

## **Budget Scrutiny 2024: Public Questions**

### Leader

#### Council Tax

Please clarify what the 4.99% increase includes – does it include the PCC and Fire Authority?

*Katherine Collins*

#### Response:

The 4.99% increase proposed to Council Tax is only for the Buckinghamshire Council element of Council Tax bills (The Buckinghamshire Council Council Tax element and the Adult Social Care precept). The figures reported in the Draft Budget reflect only the Buckinghamshire Council element of the total Council Tax collected. Thames Valley Police and Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority will agree their own increases to their elements of Council Tax, as will any Parish or Town Councils. These will be published as part of the Council Tax Referendum report alongside the Final budget in February.

#### Budget Consultation

Why isn't the council undertaking a detailed consultation exercise with residents to consider and deliberate the budget proposals in a democratic way that truly involves residents and taps into their expertise? I have lots of other questions and good ideas for saving money but there is no real forum for sharing them.

*Mike Cooke*

#### Response:

Each year we ask residents and organisations in Buckinghamshire which services they think should be the main priorities in our budget for the next year, and what they think about our outline plans for how next year's budget should be spent. The consultation includes supporting information on current spend across council services and what the service areas deliver with the allocated budget. The consultation launches in Autumn with a 6-week window for responses (most recently 31 August to 15 October 2023). The responses submitted to the consultation are considered and fed into the development of the detailed budget proposals. These detailed proposals, along with the analysis of the budget consultation, are considered by Members throughout the budget setting process. We do note however you have suggested a different approach to consult on the detailed budget once developed which is something we will consider for next year.

#### Unitary Savings

According to the business case for Buckinghamshire becoming a Single Unitary Authority, it was estimated in September 2016 that the annual revenue savings would be £18.2m with an estimated £45.4m net saving over the five-year period. Pay back was estimated at 2.2 years following go-live on 1st April 2020. By my reckoning, that means that savings over the last 4 years should have amounted to £72.8m (to April 2024) and will be £127.4m by 2027. You are predicting savings of £172m by 2027 from savings and additional income. Is it possible to have a more detailed breakdown of the costs/savings since Buckinghamshire became a Single Unitary Authority in 2020? I live in the south of the county and have seen

only a deterioration in the quality of services provided despite significant annual increases in council tax.

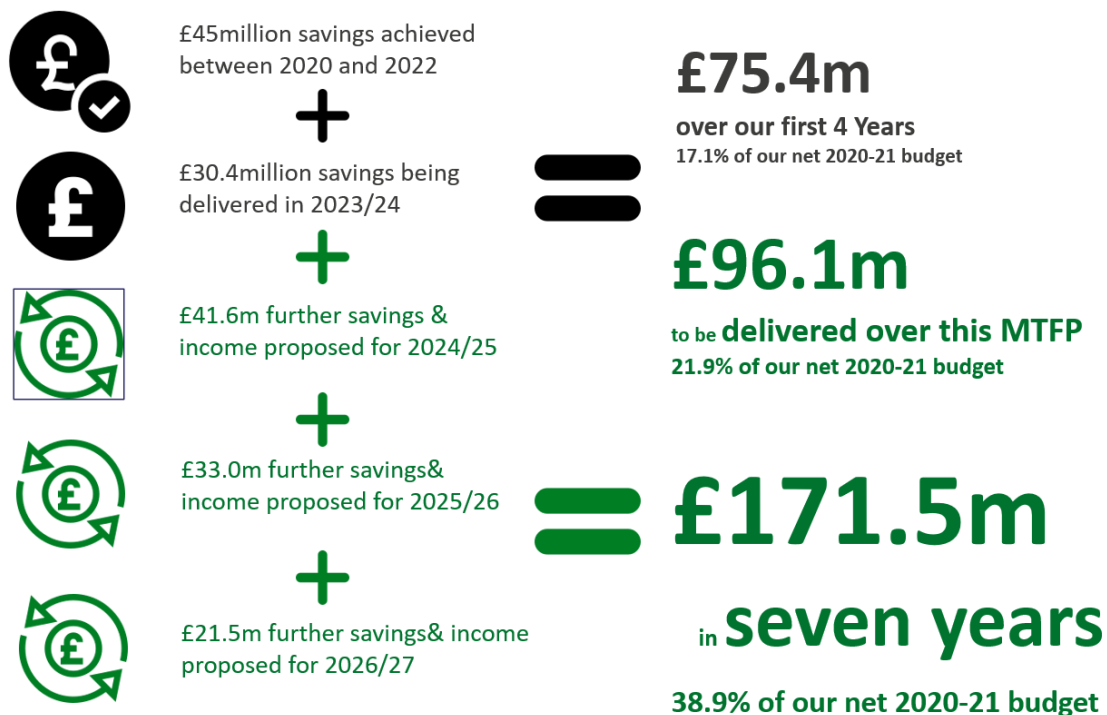
*Katherine Collins*

### Response

When reporting savings in our budget setting papers, we only count a saving in the year in which it is permanently taken from the budget.

