

**County Council Update
from County Cllr Anne Wight
September 2019**

New Unitary Buckinghamshire Council Key Consultations

There are two key consultations which are ongoing and which can be located on the Shadow Authority Website link below.

One relates to council tax support and the other to the new Community Boards which will be the successors of the Local Area Forum system. Details of these are below:

Consultation: 14 August – 24 September 2019

Changes to Council Tax Reduction in Buckinghamshire (sometimes called Council Tax Support)

The four district councils and the county council in Buckinghamshire would like your views on proposed changes to the council tax support schemes that help people on low incomes, as we plan for becoming one council in April 2020.

Why do we need this change?

On 1 April 2020, there will be a new council for the whole county, Buckinghamshire Council.

Currently each district council (Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, Wycombe and South Bucks) has a different scheme that gives slightly different levels of council tax support for people with a low income.

The aim is to have one scheme supporting those who are eligible for a reduction on their council tax bill across the whole of Buckinghamshire from 1 April 2020. One scheme for the whole of Buckinghamshire will mean that people in the same situation are treated consistently and fairly wherever they live .

The changes proposed in this consultation only apply to people of working age with a low income. **Pensioners are not affected by this change.**

What is this consultation about?

We want the views of our residents on the scheme that is being proposed for the new council. We are keen to ensure that all council tax payers are aware of the changes we are proposing.

Many people will see little or no change to the amount of support they receive, but combining four schemes into one does mean there will be some changes.

For those people whose current level of support changes there will be a fund available for people to apply for additional short term support (called the Discretionary Fund).

A number of options have been considered when developing proposals for the new scheme. If you would like to read the full reports, or view the webcast from the Shadow Executive meeting held on 23 July, they can be found on the Shadow Authority website.

Our proposal

We want a fair and equal scheme that provides the people of Buckinghamshire with the same level of help with their council tax payments no matter where they live in the county.

To do this, the current schemes for each district council need to be brought together into a single scheme for the new Buckinghamshire Council from April 2020.

The aim of the new scheme is to balance the need to support council taxpayers in need of financial help with the cost to all council taxpayers.

How do we propose we do this?

These are our proposals for how levels of council tax reduction could be set for the new Buckinghamshire Council from 1 April 2020.

- **Earnings disregard** – the four district councils offer different amounts of reduction for people of working age who work. This is the amount that is ignored from your earnings each week when your CTR is worked out and is called an Earnings Disregard.
 - **Our proposal is that the weekly Earnings Disregards should be variable based on the old Council Tax Benefit scheme.** The most common disregards are:
 - £5 for single people
 - £10 for couples
 - £20 for carers
 - £25 for lone parents
- **Non dependant deductions** – when assessing if someone is entitled to a reduction in their council tax, we also look at how many other adults (not including the person claiming or their partner) over the age of 18 live at the address. For each additional adult a deduction is made from the amount of council tax reduction awarded each week. Currently this amount is different across the four district councils in Buckinghamshire.
 - **Our proposals set a standard weekly amount of £5.00 for each additional adult.**
- **Band restrictions** – in one of the current schemes, council tax reduction is restricted to the maximum charge of a Band D property. For example, if you live in a Band E property (where the council tax is higher than a Band D property) you would only receive support for the amount of council tax up to that for a Band D property and would be responsible to pay the additional amount between the Band D and Band E property.
 - **Our proposal is to remove this restriction.**
- **Backdating claim dates** – one of the existing district councils allows for claims for council tax support to be backdated providing you can clearly evidence a good reason why the claim was not made earlier.
 - **Our proposal is that we remove the backdating facility.**
- **Level of contributions** – the four districts currently have different levels of council tax contribution that working age vulnerable people have to pay ranging between paying 0% of your council tax to 20%.
 - **Our proposal is to increase the level of support available to vulnerable groups for council tax reduction to 100%.**
- **Vulnerable groups** – Government determines that some people on a low income who are of working age and that the council consider to be vulnerable, are supported with council tax bills. How these people are currently supported is different across each of the district councils.

