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Unitary

Following the approval of a single council for Buckinghamshire in November 2018, the Leaders of the county and district councils received a letter from government in January, setting out the plans for the transition to the new council, and how the new council will be formed in April 2020, including:

The new council will replace the current five councils – Aylesbury Vale District Council, Buckinghamshire County Council, Chiltern District Council, South Bucks District Council and Wycombe District Council. These councils will cease to exist after 31 March 2020.

The name of the new council will be ‘Buckinghamshire Council’.

It will have 147 elected members – three per current county ward.

Elections for the new council will take place in May 2020, then in May 2025 and every four years after.

A temporary 'shadow' authority will be formed, with all current county and district councillors (236 seats and 203 individual councillors, allowing for 34 twin hatters); the shadow authority will set the 2020/21 council tax and budget.

Leadership to oversee the transition to the new council will be through a Shadow Executive comprising of eight district councillors and eight county councillors plus the Leader of the County Council as its chairman.

An implementation team will be established to manage the smooth transfer of services and staff to the new Council. This will be led by the County Council Chief Executive with a district Chief Executive as deputy.

Orders have already been made by government to defer the local district and parish council elections which had been due to take place in May 2019. Instead, town and parish council elections will take place in May 2020 alongside elections to the new Buckinghamshire Council.

Working with partners, including town and parish councils, will be key to the creation of the new council. Both district and county council colleagues are working closely together to plan the transition to the new council including how we engage with town and parish councils and other local groups and organisations.

Children’s Services

It is encouraging that following an inadequate assessment from Ofsted we are seeing progress in improvements in the delivery of Children’s Services for our most vulnerable children and families in the county. Progress has not been as swift as we would have liked but following significant investment and scrutiny improvements have been made. A focus on prevention and help in early years services will see the repurposing of some children’s centres with others strengthening their service provision for families most in need in their locality.

Changes at household recycling centres

A series of changes to the county's household recycling centre service was agreed this year. The recommendations for change were prepared following a recent public consultation and a detailed analysis of how the recycling centre service currently operates, including patterns of demand at each of the sites, and survey information on how people actually use their own local site.

The changes aim to make important cost savings while at the same time ensuring that residents experience as little difference as possible in the way they use their local recycling centre. Buckinghamshire's household recycling centre service is highly thought of by residents, and the decision to make changes at all was only taken with reluctance.

The main changes being introduced, which it is estimated will make cost savings of £1.25 million, are as follows:

1. Introduce charges at all Buckinghamshire household recycling centres for anything that is classed as non-household waste. This includes waste resulting from the construction, demolition, renovation or alteration of homes and outbuildings, and rubble, soil and treated wood resulting from garden landscaping. However, all green garden waste will continue to be accepted without charge. Charges will be phased in from 1st April 2019.
2. From 1st April 2019, reduce daily opening at the household recycling centres at Rabans Lane (Aylesbury), Chesham and Burnham from seven to five days a week by closing them on Wednesdays and Thursdays.
3. Permanently close the household recycling centre at Bledlow from 1st April 2019.
4. Close the household recycling centre at Burnham permanently from 30th September 2019, subject to a financial review of the effectiveness of the other changes, which could mean that closure is postponed.

The Council recognises the widely-held concern that, despite considerable evidence to the contrary, changes to the household recycling centre service would lead to an increase in fly tipping. To cover such an eventuality, authority was given for the county's waste enforcement service to bring in additional preventative measures if any increase is identified.

The Council have communicated widely to ensure that residents are aware of the changes that will be taking place both to the household recycling centre service as a whole, and especially in respect of their own local site.

Consultations

Minerals and Waste consultation

A recent consultation has addressed how the county council will manage waste and the extraction of minerals in the county.

The management of both of these tasks is extremely important and the county council, like other local authorities, has to produce plans for how it manages waste and the collection of minerals.

The main minerals found in Buckinghamshire are sand and gravel, which are essential for construction. The council has to make sure there are enough sand and gravel sites with planning permission to meet local demand and to contribute to national demand. Waste developments can include landfill, recycling centres and energy from waste plants – and again the county council has to have enough of the right facilities to safely manage the waste produced in Buckinghamshire by households, industry and businesses.

People can read about how the county plans to manage waste and minerals over the next 20 years by going to www.buckscc.gov.uk/RMWLP

Adult social care, Short Breaks Consultation

In January a six week consultation started on the modernisation of Buckinghamshire's residential short breaks (respite) service for adults.

