. I know how difficult it can be when you feel like the only one who is different; the only one who is dealing with all the things you have to on a daily basis. But at now I know there's young people just like you and me. We get support to do things we didn't even realise were options. Today, everyone single one of us gets our chance to make a difference. And, the best part is, we're doing it all together. No one here is alone. Everyone here has the power to make a positive difference."

Thank you to all the young people who came along to this event and shared their experiences, ideas and creativity. Our aim is that the valuable insight they have given will help us to develop a series of jointly produced resources that can be used in schools to provide a better understanding of the lived experience of those with special educational needs or disabilities.





## Cabinet Member report – Culture and Leisure

Councillor Clive Harriss

### Culture

Our museums and theatres hosted an exciting programme of family-friendly events over the October half-term, with more to come as the festive season approaches:

- Discover Bucks Museum ran events including a spooky Halloween trail, crafting lanterns and sun catchers, and an autumnal collage creation. The lanterns were showcased at the Aylesbury Festival of Light parade on 19 November. Other events include a Christmas craft fair and a Christmas activity day on 2 December.
- Wycombe Museum ran a series of family fun activities, including a pumpkin trail, a craft and chat social drop-in and a Halloween ghost hunt.



- Aylesbury Waterside Theatre hosted a sold out 'TeachRex' show featuring life-like dinosaurs and educational activities. This year's panto, 'Snow White', runs from 1 December and there is an interactive storytelling session exploring panto for under 5s and their parents/carers on 5 December.
- The Wycombe Swan Theatre hosted the Florence Nightingale Hospice Charity production of 'Nativity the Musical' on 28 October. The performance provided 100 local children with the chance to spend a week rehearsing with experienced theatre professionals, culminating with a performance on the theatre's main stage. Panto performances of 'Beauty and the Beast' will start on 8 December along with panto-themed free activities including an open day, technical demonstrations and backstage tours.

Buckinghamshire Archives' History Festival, in conjunction with a range of partners, took place during November, with over 30 events to promote the county's history, including an Historic Corn Milling Day at Quanton Windmill, 'Meet the Tudors' at Amersham Museum, tours of the Archives and an 'Aylesbury Ghost Walk'. The Archives Service has also recently introduced new volunteer projects that provide residents with the opportunity to work with the archival collections.

## Rekindle Library Project – Igniting Creativity, Culture and Collaboration

As I mentioned in my July report, Rekindle is a new national three-year Arts Council England funded project connecting libraries and arts partners across Buckinghamshire, Norfolk, Sandwell, Blackburn and Medway. In Buckinghamshire, we are working with our arts partner, Farnham Maltings, to bring culturally relevant and creatively vibrant activities to libraries.

We launched Rekindle in October with the presentation of 'Fun Palaces', which saw organisations come together in local spaces to offer fun, free, participatory experiences. Our libraries partnered with organisations such as Holy Cow Tea, Action for Youth and Theatre Shed to curate their activities, including a tea-themed Fun Palace (Aylesbury), 1970s Fun Palace (Burnham), 'Forever Young' Fun Palace (Chesham) and 'Your Voice' themed Fun Palace (High Wycombe).

Over 500 people have already participated in, and benefited from, Rekindle events in Buckinghamshire and a highlight, as part of Black History Month, was a sold-out performance at High Wycombe Library of 'Island Movements', a short ballet show telling the story of Windrush.



## Parks and Green Spaces



Following the success of the new play facilities installed at Higginson Park in Marlow earlier this year, works on the new Bridge Street Skate Park in Buckingham are due to complete shortly, as well as a new play area in Vale Park in Aylesbury by mid-January (see image). Other planned works include replacing the Ropes on The Rye in High Wycombe and swing replacements at Stratford Field in Buckingham, Riverside Walk and Yellow Park in Aylesbury, due by the end of March.

## Country Parks

Significant work goes into planning and maintaining the Council's woodlands, so they remain healthy for future generations. Climate change brings with it several challenges, with new pests/diseases and the impacts of drought to manage. To focus the management of the amazing woodlands at the Country Parks, new woodland management plans are currently being prepared for Black Park, Langley Park and Rowley Woods.



These will provide the structural management proposals for the next 10 years, facilitate access to funding from the Forestry Commission and put felling licences in place to allow the parks team to complete management operations internally and with specialist contractors.

The Council was pleased to receive £40k of government funding to provide a new [Changing Places](#) toilet at Black Park Country Park. Changing Places toilets are larger accessible toilets for people that may be limited in their mobility, with equipment such as hoists, adult-sized changing benches and space for carers to provide support. The new facility will be located next to the Lakeside café and is expected to be completed in March.

Forest School at Black Park Country Park recommenced after the summer holidays, with the addition of sessions aimed at home schooled children and children with Special Educational Needs. These

have proved extremely popular, with most sessions sold out. The Country Parks trails also remain very popular, with 2,261 children visiting the Halloween trail over the Autumn half term week.

## Leisure

We have continued to see visits to our leisure centres increasing and anticipate exceeding 3.6m visits over this financial year. The Chilterns Lifestyle Centre will celebrate its second birthday this month and welcomed its two millionth visit in November. The Centre was also one of the winners in the [Buckinghamshire Design Awards](#) in the New Communities Category.

