

Bucks Councillors Report for November 2021

Buckinghamshire Council Spend Consultation

We need your views to help us prioritise council spending

Residents, businesses and organisations in Buckinghamshire are being asked to give their views on how the council should prioritise its spending next year in the annual budget consultation.

As the council prepares to set its budget for 2022/23, people are being invited to give their opinion on what services and areas should be given a higher priority and where they think savings could be made.

The pandemic has seen local authorities across the country face new and ever-changing challenges. Increased costs across a range of areas, combined with reduced incomes, have only been partly balanced out by grants from central government. As this year has progressed, although the worst of the pandemic is seemingly behind us, many uncertainties still lie ahead. All of this puts extra pressure on budgets and careful decisions need to be made to ensure continued support and services to those most in need. At the same time the council is committed to making substantial savings and efficiencies.

A number of council services, including social care for adults and children, are legal requirements, meaning that money for these services is effectively protected and can only be spent for this specific purpose. Other parts of the budget including spending on roads and transport, culture and leisure, street cleaning and parks and open spaces, have more flexibility with the ability for money to be spent where there is the highest priority.

Within the council's Corporate Plan there are four priority areas outlined for the coming year:

- Strengthening our communities
- Improving our environment
- Protecting the vulnerable
- Increasing prosperity

Buckinghamshire Council Leader, Martin Tett explained: "Like any business, we must balance the books. We cannot spend money we haven't got but we have the ability to prioritise where the money we do have available is spent so we can make decisions on how and where to allocate funds to help improve the quality of life of all Buckinghamshire residents. At the same time I remain determined that we achieve some very challenging financial savings as a result of bringing all of our local councils together.

"We really want to hear from local people on what they feel our priorities for the coming year should be. It's important to think about what's important to you, your family or business but also to consider the bigger picture and the needs of our wider community.

"I would urge everyone to take ten minutes to complete the consultation so we can consider your views and do what we can to act on them."

The budget consultation is open until 14 November. To take part visit our [website](#).

Lights, Camera, Action! Buckinghamshire's new Film Office takes centre stage

Residents could soon be seeing much more of Buckinghamshire on both the big and small screen, as the council is setting up a dedicated film office to help production companies take advantage of the county's rolling countryside, diverse architecture, picture-perfect villages and edgy, urban landscapes.

The brand new Buckinghamshire Film Office is being developed in collaboration with key partners and the film industry, including Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF), Buckinghamshire's Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Pinewood Studios and Creative England. The Film Office will support production companies and filming crews with information on Buckinghamshire locations, obtaining permits for filming and production advice and guidance. It aims to maximise the economic and social benefits to the county through increased inward spend, employment opportunities and as a boost to tourism, while also ensuring local residents and businesses continue to benefit from filming in Buckinghamshire and that any disruption from filming is minimised.

Recruitment is now underway for a dedicated Film Officer to develop the Film Office including streamlining support to production companies and crews, developing the website to make it easier to find and film at locations and venues and promoting the world-class filming opportunities Buckinghamshire has to offer within both the UK and internationally.

Clive Harriss, Buckinghamshire Council's Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure said: "This is a fantastic opportunity for us to get Buckinghamshire firmly on the map as one of the best places in the country to film - from one-off television dramas to international blockbusters. We are working together with our local partners to create a dynamic, one-stop unit to offer a quality and professional end-to-end service to production companies from around the world, boosting our economy and providing valuable skills development for the county's workforce."

The project has the support of Pinewood Studios, where international blockbusters have been filmed, including the James Bond films.

Supervising Location Manager, Emma Pill, whose credits include 1917, Spectre, Blade Runner 2049 and Cinderella added: "Buckinghamshire includes many great locations to film and a dedicated team with local knowledge will make it even better. This is exciting news for the county and the film industry as a whole. I look forward to working with the Buckinghamshire Film Office in the very near future."

Buckinghamshire locations have featured in a range of films and TV series from the entire Harry Potter film series and Star Wars: Phantom Menace, to Mission: Impossible, Bridgerton and Cinderella.

Applications are currently open for the Film Officer role and close on 25 October: [Buckinghamshire Film Officer | Buckinghamshire Council Jobs](#)

The new Buckinghamshire Film Office website will be up and running shortly.

