

Title: Have your say on how High Wycombe is run

Sub-title: Your Voice, Your Town

We are reviewing how High Wycombe is governed

As Buckinghamshire Council, we are responsible for reviewing local governance arrangements to ensure they meet local needs. Local governance arrangements are the processes in place for decision making that affects you and your local area. This includes how you and your local community are represented, such as by your local councillors at council meetings. It also includes who you can contact if you have a query about services in your area.

This review is called a Community Governance Review and investigates whether:

- decisions made in your local area reflect the identity and interests of the local community
- arrangements are as convenient and effective as possible

In 2019, the former Wycombe District Council started a Community Governance Review. We suspended this because the county council and district councils merged into one - Buckinghamshire Council. Since then, there has also been a review of ward boundaries in Buckinghamshire. We've now launched a new Community Governance Review for High Wycombe.

In some parts of the country, town or parish councils are responsible for services and decision making in their local community. In other areas, such as High Wycombe, different arrangements are in place. High Wycombe does not have a parish or town council – this is known as an unparished area.

We have enclosed a survey so you can tell us if you would prefer to keep arrangements in High Wycombe as they are, or whether a town council should be created.

You have received this survey because you live in the unparished area of High Wycombe.

[Insert map of unparished area of High Wycombe]

What is Community Governance?

Community governance is about how you and your local community are represented. It is about decision making that affects you and your local area. There are many types of local governance, for example:

- local councils
- community groups
- trusts
- societies
- faith groups
- residents' or tenants' associations
- neighbourhood groups

This review is about governance processes involving local councils. It is not about other types of local governance listed above.

The current governance arrangements

Existing governance arrangements in the unparished area of High Wycombe include:

- Buckinghamshire Council and its ward councillors
- High Wycombe Town Committee
- Charter Trustees and Mayor
- High Wycombe Community Board

Buckinghamshire Council

Buckinghamshire Council is responsible for providing all local authority services to High Wycombe. Examples of these include education, social care, highways planning, bin collections, grass cutting, street lighting, and town centre redevelopment. These services are funded by the Council Tax that you pay.

Currently there are 24 Buckinghamshire Council councillors who represent a set of wards in the High Wycombe area. This will reduce to 16 councillors in 2025 representing the new wards of:

- Abbey
- Booker and Cressex
- Castlefield and Oakridge
- Disraeli
- Downley
- Hazlemere
- Marsh and Micklefield
- Sands
- Terriers and Amersham Hill
- Totteridge and Bowerdean

Most of the Downley ward and Hazlemere ward are not in the unparished area of High Wycombe. But a small section of each ward is in the unparished area.

Our councillors represent High Wycombe at Buckinghamshire Council meetings. They also serve on the High Wycombe Town Committee and serve as Charter Trustees.

High Wycombe Town Committee

High Wycombe Town Committee advises us on issues affecting the High Wycombe town area, for example:

- regeneration
- community and facilities grants
- transport, cycling and walking strategies and plans
- High Wycombe and Penn Road Cemeteries
- events in the town centre
- All Saints Churchyard

The Committee is made up of Buckinghamshire Council councillors whose wards currently include any part of the unparished area of High Wycombe. The Committee also works with local organisations.

Current arrangements for paying for services

All Buckinghamshire residents pay a Council Tax which funds the key local authority services provided by Buckinghamshire Council across the county. In addition, the Council Tax paid by High Wycombe town residents includes a fee for '**special expenses**'. This fee is sometimes called a precept. This fee supports the maintenance of local amenities in High Wycombe Town including:

- public halls
- cemeteries
- recreation grounds
- allotments
- footway lighting
- war memorials
- community grants

The average special expenses annual fee we receive from High Wycombe town residents for a Band 'D' property is £15.94. This is based on 2023/24 Council Tax.

The High Wycombe Town Committee makes recommendations to us on the allocation of this funding and proposes an annual budget.

Charter Trustees

The Charter Trustees of High Wycombe were established in 1974. The Buckinghamshire Council councillors whose wards currently include any part of the unparished area of High Wycombe are appointed as the Charter Trustees. They have a ceremonial role, in addition to their Buckinghamshire Council responsibilities. They are responsible for preserving the historic identity and civic traditions of the town. Annually, one of the Charter Trustees is nominated by their peers to be Mayor of the Town. The Mayor of High Wycombe is a ceremonial and non-political role. The Mayor represents the town at civic and ceremonial events.