Our continuing commitment to our leisure facilities for residents is seeing further maintenance and improvement works at several sites. Significant roofing works are underway at Court Garden Leisure Centre. At Wycombe Leisure Centre, over 400 new members joined in the first month after the full gym renewal was completed in September. Tiling replacement work is now underway at this centre's wet change and partly on pool side; this is being managed alongside keeping the pool available to the public. This work is due to be completed before the end of the December.

There have also been further enhancements to the health and fitness facilities at the Chilterns Lifestyle Centre. The gym has been extended and now includes 'Assault Bikes', a 'SkiErg' and track and sled alongside an improved free-weights offering. A brand-new group cycle studio has also been developed along with a new stretch area. This will help meet the growing demand at the Centre, where fitness membership numbers have now exceeded 5,000.

The final element linked to the recent refurbishment works at Little Marlow Athletics Track has seen our TrackMark Accreditation successfully re-registered for a further three years.

## Simply Walk

[Simply Walk](#) is the Council's health walks scheme which encourages people of all ages and abilities to take part in regular walks across the county, supporting our priorities around tackling loneliness and isolation, promoting community inclusion and enhancing physical and mental wellbeing. The first half of 2023/24 has seen new walks established, alongside training of new volunteers and new walkers. Total footfall for the last quarter (July to September) was approximately 7,409, with around 1,200 walkers.



An area of major success this year has been the development of Level 1 walks, and this looks like a trend that is set to continue. The idea of allowing walkers on newly developed walks to name their walk has proved really popular and we now have the following new routes:

- Gerrards Cross: The 'Happy Tortoise' launched on 4 April.
- Wing: The 'Wing Strollers' launched on 10 May.
- Booker: The 'Booker Bombers' launched on 25 July.
- Farnham Common – Southmead Surgery: 'Tillys Trotters' is the most recent walk to be launched on 26 September with 20 walkers and is also the first walk launched as a result of partnership working with Social Prescribers, and as a direct result of partnership work with Southmead Surgery. Marlow Social Prescribers have also been in contact and work is currently underway to set up a Level 1 walk using the same model.



## Cabinet Member report – Planning and Regeneration

Councillor Peter Strachan

### **Enforcement update**

The planning enforcement service has continued to perform to a high standard thus far this year with a total of 59 planning enforcement notices being issued, along with 32 other notices, including Breach of Condition Notices and Temporary Stop Notices. This formal action has been taken alongside the day-to-day management of cases which has seen 1184 new investigations lodged, 1861 cases closed and an overall active caseload of 1274.

Our continued high performance, in turn, means an increase in enforcement notice appeals lodged to the Planning Inspectorate with the team having seen 31 enforcement notice appeals lodged this year and currently have 65 appeals in hand.

The team has continued to proactively focus efforts on remedying breaches of planning control using the full spectrum of enforcement powers including amicable negotiation and we have seen dozens of planning breaches brought to resolution as a result. Of note, are two cases both located in the green belt and area of outstanding natural beauty. These cases saw the team secure the removal of 2x 1000sqm buildings from these sensitive countryside locations. These are just two of the many examples I see demonstrating how our no-nonsense approach to planning enforcement continues to uphold the planning system and protects, maintains and restores the Buckinghamshire area from harmful unauthorised development.

In addition, I'm pleased to also report legal action taken at a site in Denham where the team were successfully granted a mandatory injunction on land developed over a bank holiday weekend. This is not only a great result for the team but is really encouraging to see the law courts backing up our approach and decisions.

Due to the diligent work and no-nonsense approach from the team, we continue to see harmful breaches of planning control being regularly remedied. We continue to take a firm but fair approach to dealing with breaches of planning control, and this regularly leads to compliance being achieved up and down Buckinghamshire.

### **Planning Policy update**

In my previous report, I noted that the government had launched a consultation on some detailed proposals for reforming the local plan-making system in England which, if implemented, will be of relevance to the Local Plan for Buckinghamshire. The Planning Policy team drafted a response on behalf of the Council to this consultation. This was submitted to DLUHC before the close of the consultation on 18 October 2023.

Turning to legacy local plan matters, our programme of supplementary planning documents (SPDs) continues to progress. The adoption of the Aylesbury Garden Town 1 Masterplan SPD was agreed by Cabinet on 10 October. This document will now be an important material consideration in the determination of any planning applications which are submitted for the site.

The public consultation on the draft Shenley Park SPD, which had opened on 30 August, closed on 6 October. This attracted approximately 1200 comments via the Planning Policy online consultation portal and 389 individual responses. Many of these responses were from residents of Whaddon and neighbourhoods in Milton Keynes City adjacent to the site. The Planning Policy team is now considering these representations and what revisions to the SPD should be made in response. The aim is for Cabinet to be asked to agree the adoption of the final version of the document early next year.

Finally, we are expecting the consultation on the draft SPD for the remaining Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan site allocation at RAF Halton to commence in December.

### **Development Management Update**

The number of new planning and related applications registered has reduced, albeit the overall number of applications determined remains consistent resulting in a reduction on the overall number of cases in hand. Planning applications (major, minor and other) are being determined above the KPI targets set for speed of decision. The number of planning appeals being received from the Planning Inspectorate continues to be very high, with 22 new appeals registered in October.