In developing our proposal for a new scheme we considered which other groups should be classed as vulnerable and therefore receive support. This included:

- people who receive qualifying* disability benefit
 - single parents with a child/children under 5
 - low income households with a child/children under 5
- Our proposal is that the following vulnerable groups can receive full council tax reduction and therefore will not pay any council tax (dependant on household income):
 - people who receive qualifying* disability benefit
 - low income single parents with a child/children under 5
 - We are not proposing that low income households with children under 5 receive full council tax reduction. These households can still qualify for council tax support based on the household income, but will not automatically qualify for full council tax support. This was rejected because of the overall cost.

We would like your views on the proposals for a new council tax reduction scheme for Buckinghamshire Council and in particular your views on those vulnerable groups we are proposing to receive full council tax payment support from 1 April 2020.

Full details, case studies and other links and information can be found on the Shadow Authority website at the link below:

<https://shadow.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/consultations/counciltaxreduction/>

Community Boards Consultation

Consultation: 12 August – 30 September 2019

Get involved in improving your local area with the new Buckinghamshire Council

The new Buckinghamshire Council wants to work with local people to help understand the specific issues affecting each area and work together to find solutions.

We are therefore proposing to strengthen local connections with communities by setting up community boards. By working in partnership with local people, town and parish councils, community groups, police, healthcare organisations and residents, these community boards would help the new council understand and respond to local needs more effectively.

Community boards would give a voice to local people, giving you a chance to work with the council and other local people to make a difference for your community.

What are community boards and how would they work in Buckinghamshire?

Community boards would bring together Buckinghamshire Council councillors with local communities to help solve local issues. They would provide a vital link between the council, elected councillors and communities.

These local issues could include improving facilities for young people, tackling social isolation of older people or helping to set up a community bus.

We want you to have a say in how these community boards might work.

The proposal for community boards in Buckinghamshire

There are a number of options being considered, which are outlined in the ‘Community Boards Options Appraisal Document’. This document looks at the benefits and issues of the different options such as the objectives of the new community boards, who might be involved in discussions, who should be involved in decision-making, how many community boards there should be and the areas they should cover.

In summary:

The aim of the new community boards will be to:

- Enable Buckinghamshire Council councillors to take decisions on local issues, alongside key partners including other community representatives.
- Empower Buckinghamshire Council councillors and communities to influence service design and delivery on local issues.
- Bring communities together with Buckinghamshire Council councillors and partners to find local solutions to local issues.



Who would be able to get involved in community boards?

We want community boards to involve everyone in the local area who wants to make a difference and work with the new council to do this.

We’re proposing that Buckinghamshire Council councillors from the local area would sit on their local board. To be effective community boards would also need to include people and organisations from the local community.

This could include other public services such as fire services, police and health, residents, parish and town councils and young people.

How would decisions be made?

The aim of community boards is to have a partnership of Buckinghamshire Council councillors with local communities to help solve local issues. They would provide a vital link between the council, elected councillors and communities.

Decisions will normally be reached by consensus. There will sometimes be a need for a vote for example on community grant applications. One of the consultation questions asks for your views on who should be able to vote.

How would community boards benefit me?

Community boards are about bringing local people, groups and organisations together to make real changes that will make a difference locally to you.

How many community boards would there be across Buckinghamshire?

A number of options for how many boards and the areas they could cover have been considered. An interactive map showing the proposed boundaries for the different options can be found on the Shadow Authority Website link below.

Following discussions with town and parish councils across Buckinghamshire, a preferred option of 14 community boards across the county has been identified. However, we want your views on all options.

To have your say on these proposals, and for full information and other background links, please complete this online survey at the link below:

<https://shadow.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/consultations/communityboards/>

Developing the proposals

Community boards are not a new idea. Many councils across the country operate a form of community boards in both unitary and non-unitary areas using a variety of names such as Area Action Partnership, Area Committees, Area Boards, Community Network Partnerships etc.

