

Buckinghamshire Council Annual Report

Thank you for the opportunity to give a short update on some the past year's activities for Buckinghamshire Council.

It's important to firstly note some of the current challenges that the local government sector as a whole is facing. This year's budget was the toughest on record to set for the Council with escalating costs and demand, particularly in four key areas – Children's and Adults Social Care, supporting children with additional needs to get to and from school, and providing accommodation for an increasing number of homeless people. It is good with our record of prudent financial management, not to be in the position of a growing number of councils who are in serious financial trouble and that we've produced a balanced budget for the next 3 years, taking us to 2027. However, this isn't without making some really difficult choices and we are having to find significant savings during this period so it's a very tough context in which to operate.

To local issues:

Firstly the roads. It's been a very wet winter indeed, probably one of the wettest on record, and this is having a continued severely detrimental impact on our road network and is impacting councils right across the country. We are all aware of the damage the weather has caused in terms of potholes and flooding and our teams have been working round the clock to address these issues. Recently we have had 29 gangs out responding to emergency call outs and repairing defects. After last winter's bad weather we repaired 30,000 potholes and we anticipate that number will be even higher this year. We welcome news that nationally, over £8 billion of funds saved from the cancelled section of HS2 is now being re-directed to road repairs, but we also know this is long term and we won't see the impact of this investment in the immediate future. I am pleased that East West Rail agreed and have delivered significant road repairs in this ward and importantly we continue to negotiate with HS2 on some of the roads that their hundreds of HGVs and LGVs have damaged. Notably their haul route from Grendon to Gawcott and Shipton Lea will be priorities.

We all hope that better weather is on its way, to allow us to fully embark on our programme of longer-term maintenance and improvements as it is virtually impossible to carry out permanent repairs in bad weather conditions and when defects are under water. We have released an extra £5million from our reserves to spend on the roads which will allow us to add to our programme of 'plane and patch' and are currently prioritising where these works will be.

Along with my fellow ward councillors Michael Rand and Frank Mahon, I will continue to do everything possible to ensure our ward receives its fair share of much needed repairs.

The council and your ward councillors will continue our work in holding HS2 and EWR to account on behalf of our residents and local businesses in order to minimise disruption where we can. It is a difficult task with HS2 particularly who have powers under the Act of parliament that 'trumps' many of the local authorities powers. However we will keep up our support to assist our residents particularly on the delivery of Undertakings & Assurances given at Royal Assent, additional support on a technical basis, via planning & highways consents and approvals, to ensure that the legacy of these projects is as sympathetic to the environment and residents as possible within our limited powers under the respective legislation.

The Grendon Underwood ward, in addition to having the unparalleled impact of two massive rail infrastructure projects is now also very sadly having to deal with more enormous infrastructure projects and applications. Namely the Rosefield Solar Farm (NSIP) which is so large it does not even touch the Council’s planning committees rather it goes through a DCO process where the Council is a statutory consultee. In addition, the Stratera application for a large battery farm (BESS) a large anaerobic digester plant near Chilton and Oakley in the south of the ward and not least the mega prison at Grendon which was approved after appeal by the Secretary of State. All of these unwanted schemes will compound the appalling impact on our countryside, landscape, wildlife and wellbeing. As your elected local councillor I will oppose them all and do my best to represent the views of the community to the best of my ability.

Finally, I’d like to highlight some achievements relating to the Council’s four key corporate priorities.

1. *Strengthening our communities*
2. *Protecting the vulnerable*
3. *Improving our environment*
4. *Increasing prosperity*

The following table provides some key Buckinghamshire Council work from the year 2023-24. The full Buckinghamshire Council Annual Report 2023-24 will be available after full Council sign off on the 15 May 2024.

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITIES	IMPROVING OUR ENVIRONMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Town & Parish Focus Group was established by the Cabinet Member for Communities to work with a cohort of local councils to work together to understand current issues for local councils, with the first meeting held in February. • A refreshed Town & Parish Action plan was shared with the Focus Group, picking up actions from the recent town and parish survey, and outstanding actions from the previous Charter Action Plan. The action plan will form part of the activity in the Focus Group. • Our 16 Community Boards have continued to bring together local communities to tackle local issues and improve local place. In the year 2023 to 2024, they have funded over 200 projects with c230 anticipated by the end of the year. • Each £1 spent of Community Board funding has secured £1.80 in contributory funding. • Awarded a contract to deliver five of our leisure centres. As well as bringing positive financial benefits, the arrangements will continue to provide benefits for local residents including concessionary membership rates, close working with health partners to encourage healthy and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six Green Flags awarded for our parks in 2023: Heartlands in Buckingham, Vale Park and Bedgrove Park in Aylesbury, Hughenden Park and The Rye in High Wycombe and Higginson Park in Marlow. • A new Highways Service was launched - Buckinghamshire Highways - with industry leading delivery partners. • Our Buckinghamshire Streetworks Permit Scheme’s holds public utilities to account for their work on our road network and our ‘zero tolerance’ approach has seen us more than double the issuing of fixed penalty notices this year. • Continued the successful delivery of our 4-year £105 million improvement programme to our highways network including 209 carriageway schemes this year. • Over 200,000 extra pieces of litter binned as a result of our partnership with LitterLotto and the Council brought in £70,000 from the external Innovation Fund. • Secured Government grants have led to over £1.9m from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for the ‘Energy Doctor’ scheme; which has made

