

February 2019

Council Budget

The Borough Council's budget is to be debated and voted on at a meeting of councillors on the 6th February. It includes plans to increase Council Tax by 1.49%, with an additional 1% for the Adult Social Care precept; a £36.63 per year rise for the average Band D property.

Demand for adult social care continues to be one of the main pressures on the Council's revenue budget, with spending rising in this service area to just under £52m in 2019/20. There is, therefore, a need for the Council to continue its savings programme, with £5.3m of efficiencies to be delivered next year. The total net revenue budget is £128.6m.

The Council also has a Capital Programme for 2018/19 – 2021/22 which covers spending on 'one-off' schemes. The total value across the 4 year period is £213.2m and includes projects such as the 'Transporting Bedford 2020' road decongestion scheme (£18.4m, with £15.5m being provided by the Government) and Wixams Railway (£27.4m, although this may be superseded by the East West Rail project).

East West Rail

A consultation has been launched on proposed routes for the central section of the East West Rail (EWR) scheme from Bedford to Cambridge.

EWR will enable a new train line between Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge, with the potential in the future to extend further to Norwich. It has been unclear for a number of years as to where the line will link with Bedford but the consultation has now provided some detail.

There are 5 options, 3 of which mention the use of an unspecified 'Bedford South' station, which could be the long-awaited Wixams station or an alternative site. Conversely, 2 of the options see the line going through the town centre and linking with the existing Bedford Midland station. For more details on the route options and how to respond to the consultation see <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/haveyoursay>

Parish Police Community Support Officers

Bedfordshire's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), Kathryn Holloway, has written to parish councils offering them the opportunity to fund a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) to serve their communities. The cost of providing a PCSO would be £31,200. For more details see <https://www.bedfordshire.pcc.police.uk/>

Rough Sleeping

There has been a 33% reduction in the number of rough sleepers in the Borough in the past year following the provision of new services. The annual rough sleeper count which took place in November showed that there were 51 rough sleepers, compared with 76 in 2017.

Following the receipt of a £307k Government grant, support has been put in place through the recruitment of extra support staff and units of temporary and emergency accommodation. Support is also provided by a range of local

organisations, with co-ordination through the Bedford Homeless Partnership. While the news of progress is welcome, clearly there is still a lot more to do. For more information see <https://bedfordhomeless.org.uk/>

Volunteers Needed to Support Children in Care

The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) provides a network of volunteers to mentor and support children in care. NYAS is currently looking to recruit new volunteers as part of its Independent Visitor Programme.

The volunteers will receive training before being assigned to their young person. Volunteers act as positive role models by engaging them in new experiences, as well as sharing interests and hobbies. For more information email volunteers@nyas.net or call 0808 808 1001.

Alzheimer's Society Scheme

The Alzheimer's Society is publicising a new service in Bedford Borough. 'My Future Plans' provides one-to-one support for those who have been diagnosed with the disease and their careers to discuss future care arrangements. For further details call 01234327380 or email sam.marshall@alzheimers.org.uk

Winter Maintenance

The Council's website provides updates on winter maintenance, including gritting operations. It also notifies residents of changes to school and adult services transport, bus services and waste collections. See <http://apps.bedford.gov.uk/winterupdates/>

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