

Buckinghamshire Councillors Report for January 2026

Cllr Peter Brazier and I would like to wish all residents within Ivinghoe ward the very best for this New Year of 2026.

It has been a very busy 7 months since the elections in May, and we have quickly settled into the new council term. Peter having been appointed as a Cabinet member, for Culture and Leisure, and myself as Chairman of the Community Board. Besides these roles there is the day-to-day tasks of answering residents' enquiries and attending those meetings in Aylesbury and elsewhere as required. I shall be attending the budget scrutiny committee for the whole of the second week of January; more background to which can be found in the following paragraphs. It does not make for happy reading I am sorry to say. Central Government has pushed Local Government budgets for years and despite what some may say, this year is no exception. In Buckinghamshire, we are facing unprecedented financial pressures. The central government's recent Fair Funding Review means we face a reduction in funding in real terms.

Budget.

The settlement for local authorities was announced in the middle of December and, as expected, Buckinghamshire has suffered a reduction in funding. The forecast figure was an anticipated cut of £42.5 million over the financial settlement period. This was made more difficult given the lack of clarity provided by Government, but it proved to be broadly correct – the actual figure is a reduction in funding of £44.5 million.

As costs rise and the demand for statutory services like adult social care and special educational needs support for children continue to grow, currently approximately 73% of our entire budget, we need to make some very difficult decisions in relation to spending in the year ahead.

Following the public consultation we ran last autumn, we have now developed a draft budget for 2026-27. This will go before our Budget Scrutiny Inquiry Task and Finish Group in mid-January. If you have a question you would like to be considered for discussion by the Committee about a specific aspect of our proposed budget, please email it to: budget.scrutiny@buckinghamshire.gov.uk before 12pm on 11 January 2026.

This is obviously unwelcome news and the further £2 million reduction from the forecast serves to place even greater pressure on our finances.

Government have claimed that the "Core funding power" for Bucks has been INCREASED by 14.1%. This is completely misleading. The actual measure should be called "Core Spending Power" (CSP) which relates to the non-ringfenced money available to this council.... Including the INCREASES in Council Tax that the "Fair Funding" formula forces us to account for.

The actual increase in CSP, including the rises in Council Tax for the 3-year settlement period is 8.1%. The average across England is an increase of 15.1%. So Bucks, even with a 5% per annum council tax increase, only sees half the core spending power gain of the rest of England. This figure does NOT account for inflation – so the reality is that the small CSP

increase will largely be inflated away and yet the demand for services continues to rise. Without the increases to council tax there would be an overall REDUCTION in CSP of approx. 5% - worth around £30m.

Government is claiming this is a 14.1% increase because, inexplicably, they have chosen to use LAST YEAR as their baseline comparison and not this current year!

The headline message is that Buckinghamshire residents will see increases in Council Tax and money will be sent to other parts of the country, overall Bucks will have £44.5 million less as a county.

There is, however, some good news within our own budget. There has been an increase in the expansion of our Council Tax base. This has provided additional resources into the budget which means fewer cuts will need to be made than previously assumed.

As a result, the budget proposals have been changed to 'buy back' some options, a number of which are relatively minor and non-resident focused but the key resident ones are....

Therefore, we will retain weekly frequency of bin collections, the increases in road and transport investment, the retention of all Household Recycling Centres and keeping public toilets open!

Other Councils in the country are squeezing these areas and making swingeing cuts or changes to services. Despite the targeted attack on rural county and unitary authorities by the Government a history of strong, sound and prudent control of our budgets in Buckinghamshire has meant we can adjust to provide a balanced budget.

The reality is that Government are also reducing grants and investment in other areas – such as the cancellation of the previously promised SEND school. Plus, we also don't yet know what the SEND reforms will result in. The fact is that the funding provided is not sustainable over the long term.

I am sorry to be the bearer of such news but this is the reality every year when funding announcements are made.

Buckinghamshire housing plan.

The initial proposals for the new Buckinghamshire wide housing plan will be announced soon. With Government seeking 1.5 million homes to be built in this parliament it is inevitable that we will see large scale development in Bucks. Where these will be proposed is not yet clear but we will expect to take our share within the ward. It is simply not possible to accommodate all of this in small sites or infill, there will inevitably be new larger developments. I have always said that the arbitrary figure announced within their manifesto would be impossible to deliver. It now seems that statistics are showing this to be the case. Current projections are that between 700 and 800,000 could be built. There may well be 1.5 million permissions given but finances and skilled workforce are just not there to enable delivery.

Finally.

As always, we attend almost every Parish Council meeting throughout the year, unless a meeting at Bucks council clashes, where we can be approached by residents or we welcome any communication by email at any time.

Once again, we wish you a very happy and prosperous 2026.

Kind regards, Chris Poll.

Councillor for Ivinghoe ward.

Chairman of East Bucks Community Board