

County Councillor Report – 1st March 2024

Prepared by Cllr Linda Cohen

COUNCIL TAX NEWS

Council tax 2024/25: The Gloucestershire County Council budget was agreed at full council in February. There will be a council tax increase of 2.99% and an additional 2% through the Adult Social Care Precept to support work with the most vulnerable adults in the county. The council still expects to have one of the lowest council tax levels of any county council. Based on a band D property, this equates to a £6.34 monthly increase. See report below for full details

Highways – Update

Highways Local spending and Planned Works

I've had my annual negotiation with Highways to try and use our Highways Local funding to leverage commitment for more resurfacing work and access to specialist machinery for targeted patching. This does not affect the ongoing programme to fill all potholes or defects or other highways issues which do not meet safety standards.

This is the list for 2024 that has been agreed to date:

Swanley Lane Alkington – Full resurfacing

North Nibley - Wotton Road – pavement section from cemetery to Black Horse 30sqm resurfacing

Kingswood Road, Hillesley – full resurfacing

Hillesley – village gateways

Wotton and all villages lengthsman from April to October scheduled ongoing programme – all clerks to confirm requirements by end of March. Gary Wilson and I will produce first draft based on historic requirements. Final programme can be shared with all residents. This should anticipate and clear any maintenance jobs before they become a source of concern and complaint and ensure highways and pathways are safe and passable and that residential and amenity areas are tidy.

Money allocated towards TRO for speed restriction on Tait's Hill

Disabled parking Long Street

Consultation found no objections. GCC proceeding at their cost with TRO to reinstate correct parking bays and enforcement signage.

Road Safety

Kingswood

Continue with campaign.

Stinchcombe

Continue with work to put in place speed restrictions and warning signs at Tait's Hill.

Hillesley/ Tresham

Gateways agreed and funded. Road markings to be repainted. Meeting set up with school to start signage design initiative. (funding for signage ringfenced in Build Back Better fund).

Ham and Stone / Alkington

Ongoing – to restate: Working party has been formed to develop campaign with clear objectives to transform the safety of the stretch of the A38 that runs from Berkeley to Falfield. Work has started engaging with residents to collect evidence and information and have had input from Stone with Woodford Primary School. We will be using the lessons we have learned from our initial success with the 84/85 campaign.

Buses 84/85 (and all other services)

- Bus service to remain until September '24

I am meeting with Philip Robinson (GCC) and officers to discuss funding contribution and also setting up meetings with South Glos and WECA. Separately I am contacting all councillors with an interest across the border to ensure that they are providing commensurate support and action.

I would continue to reiterate the absolute importance of everyone trying to use the buses whenever possible, the passenger figures will continue to be a key part of the criteria used to assess our merit to receive support.

Thanks to our newest and vocal supporter Debbie Young who has taken up the fight in Hawkesbury. Barabara and Janet continue with their sterling efforts. A number of PR campaigns are in planning.

Worth noting

Council agrees ambitious 2024/25 budget

On February 21st councillors agreed an ambitious budget that will see investment of more than £616 million in services and projects across Gloucestershire, an increase of £50 million compared to last year.

Some of the essential services and schemes the budget will help to deliver include:

- **Over £200 million** to support vulnerable adults and older people with a diverse range of needs and long-term conditions
- **Over £180m** to continue improvements to services for children with SEND and for children and families in need of help and protection. This funding will also support fostering and adoption services and children with disabilities
- Continuation of the council's **£100million** commitment to improve our roads, which over the past 12 months has seen 212 roads resurfaced and 50,000 potholes filled
- **An additional £7.5m** to purchase 10 new fire engines and equipment and **£750,000** for a new ariel ladder platform
- **Over £2 million** to tackle road safety
- **£500,000** pothole busting fund to add to our innovative range of tools to tackle potholes
- **£24 million** for school improvements, including installing solar panels and the delivery of a new special school in Gloucester and a new primary school in Bishops Cleeve
- **£2.2m** to increase the frequency and operating hours of county's bus routes and extend our bookable bus service, The Robin, to three more areas of the county

This will be funded through a council tax increase of 2.99% and an additional 2% through the Adult Social Care Precept to support our work with the most vulnerable adults in the county. Despite this, the council still expects to have one of the lowest council tax levels of any county council. Based on a band D property, this equates to a £6.34 monthly increase.