The Strategic Sites Planning Committee have had a busy quarter, meeting three times over four weeks, considering a number of high profile strategic developments including Motorway Service Areas, Film Studios as well as allocated housing developments.

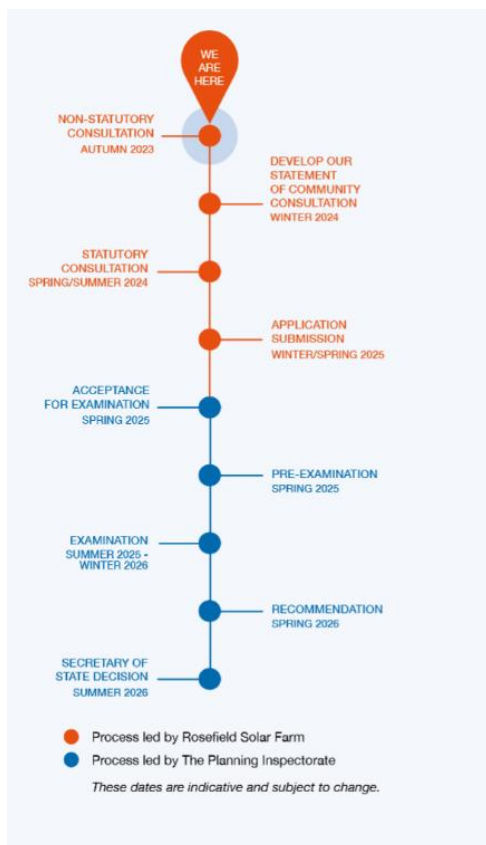
### **Rosefield Solar Farm Development Consent Order**

The Planning Act 2008 introduced a new development consent regime for determining Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). NSIPs are national schemes determined by the relevant Secretary of State via a Development Consent Order (DCO) process rather than a planning application process under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The purpose of the DCO is to simplify and speed up decision-making for nationally significant infrastructure projects. Underpinning the NSIP regime are National Policy Statements (NPS) produced by the Central Government. NPSs are the strategic policy framework, which DCOs are considered and determined against.

The proposed Rosefield Solar Farm in the North of Buckinghamshire falls under this consenting regime, whereby the Council is a Statutory Consultee and 'Host Authority' in this process, as opposed to the decision-maker.

Rosefield Solar Farm, which includes battery storage, is classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) because of the amount of electricity it would generate (over 50MW). The scheme is backed by EDF Renewables and PS Renewables, as joint Applicants. The site lies within Buckinghamshire Council between Calvert and East Claydon, surrounded on two sides by East West Rail and HS2. It is proposed that the solar farm would connect to the East Claydon substation. Rosefield Solar Farm could power more than 57,000 homes and save around 125,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide each year, with a lifespan of around 40 years. The scheme promoters have advised that they are only intending to use around half of the site for energy regeneration and storage. The land is predominantly owned by the Claydon Estate.

The Applicant is currently working to the following timescales:



The Development Consent Order process will be administered by The Planning Inspectorate, with the final decision made by the relevant Secretary of State based on a recommendation by a panel of Planning Inspectors (being Examiners of the Examining Authority). The host and neighbouring Local Authorities have an important role in the DCO process. Whilst participation is not obligatory it is strongly advised, and Local Authorities are encouraged to discuss and work through issues raised by NSIP proposals. To this effect planning officers have started engagement with the Applicant and are seeking to secure a Planning Performance Agreement, which is required to cover the cost of the DCO process that are unfunded.

Officers will be setting up a working group with impacted ward members and community board chairs. The working group will meet at key points in the DCO process so that officers can update on the Council's position, provide support and answer any questions.

This is the second Development Consent Order currently impacting on Buckinghamshire, with officers still actively engaged in the Luton expansion DCO examination.

## Regeneration

I am delighted that Cabinet have adopted 'Regenerating Bucks', a regeneration framework which sets out the vision for what growth and regeneration should look like in Buckinghamshire, meeting the needs of our residents and businesses by enhancing existing assets and attracting new investment. Three separate regeneration strategies have also been produced for Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham. These strategies set out our ambitions in these bigger towns to create vibrant and characterful town centres, celebrate local culture and heritage and offer high quality inclusive public realm. For Aylesbury, the Regeneration Strategy has also been endorsed by the Aylesbury Garden Town Board and builds on the work already achieved through the Garden Town Programme.

These strategies are key in progressing forward regeneration opportunities within our towns. In Chesham, in the short-term we have some exciting projects moving forward which include a small public realm project around the Underground Station Arrival, which seeks to provide better wayfinding and an enhanced travel experience between the Station and Town Centre to encourage active travel and enhanced air quality. We are also looking at other projects and sites that can be delivered in the short term whilst some of the larger sites are considered for regeneration.

In High Wycombe a number of key projects are being progressed including:

- **White Hart Street Public Realm Enhancement** – after the initial phase 1 of outline design and engagement with key stakeholders on the ambitions for this scheme, phase 2 has now commenced for the detailed design and implementation timetable, in partnership with Highways colleagues. It is anticipated that we can share designs with the public for views later in November/December and commence works early 2024.