Currently the service is located at Seeley's House in Beaconsfield and offers overnight breaks for up to eight vulnerable adults at any one time. The plan, if agreed, is to move to a more suitable location in Aylesbury and commission a new service in partnership with health.

Provision of the new service would mean temporarily closing Aylesbury Opportunities Centre for 12 months while a partial rebuild takes place. Current service users will be supported to find alternative day activities and transition to the new service when it opens in August 2020.

Highways / Transport for Bucks (TfB)

Defect Repairs: Since April 1st 2018 to the end of December TfB have repaired 13,807 defects across the Aylesbury Vale area of Buckinghamshire. This consists of 7,528 conventional repairs and 6,279 which were carried out using the spray injection patching machine. We are continuing to see a year on year increase in the numbers of potholes appearing across the county predominantly on C and Unclassified roads where historically there has been less capital investment. This was amplified earlier in the year as a result of the particularly cold and prolonged winter we experienced 2017/18 followed by the extreme flooding events in May all of which has had an adverse effect on the stability/ condition of the highway. In addition, we continue to see ever increasing numbers of vehicles on our roads. A recent RAC report indicated a 75% increase in delivery vehicles as a direct result of the ever-increasing popularity of online shopping which no doubt has contributed to the deterioration of our roads.

Spray injection patching machines were brought in three years ago which are designed to manage defects on our more rural C & Unclassified roads, where the vast majority (approx. 65%) of defects occur.

Grass Cutting: The 2018 rural grass-cutting program focused on highway verges around areas that are key to maintaining visibility, such as at junctions, laybys, and the inside of bends. The aim of grass-cutting is to keep the highway safe by maintaining visibility for all road users. We carried out 4 cuts last year consisting of 3 vision splay/ junction cuts and a single swath cut, 1.2m (48") wide from the edge of the carriageway or footway which was completed in October.

Winter Service: The winter service started on the 14th October and ran until April 14th 2019. All of the salt domes were replenished during the summer with a total of 10'000 tonnes in stock at the beginning of the season. Salt bins have been refilled however if there are any we have missed or have been damaged / moved please notify us through 'Fix My Street'.

As always please report any defects and local problems through the Fix My Street website

Library refurbishment

The newly refurbished Aylesbury Library is now open. The new library interior includes: better computing facilities, new self-service technology so customers can borrow and return books really quickly and easily, a modernised children's area, new meeting rooms and exhibition area, longer opening hours and much more.

Registrars service

The council's registrars service has spent the last year working hard to perfect its new weddings and civil partnerships offer. The Buckinghamshire Registration Service now offers a new online wedding service which allows couples to research venues and suppliers and even plan their ceremony online 24/7. The service has also been simplified into four special wedding 'packages' which, starting from £210, offering good value for money. The county offers a wealth of venues and couples can choose between grand manor houses, quirky museums, stylish hotels and even atmospheric caves to marry in. Last year the Buckinghamshire Registration Service conducted more than 1800 marriages and civil partnerships.

Health and Wellbeing

In our public health role the County Council has an excellent 'Simply Walk' programme which offers more than 80 guided walks a week on routes in locations right across Buckinghamshire. The walks cater for all fitness levels even for those who might be recovering from illness or injury. You can walk in very rural routes or some walks take groups round our villages and towns. www.buckscc.gov.uk/simply walk

Infrastructure

East West Rail. The western section of the route from Bicester to Bedford the Public Inquiry into the Transport and Works Act orders opened on 6 February 2019. Whilst in broad support of the scheme, the impact on the local highway network is of key concern for the county council during construction and representations are being made at the Inquiry.

HS2: councils across the county continue to oppose this project which brings zero benefit to our area and communities. Enabling works have now commenced and residents are witnessing at first hand the destruction to the environment and wildlife. We continue to make representations to ministers and our MPs.

Ox/Cam expressway: The consultation on route options will go out to public consultation towards the end of 2019, with the choice of route being made in 2020. The leader of the county council has been clear that the corridor B is not that preferred by the county council, which would have favoured a route that alleviated the congestion in Aylesbury. Leaders have also expressed their ongoing concern at the lack of public engagement from Highways England.

Angela Macpherson

Kind regards
Angela

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Leader Aylesbury Vale District Council
District Councillor Marsh Gibbon Ward
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