The council has also looked at how to be more efficient to make the money go further and as a

The Energy from Waste plant has not only stopped Gloucestershire's rubbish going to landfill, it has also generated a £15 million boost to the budget. The council has identified a further £23 million in efficiencies and additional income.

For more information on the

budget view our video [here](#).

Funding to be provided to victims of flooding in Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire residents whose property or business was flooded during Storm Henk between 2 January and 12 January could be eligible for up to £5,000 of grant funding.

The Property Flood Resilience repair grant scheme will assist home and business owners to improve the resilience of their property, reducing the level of damage should flooding happen again.

The funding, supplied by the Government, allows up to £5,000 per property to make improvements that will help properties withstand and recover from flooding.

The grant is only to be used for improvements to a property to reduce future flood damage and is not a compensation for previous damage.

Improvements could include installing flood gates and pumps, raising plug sockets, or tiling floors.

To find out if you are eligible for the funding, complete an Expression of Interest form by the deadline of 30 April 2024 and the council will respond to your application.

There are further grants available through the district councils. These include a £500 community recovery grant if your home was flooded or unliveable for more than 48 hours, and a 100% Council Tax discount for a minimum of three months if your property was flooded during Storm Henk.

For further information on each grant and to complete an Expression of Interest form, visit

<https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/planning-and-environment/flood-risk-management/flooding-information/flood-guide/financial-help/flood-recovery-grants/>.

Have your say on adult social care

Gloucestershire County Council is asking for views on proposed changes to its adult social care fairer contributions policy.

Adult Social Care services are paid for by the county council with contributions from the individuals it supports. People can be charged for their care and asked to make a contribution in line with their financial circumstances.

The council wants to make sure its fairer contributions policy is clear, accessible, and fair, to support individuals with choice and control over their care.

Following a public engagement in 2023, the council reviewed its fairer contributions policy and is proposing changes which include:

- increasing the Minimum Income Guarantee (either for everyone or for some), and a change to the Disability Related Expenditure process, which may allow some people to keep more of their income
- a change to how the council charges for short break and respite care and
- the introduction of an admin fee for people who pay the full cost of their care, but wish the council to arrange care and support services on their behalf.

The consultation will end on 6 May 2024. Everyone is encouraged to have their say, whether they currently pay for their care or may do so in the future, to make sure that it works for people now and for years to come.

People will be able to share their views by taking part in an online survey and by attending focus groups. To find out more and to have your say, visit the survey at: <http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/fairer-contributions-policy>

There will be no changes to the fairer contributions policy, and therefore no changes to how residents are assessed to pay for their care, until the public consultation has concluded, and all feedback has been considered.

Academy trust confirmed for new special school

The Secretary of State for Education has approved Reach South Academy Trust to run Gloucestershire's new special school.

The new 200-place special school will support primary and secondary aged children from across the county with moderate and additional learning difficulties (MALD). It will open in Gloucester in 2026, subject to planning approval.

Reach South Academy Trust has extensive experience in supporting children and young people with complex special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) across the South West. This will be the second special school they will run in Gloucestershire, after taking over Peak Academy in August 2022.

Gloucestershire County Council has increased the number of special school places throughout the county to meet growing demand; recently opening Sladewood Academy in Stroud for children aged 4 to 11 and Brook Academy in Brockworth for secondary pupils aged 11 to 16.

Representatives from Reach South Academy Trust will be at 'Meet the Trust' events on **Thursday 22 February at 11.00am and 4.30pm**. The events will run for an hour at Christchurch Church, Heron Way, Abbeydale, Gloucester GL4 5EQ.