High Wycombe Community Board

In 2020, Buckinghamshire Council established community boards uniting local councillors and key partners. We did this to understand and respond to local issues and priorities. The High Wycombe Community Board delivers projects that meet local needs using our funding. View examples of the projects delivered by the High Wycombe Community Board on our website: www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/high-wycombe-community-board.

Options that we considered

We considered different options for the area of High Wycombe. We decided on two options for consultation:

- keep arrangements as they are (as described above)
- replace current arrangements with a town council

What is a town council?

Town and parish councils are a legally independent, additional local government layer. Town councils are similar to parish councils but usually cover larger areas.

Town councils have elected town councillors. They are elected in the same way as our Buckinghamshire Council councillors and their term of office is 4 years.

Town councils:

- are consulted on local planning matters
 - Buckinghamshire Council would remain as the planning authority and make the final decision on any planning issue
- can represent the views of local people on issues that they are concerned about
- can provide some local services for residents and businesses in the area they cover
- provide a forum for local people to discuss issues they are concerned about and to plan local action

What services could a town council provide?

A new town council could provide a number of local services. For example, Princes Risborough Town Council:

- arranges events such as the Christmas lights switch-on and farmers' market
- manages open spaces, play areas, football pitches and memorial garden
- maintains some street lighting
- maintains flower beds and hanging baskets
- is responsible for local grass cutting

A town council could provide some of the very local services instead of Buckinghamshire Council. It could also choose to provide some new services.

If a Town Council was created, what would happen to the Charter Trustees and Mayor?

If we establish a town council, we would dissolve the Charter Trustees and Mayoral roles. A new town council could decide to create a new Mayoral role.

If a Town Council was created, what would that mean for Buckinghamshire Council?

A new town council would not replace Buckinghamshire Council. But, it could provide some of the local services currently provided by us. However, Buckinghamshire Council would remain as the principal council for the area. We would continue to be responsible for providing most of the local authority services to High Wycombe. This includes services such as education, social care, highways, planning, bin collections and recycling.

Buckinghamshire Council and our councillors would continue. A new town council would need separate elections for additional councillors. Based on similar population, this could be between 13 and 25 additional councillors.

How would a town council be funded?

Town councils are funded by a town council precept (fee) added to your Council Tax. This would be on top of the existing Council Tax that you already pay (there would be no

reduction in how much Buckinghamshire Council charge you). The amount of the precept would be decided by the town council and would depend on factors including:

- the number of councillors
- the number of staff employed
- the number and nature of the services the town council chooses to provide

So, it is not yet possible to tell you what the additional precept for a town council in High Wycombe could be. But here are some examples for existing town councils of a similar size:

Town council	Population	Band 'D' precept 2023/24 (£ annually)
Aylesbury Town Council	63,126	£156.19
Weston-Super-Mare Town Council	82,418	£110.52

Depending on what services a new council would provide, the 'special expenses' precept may continue alongside the precept for the new council (if this is the preferred option).

Each year, the increase to the Council Tax for Buckinghamshire Council is 'capped' by Central Government. There is no 'cap' placed on increases to the precept for town councils.

What would happen if a town council is not created?

The current governance arrangements would continue, including:

- the High Wycombe Town Committee
- the Charter Trustees
- the Mayor

As part of this review, there is an opportunity to suggest improvements.

Why would I pay more Council Tax if a town council is created?

The precept for a town council would be an extra charge on top of your current Council Tax. This is because a town council precept would pay for costs on top of those paid for by your existing Council Tax, such as extra services and support staff.

The next steps

Because you live in the unparished area of High Wycombe, we would like to hear your views.

You can tell us your views in one of the following ways:

- complete the online survey at www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/high-wycombe-consultation or scan the QR code below
- complete the survey enclosed and send this to us using the envelope provided
- email us at highwycombecgr@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
- write to us at High Wycombe CGR, Buckinghamshire Council, Queen Victoria Road, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 1BB

[Insert QR code for consultation webpage]

Your feedback will be used by councillors, along with other relevant information. We will then consider the future community governance arrangements for the area.

Respond before Sunday 7 April 2024

We must receive all responses before midnight on Sunday 7 April 2024.

If you would like to receive updates on the High Wycombe Community Governance Review, sign up for our mailing list at www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/signup.

This information can be made available in other formats and languages. Contact us at highwycombecgr@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

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Informacje te mogą być udostępniane w innych formatach i językach. Skontaktuj się z nami pod adresem highwycombecgr@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

Aceste informații pot fi puse la dispoziție în alte formate și limbi. Vă rugăm să ne contactați la highwycombecgr@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.