- **Eastern Quarter** – an exciting and ambitious project has commenced that will set out our ambitions for this key major site to ensure delivery of much needed regeneration, housing, leisure and employment.

In Aylesbury, we have written to our local businesses in relation to the review of the 2020 Kingsbury and Market Square public realm proposals. We are reassessing these to guarantee best value of taxpayer’s money as well as ensuring improvements will benefit the whole town. The original funding remains protected for improvements to Aylesbury town centre, and a range of town centre improvement works will commence in early 2024 including reviewing all traffic orders and movement restrictions in Market Square and Kingsbury.

### Town Centre update

Business engagement and outreach continues through the quarterly Aylesbury Town Centre Business Forum meetings, business e-newsletter and more informal business liaison and catch-ups to build and strengthen relationships with businesses in the town.

The ‘Promoting Aylesbury’ project work to showcase the diversity of things to see, do and explore in Aylesbury is underway. #EatShopPlayAylesbury posts are being posted to the shared Visit Aylesbury Facebook page as a soft introduction to the work. This project will form part of a collaborative place-based marketing campaign to be used alongside still imagery, online content and a suite of hashtags that businesses, partners and stakeholders can use, embed and share to amplify the desired messaging.



Over the school summer and half-term holidays regular Saturday enlivenment – children’s entertainment and ‘Music on the Market’ – were provided to enliven the market and support footfall for market traders. Specialist Vegan Markets were held in July and October and the Christmas Craft and Gift Fair was held on 3 December. In High Wycombe, the Christmas Light switch on was held on 18 October, organised by the High Wycombe BidCo.





## Cabinet Member report – Communities

Councillor Arif Hussain

### Helping Hand

The Helping Hand team continues to provide support to individuals or families in need, issuing over 43,300 digital food vouchers between April and October. These have been issued to eligible families providing support over school holidays including May half term, summer, and October half term.

Over 5,900 applications for support have been managed by the team with over 7,300 provisions of support delivered including white goods, essential furniture and emergency food and fuel support.

Funding has been provided to support over 54 Voluntary and Community Sector initiatives/schemes for residents across Buckinghamshire.

### Ministerial Visit

The leader of the Council and myself, together with Steve Baker MP, met with Mims Davies MP, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions, and Minister for Social Mobility, Youth and Progression Monday 16 October. Ms Davies was visiting the County to mark the start of the Household Support Fund Awareness Week. The focus of this week was to promote the good work in using the Household Support Fund to improve outcomes for local residents.

The Helping Hand service has provided a grant of £800 via Household Support Fund to support the Buckinghamshire Student Union monthly meals programme up until March 2024 – enabling students to receive a free monthly recipe bag and access to an online cookery course to learn how to cook healthy budget friendly meals. In September, a total of 25 students accessed this support, 14 living within the Opportunity Bucks wards.



## Community Boards

The Community Board Boundary Review has now started, and I chaired a workshop recently with Chairs and Vice Chairs where we considered the strengths and challenges of the current boundaries, the number of boards, and what opportunities there are following the new ward boundaries. These are the first engagement sessions with a recommendation report in early spring.

I will ensure all members get an opportunity to engage with the review, and we will also engage with representatives from our partners such as the local councils, VCS (Voluntary and Community Sector) and police during the process as well. I will inform members of any updates over the next few months.

The Boards are continuing to develop projects to deliver their local priorities, there are over 100 projects currently being considered. Boards continue to engage and support their local communities, examples include developing and supporting volunteering opportunities generally but also with schools, working with services on forthcoming projects, discussing potential delivery partners and community grants which may be available.

The social media presence continues to increase, since January an additional 1500 people have started following the Boards and a monthly video shared on social media now gives a great overview of what the Boards have been up to and how people can get involved themselves. If you would like to get involved with your local Community Board, further details are available on our website [Community Board - Getting involved - Section 1 - buckinghamshire.gov.uk \(buckscc.gov.uk\)](https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/buckscc.gov.uk)

I am continuing to visit as many Community Board meetings taking place, as I can, and I am pleased to see attendance and engagement levels good. There have been engaging presentations from applicants who have completed projects on the outcomes and benefits in the local community.



## Town and Parish Councils

On 17 October, I was invited to attend and speak at the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (BMKALC) Conference 2023, which this year was entitled, Communities: Enrichment and Resilience. It was a very informative day with many presentations from local councils across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. I was pleased that a number of teams from Buckinghamshire Council were also able to support the day including our Resilience Team, Partnerships and Communities, Community Safety and Public Health.



On 1 November I also had the pleasure of attending BMKALC's AGM (Annual General Meeting) and 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration and Awards.

As well as sampling the delicious cream tea and cake, it was great to hear about the support that BMKALC have given, and continue to give, the sector as the official training provider for local councils and clerks and the representative for town and parish councils in Buckinghamshire on countywide boards such as the Strategic Partnership Board.

I was also delighted to receive a certificate on behalf of Buckinghamshire Council as one of 12 Founder Members of the organisation.

On 31 October, I was also able to attend a meeting of the South Bucks Association of Local Councils (SBALC). This gave me the opportunity to hear first-hand some of the key issues and concerns facing town and parish councils in the south of the county.

Over the next few weeks, I am looking forward to the publication of the results of the Town and Parish Survey which we ran over the summer months, and which will help us identify some areas of improvement as we look to build on the relationships that we have with local councils.