The trust will give a short presentation about how they work, their vision for the school, and will share information about the other schools they manage. It will be an opportunity to meet some of the key people involved in setting up and running the new school, and to ask any questions about how the school will be run.

The events will be of most interest to parent/carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities who are considering requesting a place at the school but will be open to everyone.

There will be another community event later in the spring that will focus on the design and construction of the building before the planning application is submitted. At this later event, members of the design and project team will be available to answer questions about the project, and detailed plans for the school will be available for people to review and comment on before a planning application is submitted later this year.

Visit www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/new-special-school-gloucester for more information and frequently asked questions.

To find out more about Reach South Academy Trust, visit www.reachsouth.org

86 per cent of pupils get first choice secondary school

A total of 6,539 Gloucestershire children who applied on time will be offered a secondary school place for September this year, with 86 per cent of pupils receiving a place at their first preference school.

On Friday 1 March, all parents of pupils going to secondary school in September 2024 received a place from Gloucestershire County Council. Parents will have until 8 March to accept their school place or request an alternative school.

As well as the 86 per cent being offered their first preference school, 97 per cent are being offered one of their preferences.

The 99 per cent of parents and carers who applied online will receive an email confirming their school place after 9.00am on 1 March and will be able to accept the place online. For those who did not get offered their first preference school, they will also receive a letter that explains how the decision was made.

Those parents or carers who did not apply online will receive a letter on Friday 1 March, including the place on offer and an explanation for how the decision was made.

Parents are encouraged to accept their place online or return their reply forms as soon as possible. As we know from previous years, more places are likely to become available over the next few months as parents change their preferences.

If parents ask for their child's school place to be reconsidered, they will be placed on the waiting list for their preferred schools. If places then become available, they will be offered a place in line with the school's admission policy.

Parents unhappy with their initial offer are encouraged to keep their place as this will ensure that, whatever the outcome of the reconsideration, their child will have a place at a school in September.

The county council will write to parents with the result of the reconsideration after 29 March, and parents will have until 3 April to reply. Parents who are still not satisfied with their given school will be advised of the appeals procedure.

The admission criteria and more information about waiting lists for every school is also available at www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/schooladmissions.

If any families need my support for appeals on school places please get in touch.

I will be asking questions at the next full council meeting about the number of grammar school places awarded to children out of county.

First steps towards family hubs

Gloucestershire County Council is investing over £35million as part of the first phase of its plans to reshape services available to support families.

This investment in the council's network of children and family centres in communities across the county will play a key role in the introduction of the family hub model to Gloucestershire, offering a wide range of family support services, or signposting to other services as needed.

The concept of family hubs was developed by the Centre for Social Justice (2014) and aims to provide support for all families with children and young people aged 0 to 19, or up to age 25 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

The county council has appointed Family Action to run its centres in Stroud and Cotswold, with Aspire Foundation Trust managing Cheltenham and Tewkesbury. The new contracts will begin on 1 April 2024. Work is ongoing to confirm a partnership for Gloucester and the Forest of Dean.

The centres will co-ordinate and facilitate family support activity locally, making it easier for families to find out about the services and support available where they live. The aim of the family hub model is to ensure all families have access to the right support, at the right time, in the right place.

The new arrangements will offer opportunities for council services to co-locate with health partners and work more closely with local community and voluntary services in the locality making it easier for families to access support when they need it.

The children and family centres will become part of a wider network of physical and virtual family support points across the county. Families can find out more by visiting [Children & Family Centres - First steps to Family Hubs | Gloucestershire County Council](#)

CONTACT

If you have any ideas that you'd like to discuss or community / personal issues that need my help please get in touch. Email linda.cohen@gloucestershire.gov.uk 07791110906

My remit includes: Education, Highways, Children and Families Services, Health and Social Care, The Environment, Apprenticeships, Employment and Business, Fire and Rescue, Police, Trading Standards and Waste Disposal (not collection).