In our draft budget papers (which were the subject of the budget scrutiny process) we set out the delivery of savings on a cumulative basis by year from 1 April 2020. This shows that we will have delivered £75.4m of savings over 4 years through both Unitary savings plans and other Service improvement activity.

## Section 1: Draft Budget and MTFP



(\*Please note that the future years figures are subject to change in the Final budget to be agreed by Council on 21 February 2024)

Full details of the savings made since the creation of the Council can be found in our published budget papers for each year. Links to these documents are below;

Budget 2020/21

<https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s3032/Budget%20Appendix%203%20-%20Detailed%20revenue%20budget%20changes.pdf>

Budget 2021/22

<https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s18217/Appendix%203%20-%20Detailed%20Revenue%20changes.pdf>

Budget 2022/23

<https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s39171/Appendix%203%20-%20Detailed%20Revenue%20chnages.pdf>

Budget 2023/24

<https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s57066/Appendix%203%20-%20Revenue%20Budget%20detailed%20changes%2014022023%20Cabinet.pdf>

## Communities

None

## Transport

### Potholes

I'm sure you are aware but there are a number of new technologies already trialled by other authorities which I hope are built into your budget plans. Though involving some capital expenditure, the productivity increases dramatically. so not only do you get rapid payback but much cheaper, quicker and better more proportionate repairs. Also the method of identifying and marking up potholes is archaic inefficient and too late, much better technologies are becoming possible through an entirely different approach especially as potholes of any size can now get repaired quickly before waiting for them to develop into large ones. Maybe some sort of blanket approach should be used rather than the inefficient current ad hoc method. This might involve an entirely new approach.

*John Diamond*

### Response:

The council already uses radar detection and AI technologies to assess the condition of its roads, as well as the traditional visual inspection condition surveys. We are continually trialling new innovative approaches to detecting defects and ensuring a right first-time approach.

How come motorways do not need repairing/resurfacing as much as our local roads?

*Vanessa Samuels*

### Response:

In accordance with national standards, Motorways are built to a higher standard to cope with the volume and type of traffic (HGV'S) with concrete often forming the base. Motorways do get potholes in the surface layer but the National Highways budget is significantly larger when compared to local authority highway budgets, so motorways are treated more often. Additionally, local roads, and particularly rural roads, were never designed when they were built to take the volumes and weight of today's vehicles which reduces the life of the road.

## HS2

How much money has been received from HS2 and other projects that are causing excessive damage to the Bucks road network. Bucks residents cannot be totally responsible for repairing the damage caused by a national project? The proposed spend on the road network can only be judged as good or bad if we also have an idea of the total contribution received from the various projects or central government on their behalf.

*Leon Kelly*

## Response:

HS2:

The HS2 construction project is causing considerable disruption and damage to our already strained road network in Buckinghamshire. We work hard to hold HS2 to account and have lobbied both HS2 and the Department for Transport to seek suitable compensation payments for the damage caused to our roads by the high numbers of HS2 HGV movements across the county.

The Council has been extremely frustrated with the limited level of funding provided to date, but we are actively engaged with HS2 to make tangible progress and secure funding for both short- and long-term repairs.

There are 4 compensation funding streams related to damage to roads from HS2 HGV movements:

- Pothole/deterioration fund – funds for small interventions because of HGV traffic - £93k per annum for 5 years
- Road Safety Fund (RSF) - communities can bid for RSF funding to develop and implement road safety initiatives. Circa £3.95m contribution received to date.
- Highways damage claims process – these are claims for more significant works either to intervene on routes that are still being used or to repair damage on routes that are no longer used. Circa. £1m contribution was last year.
- HS2 are committed to fully compensate for outstanding damage at the end of the project and the Council will also hold HS2 to account to deliver on their long-term commitment to compensate for any outstanding damage at the end of the project.

The details of individual claims are commercially confidential between HS2 and the local authority. The process is a little slow and we are proactively working with HS2 to streamline the process.

East West Rail (EWR) are undertaking fixing the highway/ roads they have damaged – there is no cash exchanged for this as EWR deliver these works and there is a 1-year maintenance period and inspections before agreed handover.

## School Transport

Can you inform me what the budget costs are for pupil transport as I see school bus after school bus going to and coming from Haddenham? I am sure this is repeated all over the county and must be expensive.

*Peter Mason*

Response:

The Home to School Transport budget in 23/24 is c£28m. Home to school transport is a statutory duty placed on local authorities to provide free-of-charge travel arrangements for eligible children of statutory school age (5 to 16 years). The Council's [Home to School Transport Policy](#) describes the policy for home to school travel assistance and the criteria applied to determine eligibility. Details of the current costs of providing home to school transport in Buckinghamshire, as well as the difficult national and local context that Councils providing home to school transport operate within, were recently reported to the Transport, Environment and Climate Change Select Committee. The full report from the meeting can be accessed [here](#).

## Accessible Housing & Resources

### Number of Councillors

Can the number of councillors be reduced sooner than May 2025?

*M.A.Knight*

### Response

The number of Councillors cannot be reduced sooner than May 2025, because the changes in the number of Councillors are as a result of the electoral review of Buckinghamshire undertaken by the Boundary Commission for England.

