

## **Buckinghamshire Councillors Report for Edlesborough 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024 and Newsletter January 2024**

### **Keeping roads safe this winter**

When temperatures plummet, Buckinghamshire Council's trusty fleet of gritters rolls into action, salting key roads across the county, to make them safer for motorists. But did you know that the council also provides salt bins for people to freely use to make their roads and pavements safer during cold and icy weather?

The bins are filled with salt and are available at multiple locations across the county for drivers and pedestrians to treat public roads and pavements in their local area. The bins are filled and topped up during the winter season with a mixture of salt and sand. They are located in targeted areas known to be affected by icy conditions which the gritting routes don't cover.

Salt bins are provided for residents to use on public roads and footways only, and should not be used to clear private drives.

### **Changes to household DIY waste disposal due from 31 December**

Residents in Buckinghamshire will be able to dispose of small amounts of DIY waste for free at Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) from 31 December 2023.

The changes have been brought in by central government and will make it easier for people to freely dispose of small amounts of waste created at home from DIY projects such as re-tiling, renovating a bathroom or digging a pond in the garden.

Buckinghamshire Council's Cabinet voted in favour of necessary changes to the council's Waste Access & Acceptance Policy which sets out rules and procedures for the county's 10 HRCs, to reflect the new legislation.

Following the change in law regarding the disposal of household DIY waste, the council is reintroducing a digital e-permit for DIY waste. From 31 December, any resident wanting to dispose of household DIY waste at a HRC will need to have an e-permit printed out or on a portable device, such as a mobile phone or tablet, before they visit. This only affects residents who wish to bring household DIY waste.

The DIY e-permit will allow residents to dispose of one load of DIY waste each week for free. One load of DIY waste is no more than 100 litres of loose DIY waste, or one large item no bigger than 2m x 0.75m x 0.7m such as one bath tub, one door or one kitchen unit. Staff will scan the permit and check the resident's address, after which the e-permit will expire. It can be renewed after seven days, to allow residents to dispose of another load of DIY waste for free. Anyone wishing to dispose of more than one load of DIY waste in a week will be able to do so but will be charged, using the same price list which has been in place for the past four years.

## **Council enforces higher penalties for fly-tipping in Bucks**

Those caught fly-tipping in Buckinghamshire face the consequence of paying a higher penalty for their crime following changes to the law which have been adopted by the council.

Earlier this year the government increased the maximum Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) for fly-tipping from £400 to £1,000. The penalty for Failure in Householder Duty of Care, has also been raised from £400 to a maximum of £600. This penalty relates to people who have waste removed by a third-party waste carrier. By law householders have a duty to check that the carrier they are using is legally authorised to carry out the work and will do so responsibly. If the waste they have given the carrier is found dumped illegally, the householder is deemed to have failed in their Duty of Care regarding their waste and can be liable for prosecution.

Buckinghamshire Council's Cabinet today voted in favour of amending local policies to reflect the changes, bringing in powers to enforce the highest rate for FPNs for those caught breaking the law in this way.

FPNs are generally used for smaller scale offences and avoid court proceedings and a criminal record. However where possible the council will always seek to impose the maximum penalty and for larger scale or more serious offences the defendant may be summoned to court where fines are set by magistrates and can result in custodial sentences and costs totalling thousands of pounds.

## **Coming soon to the Aylesbury area – buses on demand**

People in the area surrounding Aylesbury will have an exciting new choice of how to travel by public transport after Buckinghamshire Council is set to partner with WeMove to launch a 'demand responsive' bus service. The three-year trial follows the successful introduction of a similar scheme in Wycombe earlier last year, which has already proved so popular that it has expanded to new areas to meet demand.

The new service is part of a pilot scheme funded by the Government's Rural Mobility Fund and covers a specific geographical area, enabling passengers to request a pick up from one of the fully accessible minibuses at a convenient nearby 'virtual bus stop' as the buses travel through their area.

The areas covered by the service include Aston Clinton, Weston Turville, Halton, Hartwell, Stoke Mandeville, Bishopstone and Weedon. The service will drop off passengers anywhere within the operational area, which includes Stoke Mandeville Hospital, Aylesbury town centre and the railway stations at Aylesbury, Aylesbury Vale Parkway, Stoke Mandeville and Wendover.

## **Council plan to balance the books for the next three years**

Buckinghamshire Council has published its medium-term financial plan which details how it will balance its budget for the next three years.

In an acutely challenging financial context for local government, the council has worked hard to identify the savings needed to balance the books until 2027 and where spending reductions will be needed over the next three years. It's also produced a detailed budget proposal for 2024/25 including how much it's proposing to spend on major projects and services, following consultation with residents.

With many local authorities increasingly unable to produce balanced budgets, we are not yet in that position in Buckinghamshire. We have already made considerable savings from becoming a single unitary authority in 2020. The council forecasts that by 2027, it will have saved a total of nearly £172 million from both savings and additional income.

However, the council is still facing very significant extra financial pressure because of rising costs and demand particularly for services that help the most vulnerable, such as social care, providing temporary accommodation for people who have become homeless and home to school transport (particularly for children with special needs). All of these are critical services that people depend on, and which are statutory, meaning the council is legally obliged to fulfil these services.

It means that to balance the budget, the council has put forward solutions to ultimately reduce costs, including:

- investing in additional children's homes to reduce the heavy cost burden of external placements
- making savings in Adult Social Care through providing help for some residents, where it fits their need, to live more independently
- rationalising the council's office space, such as closing the King George V site in Amersham
- investing in more housing and temporary accommodation units to bring down the spend on costly nightly-paid accommodation

Residents were asked their views during the autumn on where they wanted the council to prioritise spending the budget and this feedback is now reflected in the financial plans.

The budget proposals include spending the following amounts over the next four years:

- £105 million on the highways network
- £25 million on supporting housing and homelessness
- £14.7 million on climate change and flood management projects
- £37.6 million on economic growth and regeneration projects

Overall, the plan proposes that the council spends £656.4 million on capital projects over the next four years.

The council raises the money needed to pay for these projects and services through grants and income streams. The biggest of these by far is the income from council tax, which makes up 80% of how council services are paid for. Because the cost of providing services has risen so significantly due to added demand and high inflation, the council can only balance the budget by raising council tax again next year. The

budget proposals put forward a 2.99% rise in the base rate of council tax, with a further 2% rise to be spent on Adult Social Care, meaning a total rise of 4.99% - or an extra £1.69 per week for the average Band D property.

Underpinning this overarching financial plan are a number of key principles, including how it will allow the council to keep delivering on the priorities residents have asked for, while not making over-ambitious savings or excessively using reserves in the process.

## **Council agrees to start work on Phase 2 of the South East Aylesbury Link Road**

Buckinghamshire Council will start work shortly on Phase 2 of the South East Aylesbury Link Road (SEALR) scheme.

SEALR will see the construction of 1.1 miles of dual carriageway including three new roundabout junctions designed to ease congestion in Aylesbury and provide an easier route for traffic to flow without going through the town centre. The new link road will join the A413 Wendover Road with the Stoke Mandeville Relief Road, which is being constructed by HS2.

The council is coordinating the SEALR scheme with the project moving forward in two phases. Phase 2 will connect the B4443 Lower Road to a new roundabout junction with both the Stoke Mandeville Relief Road and future South West Aylesbury Link Road

Buckinghamshire Councillor Derek Town