### **Armed Forces Covenant**

In October I had the pleasure, alongside Cllr Mimi Harker OBE, Vice -Chairman of Buckinghamshire Council and Armed Forces Champion, in proudly receiving our Gold Award for the defence Employer Recognition Scheme, organised by the Ministry of defence.



*Photo credit Stewart Turkington Photography*

The award recognises the extra support we offer local armed forces families as an employer.

Including guaranteeing job interviews for ex-armed forces personnel and serving reservists (when essential post criteria are met), offering additional annual leave for reservists to attend training and facilitating a staff network.

### **VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) Sector**

The 6th to 10th November marked Trustees Week 2023, a time to thank trustees who volunteer their time to help support and guide not for profit organisations.

This week was a time to reflect and celebrate the good work of trustees and share their stories.

Support is at hand beyond this week as Community Impact Bucks continue to offer valuable support and advice to our local charities and not for profit organisations, which includes online training, advice, and other resources to help trustees. More information can be found on their website: [Leadership and Trustees - Community Impact Bucks](#)

I would like to personally thank all the trustees that volunteer their time and expertise and wish them ongoing success.

### **Resilience Service**

As members are aware, Storm Ciaran brought some disruption across the country, here in Buckinghamshire we were on the extreme fringes of the severe weather so didn't suffer any damage. We were prepared for any incidents and, as part of our response, we held officer led Incident Management Team meetings, twice a day to ensure daily updates and briefings from external partners such as the Met Office were shared with front line services.

I have referred to the Winter Cell in previous reports, our first meeting was held very recently and will continue to meet on the first Thursday of each month until March 2024. The Cell contains representatives from 15 front line council services and 6 external partners, such as Utility companies, Health, and Met Office. Its purpose is to horizon scan across the council any issues or concerns with regards to weather or other problems that would impact on the ability of the council to deliver crucial services.

I was delighted to open and attend the Buckinghamshire/Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (BMKALC) event held at the Gateway in October, where I was able to deliver a presentation with regards to community resilience and the importance of local communities developing emergency plans.

The Resilience Team were also on hand to provide advice and support and to engage with representatives from the local parishes.

I have recently attended the Marlow Flood Fayre to discuss and support the wider issues of flooding locally. I visited the team, providing a range of information to those attending, including the various schools who were able to take part in lots of activities.

In October, the Resilience Team took part in Exercise Blue Nimbus, which was a multi-agency exercise overseen by the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum and supported through DLUHC (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities). The exercise centred around multi agency flood planning and collaborative working to provide mutual aid across a range of varying partners in such a situation.





## Cabinet Member report – Accessible Housing and Resources

Councillor John Chilver

### Resources Update

#### **National Customer Service Week 2023: Celebrating our Customer Focus**

From 2<sup>nd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> October 2023, we celebrated National Customer Service Week, a week dedicated to recognising and appreciating the excellent customer service we deliver across the Council. We shared our achievements and initiatives that improved the customer experience, and highlighted the services, training and systems that support our customer focus. We also learned from each other through blogs, webinars and articles, featuring stories and insights from our Customer Service colleagues.

One of the most popular activities was call shadowing, where over 50 colleagues and Members joined the Customer Service Centre (CSC) to listen to calls from our residents. The feedback was very positive, and we encourage all staff to join the Customer Services team for some shadowing throughout the year to really understand how customers experience the services we provide. The CSC also celebrated their staff with team building activities, such as compliment sharing, team breakfasts and the CSC staff awards, which were presented by Cllr John Chilver. Next year, we hope to get more services involved to showcase their amazing work with and for customers.



Rachel Shimmin said “I was delighted to have the chance to spend some time with colleagues in Customer Services this week. As part of my visit, I spent some time call shadowing with one of our Customer Service Advisors, Molly. Listening to the issues our residents and partners raise with us is always illuminating and really brings to life both the spectrum of issues we respond to and ways in which we can further improve our service offer. I am filled with admiration for the work of the team, and I would strongly recommend that all our managers spend some time call shadowing to get a first-hand insight into the

issues that matter to residents and ways in which we can make their involvement with us easier and more responsive.”

## Milton Keynes and Chesham Jobs Fair

The second Buckinghamshire Council Jobs and Apprenticeships Fair took place on Saturday 23 September at the Elgiva Theatre in Chesham. Over 400 people attended the event meeting over 25 exhibitors who provided both career advice and also jobs and apprenticeship opportunities within their organisations. The exhibitors there on the day included:



- Adviza
- Aegis Security
- AGR Automation
- All Spring Media
- Buckinghamshire Council
- Buckinghamshire Fire
- Buckinghamshire Highways
- Buckinghamshire Skills Hub
- Careers Springboard
- Carousel Buses
- Community Impact Bucks
- CPI Selection
- DWP
- Haringtons
- Hospice of St Francis
- HS2 Limited
- Neuro Diverse Self Advocacy
- Oasis
- Right at Home
- Silverson Machines.

Buckinghamshire Adult Learning were also on hand to deliver mini workshops.

This year, the event was supported by Opportunity Bucks, the council's flagship programme to improve opportunities for people in Buckinghamshire. It focuses on 10 wards in Buckinghamshire where people are experiencing the most hardship – one of which is Chesham.