We have researched how these work elsewhere and used this to develop the proposal for Buckinghamshire.

We have also tested out and developed the detail of how community boards might work with town and parish councils, health, police and voluntary and community sector partners.

We welcome feedback from Buckinghamshire's residents, charities and voluntary organisations.

This consultation will close at 11:45pm on Monday 30 September.

The New Family Support Service

A new Family Support Service offering wide-ranging advice, help and information to Buckinghamshire families has been launched today by the County Council.

The new Buckinghamshire Family Support Service will offer support, services and activities for local families from a network of 16 new family centres, spread across the county over three locality areas. Importantly, the service will also provide more targeted, specially tailored help for families with more complex challenges. Where needed, a lead family worker will create a team of professionals around

families experiencing problems such drug and alcohol misuse, money problems, mental health issues, domestic violence, or who may have children with poor school attendance or emerging additional needs.

The Family Support Service aims to help these families to overcome their problems before they get worse and reach crisis point – so that in the longer term they become more self-sufficient and lead happier, healthier lives. Families will be helped directly in their homes or other places where they are comfortable such as libraries or community spaces as well as being able to go to specific sessions at the family centres.

The 16 family centres will also offer a programme of activities for all Buckinghamshire families with children up to the age of 19 or 25 for children with special educational needs or a disability (SEND).

Family centres are spread across the whole of Buckinghamshire, with three being 'Family Centre Plus' sites; Southcourt Family Centre Plus (Aylesbury), Mapledean Family Centre Plus (Wycombe) and Newtown Family Centre Plus (Chesham). These centres will offer drop in advice and support five days a week.

Timetables of activities on at the family centres can be seen online via the Buckinghamshire Family Information Service website (www.bucksfamilyinfo.org).

The Buckinghamshire Family Information Service has comprehensive information on all aspects of family life, from activities, to childcare to SEND services and much more and is a valuable resource for all Buckinghamshire families.

Families with younger children (0-5) will be able to go to open sessions at their local family centre, as well as being able to access the health services and drop-in clinics they already use.

Warren Whyte is Buckinghamshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Children's Services. He said: "I'm delighted to see the new Family Support Service start from today.

"The new Family Support Service integrates the general support we provide to local families with a more targeted approach for those who need a higher level of help from us.

"It's been essential for us to make these changes as previously we weren't able to get help to families quickly and effectively enough when problems emerge – this has contributed to an increase in the numbers of children needing social care input.

"Parents of young children will still be able to go to classes, see health visitors and access their usual services at their closest family centre, which will offer flexible opening hours and develop a wider range of activities than many of the children's centres did previously. There will be open sessions at our family centres for any family with children of any age who would like a little extra guidance or support.

"This new service is a key element of how we intend to reduce school exclusions and reduce the numbers of children needing social care involvement."

Find out more about the new Family Support Service at www.bucksfamilyinfo.org/familysupport

Prostate Cancer Awareness Week

We have been asked to remind everyone that it was Prostate Cancer Awareness Week and to voice our support for this very important issue which ran from 2 – 8 September.

The “Face Up to Prostate Cancer” campaign is important because the latest statistics from CCGs show that late stage diagnoses for prostate cancer were at 42.5% in 2017, having increased by over 5% since 2014 and 11% since 2012*.

In response to these figures, the ***FACE up to Prostate Cancer*** campaign focuses on three key risk factors and the chief symptom associated with prostate cancer; family history, age, change in urinary habits and ethnicity. The aim is to increase public awareness of prostate cancer and encourage men to know their risk and, where heightened, to go and speak to their GP, and our own polling shows this approach is supported by 85% of GPs.

For more information, please check out their website below:

<https://orchid-cancer.org.uk/awareness-education/male-cancer-awareness-week-2019/>