Trial traffic enforcement cameras to be piloted in Buckinghamshire

Three locations in Buckinghamshire have been chosen for a camera trial to assess the level of traffic violations. From Wednesday 3 November, temporary cameras will be placed in three known areas where multiple complaints from residents and road users have been received over a period of time.

The three locations are:

- Marlow Bridge
- Castle Street, High Wycombe
- Corporation Street, High Wycombe

Marlow Bridge is a historic, listed structure with a three tonne (max gross weight) restriction. Despite clear signage and width restriction measures in place, drivers continue to attempt to cross the bridge, damaging its integral structure. Many vehicles get stuck, so causing the need for repetitive and costly repairs.

The two locations in High Wycombe are bus gateways. Problems have existed for a number of years with people driving through the roads which are only meant to be accessed by buses. This causes a threat to safety for pedestrians.

Legislation is currently being passed through Government to allow all local authorities in England and Wales to apply for powers to take over the responsibility of enforcing moving traffic offences. These include no stopping in yellow box junctions, no right/left turn for vehicular traffic, no U-turns for vehicular traffic, as well as weight restrictions and many more. Currently such violations are dealt with by the police apart from in London and Cardiff. In the near future, possibly as early as March 2022, all councils will be able to apply to adopt these powers to take on the responsibility of upholding restrictions and issuing fixed penalty notices to those caught contravening the restriction.

Steve Broadbent, Cabinet Member for Transport said: "We are looking to install these temporary cameras to give us a better idea of the number of vehicles currently breaking the rules and causing a danger to others and damage to our roads and highways infrastructure.

"We want to make our roads and towns as safe as possible for everyone who uses them. This exercise will help us to better understand the way motorists are using these areas so that we can address particular issues and introduce measures to help improve safety and accessibility for all."

The trial will be for a period of one month.

Covid update from Martin Tete Buckinghamshire Council Leader

Whilst most of us have seen life return to something approaching 'normal' over the past few months it is important to remember that Covid has not gone away and remains a threat to many in our county. You may have seen in the news that Covid infection rates are rising again nationally. This is also true in Buckinghamshire. Here we now have an infection rate of 699 per 100,000 population. This compares to just 440 a few weeks ago.

It is important to stress that infection rates are not the same as serious illness. Infection rates reflect the number of people being tested and also will include many people who do not display any symptoms at all. More than half of Covid infections in Bucks are either school age children or live with school age children. With our national vaccine programme, it is also more likely that anyone catching Covid will not suffer severe effects. Nevertheless, the trend is concerning and we are seeing more cases amongst older aged people who may be more vulnerable to serious illness. This is especially true if they have not been fully vaccinated.

The current Covid-19 figures for Buckinghamshire can be found here:

<https://covid-dashboard.buckinghamshire.gov.uk>

A concern is that rising Covid cases, when combined with a greater likelihood of catching the winter flu, the need for the NHS to catch up with the large backlog of operations and treatments delayed due to Covid, and higher numbers of people attending Accident and Emergency departments is already putting pressure on our NHS hospitals in Buckinghamshire. None of us want to go back into more restrictions unnecessarily. I am therefore urging all of us to take the basic sensible precautions that will reduce the likelihood of this being necessary.

I would strongly encourage you to:

- Be vaccinated if you're eligible. This is so important.
- Have the booster vaccination as soon as you're eligible. You will be invited by the NHS to book an appointment.
- Have your winter flu jab if you're eligible.
- Wear a face mask on public transport and when asked to by shops and in crowded enclosed spaces.
- Self-isolate and book a PCR test if you have symptoms.
- Keep rooms ventilated if you're meeting with others inside.

The council has been working hard with other organisations to help keep Buckinghamshire safe. This has included working with the NHS to set up more local vaccine clinics, sending mobile testing vans into our communities and supporting the vaccine roll out for 12-15 year olds in secondary schools. We have come a long way since the difficult lockdown days earlier this year. Let's keep working together to keep each other safe.

Support for the vulnerable

Our Helping Hand team are available to help individuals or families in need, those on low incomes and those who are experiencing a financial emergency or crisis.