From 23<sup>rd</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023, a total of 42 applications were received by exhibitors. These applicants voluntarily cited the Chesham Jobs & Apprenticeship Fair as the origin of their application.

The roles applied for include:

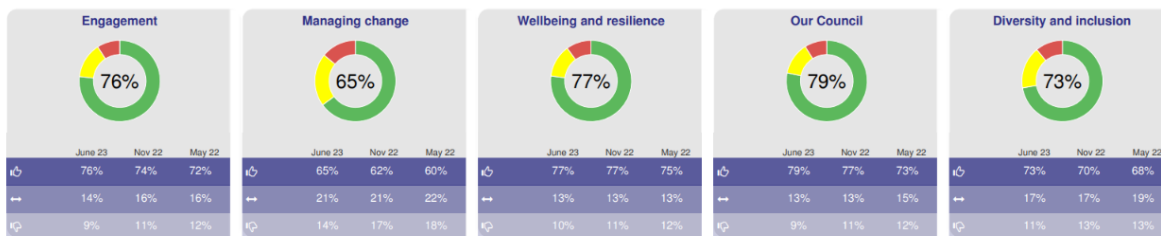
- Members Liaison Officer
- Customer Service Advisor (2 applications)
- Social Care Assistant (Chesham Opportunities Centre)
- Business Support Officer
- Business Intelligence Analyst
- Senior BI Analyst
- Information Governance Officer
- IT Apprentice



## Together Survey

The Together Survey is held twice a year to gather employee feedback against 5 key indices that can be benchmarked against other organisations. Our last survey was held in July 23 with a council wide response rate of 63% up from 58% November 22. Our KPI target response rate is 60%.

## July 23 Together survey results:



Results for July were very positive with 4 indices showing a positive increase and the fifth unchanged from the previous survey.

- **Engagement Index** - 76% up from 74% (External Benchmark 70%)
- **Managing Change Index** - 65% up from 62% (External Benchmark 68%)
- **Our Council Index** - 79% up from 77% (External Benchmark 72%)
- **Diversity and Inclusion Index** - 73% up from 70% (External Benchmark 80%)
- **Wellbeing and Resilience index** - 77% (no change) (External Benchmark 75%)

All of the score's bar 1 in the survey showed an improvement on the last survey showing that we are making steady and sustained progress in raising engagement. The lowest scoring question was 'I feel like everyone has a fair opportunity to grow and develop' (61%). The highest scoring questions were 'I am clear what our council values and behaviours are' (88%) and 'I have a positive working relationship with my manager' (87%); the question with the biggest improvement was "I feel there is a clear sense of direction for Buckinghamshire Council "(up 4% to 69%). Building on the feedback from previous surveys our focus continues to be on promoting career and development opportunities through the work of the Talent Academy programme and our Early Careers Network.

The next survey will be held in January 24.

## Property & Assets Update

Working collaboratively with other Council Portfolios including Education, Culture and Leisure, Planning and Regeneration and Housing and Regulatory Services, we have continued to deliver against our significant and substantial capital programme.

Our schools programme continues to make good progress having recently delivered the Kingsbrook Secondary School and major expansion works at Holmer Green, Chiltern Hills Academy and Misbourne School. We are also progressing with pre-construction agreements at a number of other sites including a second new Primary School at Kingsbrook and major extension to Cottesloe School and expecting to reach planning committee for major extension to Green Ridge Academy at Berryfields in the coming months.

We are in the earlier stages of planning for a number of other projects to remodel, expand or deliver new schools in Buckinghamshire, including a new three form entry Primary School at Hampden Fields which would include a 90 place nursery and 18 place SEND unit for students with Speech, Language, Communications and Interaction (Autism) designation. Procurement of external consultant teams has begun and due to complete in January 2024, with a target to be on site in February 2026.



Property and Assets team are managing the Chiltern Lifestyle Centre project through the rectification period with final sign off planned for December this year. In addition, in November work commenced on site at the East West Rail Winslow Station Car Park which will provide 365 spaces, including 19 disabled spaces, and is expected to complete for September 2024.

Projects in the Future High Streets Fund regeneration programme in High Wycombe continue to progress:

- 16 Church Street refurbishment is complete,
- Scoping works for part of 22 Queen Square have been tendered, the remainder are in the process of being tendered
- The Little Market House undercroft scheme has been amended, as glazing it proved unacceptable in conservation/PROW terms – and therefore adjoining 2 Cornmarket (a Council owned ground floor unit in an unlettable condition), is being refurbished instead
- Completion of the freehold purchase of the former Liberal Club building is in process and Phase 1 external refurbishment works are being tendered.
- The major Western Gateway ‘re-purposing’ project, referred to last quarter, has undergone detailed feasibility and a Project Adjustment Request has received Department of Housing, Levelling Up and Communities approval.
- It is 12 months since the Council selected a preferred developer for its Ashwells, Tylers Green and Bellfield, Hughenden Quarter residential development sites, together they will produce around 170 new homes. The major transaction has stayed on track, with an exchange of contracts imminent. Both sites are subject to reserved matters detailed planning consent.