Changes in the number of Councillors and the warding patterns as a result, all come into force in May 2025 at the next local elections.

## Health and Wellbeing

### Daycare Units

I am concerned about the limited services available for the African & Caribbean communities. We have one fit-for-purpose daycare unit at Hairoun Elderly Daycare Centre that is struggling for funding for building repairs and accessible outside space. It is primarily visited by the so-called 'Windrush Generation' and other members of the community. It is of vital importance that the elderly pioneers of our community engage in an interactive stimulating environment, reflective of them. According to a recent population census, approximately, 14 thousand of this population reside in Buckinghamshire. To reduce financial expenditure on our hospital services - the preservation of an active, stimulating engaging environment for the elderly keeps them healthy for many more years than without these beneficial services. How does your budget achieve this?

*Makeda Bonsu - Hairoun Centre Volunteer*

### Response

As part of our Improvement Programme for the coming year, we will be doing a review of Community Opportunities provision. This will focus largely on those who are eligible for Adult Social Care funding, and ensuring we have the right levels of provision. This work will of course take into account the changing profile of the populations of Buckinghamshire. We will of course look at what Voluntary and Community Group provision is available, and we acknowledge the valuable role groups play in keeping people well.

We also fund, through the Public Health Grant, a Health Equity Fund where charities/not-for-profit groups can bid to us to deliver projects that aim to keep residents from ethnic minority communities healthy and independent for longer.

For example - Successful applications, to date, have come from Chesham Movers and Shakers (supported to fund a fitness instructor), More Horizons (to deliver their IN-CONTROL programme to ethnic minority communities in Aylesbury), Lindengate (to support women's wellbeing groups led by women from local ethnic minority communities), the Wycombe Multi-Cultural Organisation (to establish and deliver a Movers & Shakers programme, which will provide support and social connections for older people particularly from the African Caribbean community), the Caribbean community club to support events and workshops in Aylesbury to provide advice on healthy lifestyles. We are also working with the Aylesbury Caribbean lunch club and the Wycombe Movers and Shakers group to raise awareness of how communities can take care of their own mental health and support others to do the same.

### Care Costs

The Leader's newsletter said that 'some individual clients have needs so complex that the cost to support them alone can run into tens of thousands of pounds per week'. How can this be? Could you be more open about how this money is being spent please?

*Guy Moultrie*

### Response

Please see below two case studies which provide further details around support in complex cases.

#### Case Study 1

- Paul is 19 years old. He suffers with a complex range of learning difficulties including ADHD.
- He has significant negative childhood experiences impacted some of his ongoing actions and behaviours. History of self-harming and expressing repeated suicidal intentions. Previously sectioned.
- Supported by the Council since he was a child and transitioned to adult services at 18, adult care staff have helped Paul reduce self-neglect, manage his medication and avoid risky behaviours.
- He has lived in several shared Supported Living placements which have broken down due to his behaviour. Staff have found it hard to keep him safe.

- To better support Paul and his needs, he moved into a self-contained Supported Living placement with round-the-clock assistance and 2:1 support. The cost of this placement is £8,000 per week (£415k a year).
- Paul has settled in well and support has been reduced to 1:1 support during the day and 2:1 at night at a cost of £5,700 per week (£295k a year).

#### Case Study 2

- Charlie is 15 years old. He suffers with considerable mental health difficulties and has a long history of serious self-harm.
- He requires round the clock supervised care to keep him safe, which cannot be provided at home with his parents, (always our chosen first option).
- A prior registered care placement has proved unsuccessful. Charlie does not meet the threshold to be detained under section 3 of the Mental Health Act, which would trigger health funding for his treatment.
- He has received some hospital care but was discharged into the care of the Council, as his legal guardian. At present, the only option available is for Charlie to be looked after in a placement with 3 staff with him 24/7.
- The cost of this care is £40,962 a week (property cost £2,400 and staffing costs £38,562). All cheaper care options have been explored but have failed to keep Charlie safe. The cost of care to date in this financial year is £800,000. If costs remain at £40k per week, total for this financial year will be £1.75m.

## Climate Change & Environment

### Climate Change Expenditure

Please will you tell me what precisely is being spent on "climate change" and, in detail, what benefit the residents of Buckinghamshire will realise as a result of this expenditure?

*Nigel O'Driscoll*

### Response

The Council published its Climate Change Strategy in 2021, setting out our objectives and financial commitments, and the benefits we are aiming to achieve for our residents. An annual review is published of our progress, including a detailed update of progress against our Climate Change Action Plan. Please find links to these documents below. All of the projects listed in the strategy are included in the published budget.

Climate Change Strategy: [Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy | Buckinghamshire Council](#)

Progress Report 22-23: <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/environment/climate-change-and-sustainability/view-the-climate-change-and-air-quality-strategy/climate-change-and-air-quality-progress-report-2022-to-2023/>

Action Plan update 22-23:

[https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/documents/29328/Action\\_Plan\\_Update\\_202309\\_v1.2\\_1.pdf](https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/documents/29328/Action_Plan_Update_202309_v1.2_1.pdf)