<p>active lifestyles, and an apprenticeship programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £966k invested in replacing and improving children’s play spaces across seven sites in 2023/24, with all new play areas including accessible play equipment. • New Changing Places accessible toilet installed at Black Park Country Park, part-funded by a grant from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. • 64 activities, events and campaigns were held in libraries with over 1,300 people participating as part of the Healthy Libraries pilot in partnership with Public Health. Healthy Libraries is now being rolled out across all libraries. • Established Buckinghamshire’s Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) team, to enable our approach of targeting support to people in the county who are the most in need. The team has already enabled 3 rough sleepers to secure accommodation and improved the stability of accommodation for others. • Just under 400 nominations received for our Proud of Bucks Awards across 274 different people/organisations, with 48 winners and 48 commended recognising individuals, local groups and organisations. 	<p>functional improvements to over 110 properties in Opportunity Bucks wards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 49 public bus routes subsidised with a £2.05m budget annually. • Delivered over 5 miles of new active travel routes including Platinum Way, Waddesdon Greenway School Link, Berryfields to Buckingham Park, Aylesbury canal towpath, and Wendover, including 3 parallel crossings to prioritise people cycling and walking.
<p>PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE</p>	<p>INCREASING PROSPERITY</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 14,000 children and young people eligible for free school meals, early years pupil premium or 2-year-old funded early education received additional support through the Department of Work and Pensions Household Support Fund grant in the form of supermarket vouchers for each of the school holidays. • Completed 7 community resilience evening workshops to support local communities to develop emergency plans. • Between 300 and 500 students were engaged with at each of the Freshers Fairs at Bucks New Uni, Buckingham Uni and Buckinghamshire College Group campuses. • 133 vulnerability packs were distributed to late night venues across Buckinghamshire, produce advice and guidance to staff. • The Stayok.uk website was launched for those with learning disabilities (and/or autism) providing safety advice. It is the first site in the country of its kind and uses photo symbols and easy read text. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopted the Skills and Employment Strategy which sets a clear direction for increasing access and provision of in demand skills and qualifications to enable our residents, communities and employers to thrive. The Strategy was launched with a Bootcamp at Buckinghamshire College Group in Aylesbury, giving 30 people the opportunity to learn new skills to enter the construction sector. • Launched an employment programme supporting people with barriers to employment with a target of up to 30 people to receive employment and development support (20 from Opportunity Bucks wards) • The Rural England Prosperity Fund has been used to launch the Bucks Rural Business Fund which allocates grants to local businesses. • Adopted the Buckinghamshire Regeneration Framework & Strategies, which will maximise the potential of Buckinghamshire’s three larger towns, Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham alongside enhancing the strengths of

- Support has been provided to the NHS to see over 81,000 people receive a covid autumn booster vaccine within Buckinghamshire. This is more than 73% of the eligible population.
- We have accommodated 123 adults and children within 25 families from Afghanistan who now permanently reside in Buckinghamshire and we are supporting to gain employment and access education. We've also accommodated over 1,800 guests who have fled the war in Ukraine.
- We have supported residents to stay warm during the colder winter months, including through the continuation of 'welcoming spaces' in libraries and other community venues, and have distributed 640 warm packs to residents via partners.
- Supported 7,500 financially vulnerable residents with essential white goods and furniture and emergency food and fuel support.
- Provided over 58,000 digital food vouchers for eligible families during the school holidays
- Provided funding of over £400,000, via the Household Support Fund from the Department of Work and pensions to support Voluntary and Community Sector initiatives/schemes for residents across Buckinghamshire through the Household Support Fund, including over £220,000 to organisations supporting within Opportunity Bucks target wards.

the county's network of towns and villages as well as its extraordinary natural environment.

- Secured £14.1m of S106 contributions from new development and £6.4m in Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)
- The Council have spent £17.4m of S106 funds on infrastructure to mitigate development impact.
- Secured £14.1m of s106 contributions from new development and £6.4m in Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).
- The Council have spent £17.4m of S106 funds on infrastructure to mitigate development impact.
- An estimated £10.2m was spent with local businesses in Buckinghamshire through location filming, where the Film Office has provided a service to the production.
- 63% of 19-21-year-olds who have left care were in education, employment or training.
- 210 employees are taking part in on apprenticeship programmes across council services and maintained schools.
- Through Opportunity Bucks we have established Personal Career and Apprenticeship Mentors at Buckinghamshire College, who have contacted over 400 students from the target wards.