## Asset Management

As we approach the end of 2023, the Asset Management Team continues to focus upon delivery of Medium Term Financial Plan and other critical targets in terms of occupational and functional requirements, safety, and the environment. Ongoing improvements to our operating model continue to reduce risk and are helping us to ensure that portfolio performance, especially in the context of challenging market and economic conditions, is best supported in terms of people, processes, and systems.

Our Strategic Asset Management Plan, which will deliver a clear statement of our objectives and plans for the entire property estate, including the investment portfolio, our operational portfolio, and our Agricultural and strategic land holdings, is now at a draft stage and we look forward to bringing this forward for adoption in early 2024.

A major item of work over the last quarter has been to organise the open market re-tendering of our principal external service provider. It is of vital importance that we access best value in terms of the cost of services acquired, and also to ensure access to the very best available services and expertise, to support our real estate endeavours over the coming years. This process is now approaching completion and we look forward to awarding a contract in the weeks to come.



## Cabinet Member report – Transport

Councillor Steve Broadbent

### **Day Travel Cards and Closure of Ticket Offices**

I welcomed the news of the withdrawal of plans to stop selling Day Travel Cards by the Mayor of London. This followed the motion at full council in July and work alongside other adjoining home counties councils, which demanded that the proposals were withdrawn as they constituted an unfair, unacceptable and expensive levy on Buckinghamshire residents who wished to travel to London. Having also expressed concern over the proposed closure of ticket offices at railway stations which would have had a disproportionate impact on the vulnerable, including the elderly, visually impaired and those struggling financially the news that these plans are being abandoned is equally welcome.

### **Buckinghamshire Highways**

The winter service is up and running, with the salt barns being fully stocked and the fleet of winter vehicles provided through the Buckinghamshire Highways Alliance partner (Balfour Beatty Living Places) doing their gritting work. You can learn how we prioritise which roads to grit by watching this short [video](#).

Since last winter substantial improvements to our road network have been delivered, with over 23,500 highway defects having been fixed since April. Up to 16 crews have been working on repairs, covering 7 days a week, with schemes being accelerated to tackle the highest priority routes in many areas. Other maintenance and repairs are also making excellent progress, with over 53,000 gullies cleansed and 2,300 streetlights fixed.

Our larger carriageway re-surfacing programme has continued at pace over the summer. As of mid-October, 91 carriageway and footway surfacing schemes were fully complete. The capital programme for other highway works is fully underway with work commencing on 3,489 street lighting assets, including LED lantern upgrades as well as replacement and repair of illuminated bollards & signs. Over 91% of the 29,000 streetlights in Buckinghamshire have now been converted to energy saving LED lightbulbs. The works programme also include 9 road safety schemes, 21 road lining schemes, 7 safety fencing schemes, 20 drainage schemes, 21 signals schemes and 3 major structures schemes.

## Major re-surfacing – Stanley Hill, Amersham

Before



After



## Footway Repairs – Barnard Crescent, Aylesbury

Before



After



## Managing Highways Works

Our Rapid Review report into Streetworks was received by the Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee (TECC) in September. This report aligns with our work programme where our teams seek to minimise and mitigate the disruption to local communities and travelling public. We are working closely with utility companies to find a balance which ensures highways works can be carried out safely whilst also ensuring the most effective traffic management arrangements. You can read the report to the TECC [here](#).

Our aim is to keep Buckinghamshire moving. We adopt a ‘zero-tolerance’ approach to organisations not complying with due process, notification periods and adhering to the conditions of their permits to work on Buckinghamshire’s roads and footpaths.

## HS2/East West Rail

The Council is working with HS2 on roads repair in order to secure maximum compensation for repairs needed. East West Rail continue to deliver on their road repairs and are over halfway through the agreed road reinstatement programme. The Council will continue to hold both HS2 and EWR to account for the impact of their construction on our environment, residents, communities and businesses.

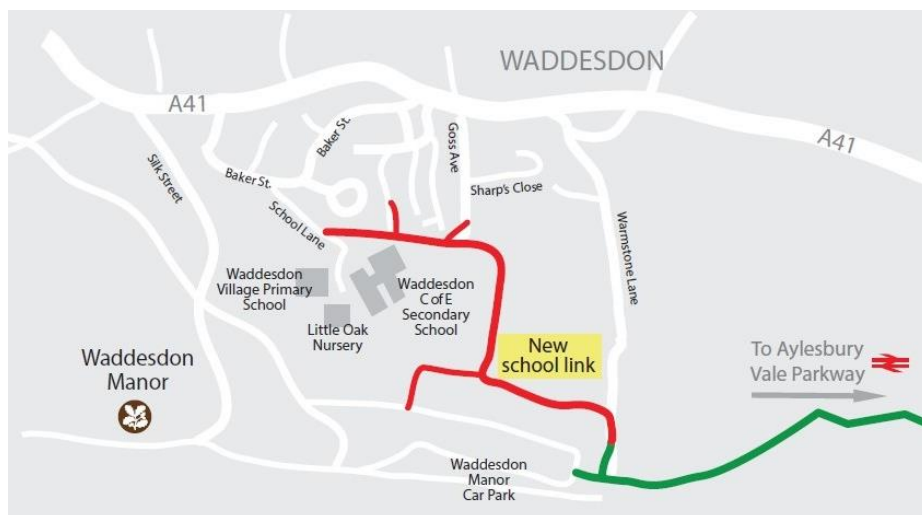
We continue to make good use of HS2 Road Safety Funds to deliver mitigation and improvements on our network.



