

# Buckinghamshire Councillors report to Annual Parish Council meetings 2026.

We will break this report into three sections which are of most importance to residents and businesses alike. They are 1. Financial position. 2. Potholes and 3. The new Local Plan.

## Budget

These are incredibly challenging times for local Government. We have for the first time in many years received a multi-year settlement, but it means a reduction from previous years.

Much of what we receive is directed by central Government to various statutory categories.

74% of our entire budget goes on the five statutory services we are legally required to provide. These include Adult Social Care, looked after Children and safeguarding, Education and Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Housing and Homelessness. The settlement for local authorities has been announced and as expected, Buckinghamshire has suffered a reduction in funding. Our forecast of approximately £42 million was difficult given the lack of clarity provided by Government up until the last minute, but it proved to be broadly correct – the actual figure is a reduction in funding of £44.5 million.

Local Labour MPs have claimed on social media 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 approximately 5% - worth around £30m.

Labour MPs’ are claiming 14.1% because, inexplicably, they have chosen to use 2024-2025 as their baseline comparison and not this current year 2025-2026!

What this means is that overall Buckinghamshire will have £44.5 million less as a county and effectively our Council Tax money will be sent to other parts of the country.

There is however some good news within our own budget. There has been an increase in the expansion of our Council Tax base due to an increase in housing numbers. This has provided additional resources into the budget which means the council can retain the following.

- Proposed charges for replacement bins will now NOT happen.
- The Gully cleansing budget will remain in full
- We have been able to re-introduce and retain the additional planning enforcement resource for each of the 3 years of the budget.
- The weekly frequency of bin collections
- The increases in road and transport investment
- The retention of all Household Recycling Centres
- 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 authority 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.

With regard to education, the reality is that Government is also reducing grants and investment on other areas – such as the cancellation of the previously promised SEND school. The national budget confirmed that from 2028 the costs for the (Dedicated Schools Grant) DSG statutory override - this is a permitted overdraft underwritten from Central Government when central funding falls short – will now be met from Central Government and not local authority budgets. Before then the deficit will continue to rise. It has been confirmed that 90% of the cumulative DSG deficit for the coming year will be met centrally. Initially this appears as being good news but, it does now crystallise the need for our budget to accommodate the £4.7m that comprises the remaining 10% of the deficit – a new financial pressure. The Government expect to make similar provision for the subsequent period to April 2028. If the 90/10 split remains, then the £4.7m we need to finance in the first year will become £13.7m over the whole period. Ultimately, we will need to meet these costs in 2028 and so, at the year-end for this financial year, we will make provision for achieving this for each of the years in question. Our collective condemnation of their plans – forcing taxation here to send money to areas that politically align with them

is wrong – but we continue to do the very best to protect and prioritise services for residents and not shy away from making the hard choices to do so.

## Potholes

We now have a new system of liaising with highways technicians after the abolition of Local Area technicians. I would like to express my thanks to Paul Foot, whom for many years has been ours. The new system, although larger in area appears to be a more responsive one as it is a more focused role. The “member priorities” are retained and the budget for this has been increased from last year. We hope you will see more permanent repairs over larger stretches of highway than in previous years. Some have already been carried out this year which you should have come across. There should be more maintenance of footways this year as well, something that I will particularly push for.

Our MP has taken to social media complaining that we are not doing enough to maintain our roads. It is certainly noticeable that we have had a lot of rain this winter and with the freeze and thaw effect this has a detrimental impact on roads. Her claim that the government has awarded this £20m to Bucks to “fix potholes” is misleading and is less than last year. The grant awarded is for particular projects such as the Marlow Bridge and the South East Aylesbury Link Road amongst others and not just for general maintenance. Together with the £45m taken from the funding review we are in a worse position than previous years financially and have, thanks to prudent financial management managed to increase our budget this term from last. £120m from £100m. I personally have had two punctures in the last few years and it is incredibly frustrating and expensive. I report defects through the “Fix My Street Buckinghamshire” app and raise this with the highways team at regular meetings. There are more crews out making repairs than ever before and more resurfacing planned.

In the winter time it may be necessary to make temporary repairs, which is what is complained about on social media. A more permanent repair will mean fewer “emergency repairs” can be carried out and in wet weather, a more permanent repair may not be practical. This situation is the same as our neighbouring counties which are suffering the same financial constraints.

We have committed to spending £120 million on our highway network with more crews out than ever before.

## Local Plan

We must have a Local Plan, or the Government will just impose one. The Council have worked hard to minimise impact on our Green Belt and have not included any new housing settlements in there with the current housing numbers in the engagement sites. In extreme circumstances it may be impossible to avoid completely but the Green Belt is the absolute last resort for inclusion in the local plan for housing. (Undertaking the Green belt review was a legal requirement.)

A local plan is the best defence against speculative development. The protection this provides increases through the local plan process. Without a local plan developers are likely to have more successful applications with little regard for communities or for infrastructure requirements.

The people who can change this are Labour MPs and Councillors – they can challenge the housing numbers to meet need not the inflated targets and secure funding for necessary infrastructure. We should tell them we need realistic, needs-based housing targets and money for infrastructure.

The Conservative run Council are fighting to protect Buckinghamshire from the Government's assault on our towns, villages and countryside. Do please engage with the consultations and provide comments and evidence on the local plan engagement.

The Labour government are imposing 95,000 homes, a 43% increase over the previous needs-based calculation. It is a political choice to impose more houses on Buckinghamshire whilst reducing housing numbers in other Labour held area including in London and Milton Keynes.

There is not a single penny of government funding for the additional infrastructure that is needed. So, no money for things like schools, GP surgeries, roads or sewerage. Developer money will be secured but it will not be sufficient to cover the multi-billions of pounds cost.

## Finally.

At the elections last year, the political makeup of the council was no overall control but Conservative run. I am pleased to report that following two members joining the Conservative group we are now a majority administration. This means we can more easily implement our manifesto commitments and program over the remaining term which ends in May, 2029.

*Buckinghamshire Councillors Chris Poll & Peter Brazier*