Whether you get in contact by phone or the online form, we will ask you a few questions about your situation so that we can offer the best support or advice.

Help with food and food costs – If you are struggling to afford food, our Helping Hand team can make referrals on your behalf to a local food bank.

You can also use the [Buckinghamshire Online Directory](#) to find organisations in your area who can help you with food. Many of these organisations are providing food and meals during the school holidays.

Help with household bills – If you are unable to pay your energy costs and are struggling to keep your home warm, please contact us.

We can discuss the options available to you and help you apply for grants from third party organisations. We may also be able to help with any other essential bills.

Help with essential items for your home – Please contact us if you need help with essential furniture. We can explore the best support for you.

Some external charities can help with essential furniture if you are on a low income:

- [Aylesbury Vineyard Church](#): The Vineyard work on a referral basis for furniture collections.
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- [High Wycombe Central Aid](#): Help local people who are in need and/or on a low income with basic essential furniture and electricals.
- [Thomas Hickman Charity](#): Can help people on low incomes with aids for living such as washing machines, carpets, cookers and fridges.

Get in touch – let us know if:

- you are struggling to afford food
- you cannot keep on top of your bills
- you are in debt
- you are struggling to pay for essential goods in your home

To request support from the Helping Hand team either use our [online form](#) or phone 01296 531151.

Our phone lines are open Monday to Thursday 9am to 5:30pm and Friday 9am to 5pm.

In an emergency, our out-of-hours team can be contacted on 0800 999 7677.

Food collections

In the Chiltern and Wycombe areas we are still collecting food waste as general rubbish. This is because of a national shortage of HGV drivers and a small number of Covid-related cases meaning crews have had to self-isolate in line with government guidelines.

This is just an interim measure and means that residents in Chiltern and Wycombe should dispose of their food waste together with their general rubbish (in the black bin). Brown food caddies will still be emptied if presented on general rubbish week only, but this waste will not be recycled during this time. General rubbish will still be collected every two weeks. Collections in the rest of the county are unaffected.

We will let you know when the situation changes.

Mental health support

The free Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire 24/7 mental health helpline for adults and young people has supported more than 2,000 people since the start of the pandemic.

Contact the helpline anytime if you are worried about your mental health or that of a loved one via [111 online](#) or by phone.

Lastly, please keep an eye on elderly or frail friends or neighbours as we go into the winter months. Vulnerable people may be afraid or too proud to ask for help but it takes so little to enquire if they are all right or need any assistance.

In Buckinghamshire, self-isolating does not mean you are alone

The latest ONS (Office for National Statistics) research suggests people of working age are least likely to self-isolate for the full 10 days. As cases of Covid-19 are rising, if you are required to self-isolate and you are unable to get help from friends and family, there is a range of support available for you.

Practical, social and emotional support is available to those self-isolating. This includes arranging for shopping to be delivered online, contacting the National Responders Service <https://nhsvolunteerresponders.org.uk/> for practical tasks and wellbeing and using the Medical Delivery Service to have your prescriptions delivered. Please check locally for participating pharmacies or ask your GP surgery.

Buckinghamshire also has many local volunteer organisations and charities that can help. You can search for more information in your local area through Bucks Online Directory: <https://directory.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/>

There is also additional support from Buckinghamshire Council's Helping Hand service who can provide you with a range of support including emergency access to food and other essential supplies, signposting for financial difficulties such as paying for fuel and other bills and access to mental wellbeing services.

Find out more by visiting: <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/coronavirus/community-hub/help-if-youre-self-isolating/>. Or take a look at how our Helping Hands team can support you during your self-isolation period: <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/housing-and-benefits/support-with-food-bills-and-finances/>

Self-isolation is when you have tested positive for COVID-19 and do not leave your home.

Keep up to date with the latest government guidelines on self-isolating by visiting the NHS website - the rules can change quite quickly so it's always worth checking regularly. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/when-to-self-isolate-and-what-to-do/>

If you're required to self-isolate in line with the latest guidance, please play your part. Follow the advice from NHS Test and Trace to keep your family, friends, neighbours and others safe. It's a legal requirement to self-isolate if you are told to by NHS Test and Trace and not following the rules could result in a fine.