The new parallel crossing at Lower Road opened in September, ahead of the new school year at Stoke Mandeville Combined School. The new crossing facility incorporates a cycle lane parallel to the zebra crossing, offering greater safety for both pedestrians and cyclists.

The new footway along the A4010 Risborough Road between Fremantle Court and Gaydon House was completed at the end of October. The scheme provides connectivity between the care home and local amenities, improving safety for pedestrians and encouraging active travel.

### Waddesdon Schools Link



An opening event marking the completion of the Waddesdon Greenway Link to School Lane Project was held at the end of November. The completed work provides an improved connection to the

village and nearby schools which will help encourage active travel, reduce congestion and improve air quality. The cost of the project has been met from a combination of contributions from developers and funding from the Department for Transport.

### **Castlefield Traffic Calming**

This project, part of the Opportunity Bucks programme, has been designed to address significant anti-social driving behaviour in the Castlefield area. The Castlefield traffic calming proposals have been developed following engagement with local members, TVP, and community groups. The community groups engaged included Castlefield School, mosques, church, community centre and local shops. The estimated reach of the engagement in September was over 4,000. In addition, 4 events concerning the proposals attracted over 200 people. A statutory consultation is now being held with plans shaped with community groups and feedback from the earlier engagement. The final design is due to be completed in late December, followed by construction procurement in the new year. Construction work is scheduled to start from next spring.

### **School Transport Policy Consultation**

We are proposing some changes to our Home to School Transport Policy and Post-16 Transport Policy for the 2024-25 academic year. In line with our duty to consult a public consultation will run for 8 weeks from early December into January on the proposals at [www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/school-transport-consultation](http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/school-transport-consultation).

### **Pick Me Up High Wycombe**

The expansion of this scheme to Flackwell Heath and the addition of the extra peak-hour vehicle has been successful and we are now carrying over 300 passengers per day on a regular basis and 2,000 new user accounts have been created since the end of August. The Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) scheme '[Pick me up](#)' launched as a pilot in October 2022. DRT is a flexible type of bus service that allows users to book their journey on demand as they require it, between any two points within the area covered by the route. The service runs Monday to Friday from 6am to 7pm.

### **School Travel Plans**

Twelve Buckinghamshire Schools have been nominated for national awards for school travel plans which are a mixture of urban and rural schools and primary, secondary and SEN establishments. Of these, five schools have been rated as Outstanding by Modeshift STARS. The Schools' Sustainable Travel Team continues to work closely with schools to encourage the use of sustainable means to get to your local school and Buckinghamshire remains the leading large local authority nationally in terms of schools which have an up-to-date travel plan registered with Modeshift STARS.

### **Bus Network Improvements**

In August and September this year, the Council worked with bus companies and through our contracts to make several improvements to the bus network. Improved levels of services now operate to Penn Street, Winchmore Hill and Elizabeth Avenue in Little Chalfont where buses now run

hourly rather than just 3-4 times per day. There is now a regular hourly service between Great Missenden, Prestwood and Amersham; a new hourly link between High Wycombe, Beaconsfield and Windsor; as well as the Council stepping to preserve evening and Sunday services across the County, in particular in the High Wycombe area.

The Public Transport Team are currently monitoring and assessing the success of these interventions and what further interventions may be possible using Bus Service Improvement Plan + funding.

### **Extension to travel before 9.00 for £1 scheme for concessionary pass holders**

The current local [scheme](#) offering travel for £1 before 09:00 on weekdays to concessionary pass holders will now be extended through to the end of March 2024. Bus use with a concessionary pass remains free between 09:00 and 24:00 on weekdays and all day at weekends.

### **Ridgeway at 50**



Council Leader Martin Tett and Council Chairman Patricia Birchley joined walkers and representatives of local and national organisations on the steps of the Coombe Hill monument to celebrate the Ridgeway at 50

On Friday 29<sup>th</sup> September a celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ridgeway National Trail was held at Coombe Hill, the highest viewpoint in the Chilterns. The Council Leader, Cllr Martin Tett and Council Chairman Patricia Birchley joined walkers and representatives from local and national organisations marking 50 years to the day the official opening of the Ridgeway on September 29<sup>th</sup> September 1973. Participants in the celebration enjoyed activities highlighting the diverse ways the Ridgeway is used today. This included the casting of a replica of the Bronze Age sword found on the Trail at Ivinghoe Beacon, as well as talks on photography and the origin of off-road cycling on the Ridgeway.



Gavin Capersz, a member of the Local Access Forum also gave a demonstration of the Disabled Ramblers GoPro project. The Disabled Ramblers have received National Lottery funding for a project to show the Ridgeway on Google Streetview. The funding has been used to the purchase a GoPro Max 360-degree camera which can be carried on a stick or bolted onto a mobility scooter. The footage is then uploaded to Google which processes this into a format suitable for Streetview. For people who have difficulties accessing the trail due to disabilities, this allows them to determine whether a section is accessible. Footage has now been uploaded of [Coombe Hill](#) and of [Ivinghoe Beacon](#)