



**CLlr Jilly Jordan**

**Stoke Hammond Parish Council Meeting Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup>Nov 2024**

## **Could you get pension credit?**

Following the government's decision to withdraw the winter fuel payment from most pensioners, Buckinghamshire Council is advising residents of pensionable age and their friends and families that it's vital they find out which government benefits they can claim to help them meet their living and fuel costs.

The winter fuel payment is now limited to people over state pension age (currently 66) who are receiving pension credit or a limited number of other benefits.

Older people over state pension age and on a low income may qualify for pension credit – which offers support for a range of household expenses including the winter fuel payment, but many are not aware and are not claiming this support that they are eligible for.

According to the government, only about 60% of eligible people currently claim pension credit countrywide. This means four out of 10 eligible pensioners are missing out on benefits of up to £3,900 a year.

The council is also highlighting that support is still available through its Helping Hand service for people who may not qualify for pension credit but who are still struggling financially. The team can offer emergency support, practical guidance or supply contact details for other organisations that provide food support or specialist advice.

With the government's decision to withdraw winter fuel payments from all except those in receipt of pension credit or other means tested benefits, the council estimates 93% of all Buckinghamshire pensioners could lose this allowance, which is so vital to many of our older households.

“A significant concern is that a number of eligible pensioners are not currently claiming pension credit, so will miss out on a winter fuel payment when they are eligible and in genuine need. Please do check if you or someone you know is eligible – it is critical that those eligible for these payments receive them.

To find out all about pension credit, including whether you qualify and how to apply, go to [buckinghamshire.gov.uk/pension-credit](https://buckinghamshire.gov.uk/pension-credit)

Buckinghamshire Council's Helping Hand team can be contacted at [Help with the cost of living \(Helping Hand\) | Buckinghamshire Council](#) or on [01296 531151](tel:01296531151).

## Calling Bucks pensioners – can we help reduce your energy bills?

Buckinghamshire Council has extended the eligibility criteria of one of its key programmes to help lower heating bills, following the government's decision to remove the Winter Fuel Payment from the majority of Buckinghamshire pensioners.

The council's 'Energy Doctor' scheme involves a home visit from one of their Energy Doctors to assess 'easy interventions' to lower energy bills, funded by the council, such as fitting LED light bulbs and draught proofing.

Now the council has extended the scheme to include all residents of State Pension age whose homes have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rated D-G.

It's part of a range of help the council wants local pensioners to access if losing their Winter Fuel Payment leaves them struggling to meet heating costs. The Winter Fuel Payment will only be made this year to pensioners receiving Pension Credit or another related benefit. It means some 95,000 pensioners in Buckinghamshire will no longer receive this payment so Buckinghamshire Council is working hard to remind those residents about what other support is available.

The council's Energy Doctors have visited more than 800 Buckinghamshire homes in the last 18 months, and the energy saving measures they have put into those homes are saving each household on average an estimated £129 on annual energy bills.

The Energy Doctors use low-cost 'retrofit' measures to reduce energy costs, such as:

- draught proofing
- installing LED lightbulbs
- installing secondary glazing
- providing heated throws
- installing aerated shower heads and shower timers

As a council we have made clear our extremely strong objections to the government removing this critical support for pensioners and have written directly to the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to ask that this policy is reversed. We are also doing all we can to support our local pensioners as we move into the colder months and expanding our Energy Doctor scheme is one way we can help.

Please find out from our team if you're eligible for a visit as our Energy Doctor could make a real difference in helping to make heating the home more affordable. I also urge family and friends of local pensioners to make sure they're aware of our Energy Doctor scheme which has already helped so many local households – please spread the word!

Buckinghamshire Council is also urging local pensioners to check if they're eligible for Pension Credit to enable them to claim the Winter Fuel Payment. Find out more at: [www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/pension-credit](http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/pension-credit)

Any Buckinghamshire household facing financial hardship can contact the council's Helping Hand service. Find out more at: [www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/helping-hand](http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/helping-hand)

## Start your journey to adoption this National Adoption Week

If you are interested in adoption, now could be the perfect time to start your adoption journey. National Adoption Week . During the week, Buckinghamshire Council's adoption team will be sharing stories and information on adoption and encouraging those who may be thinking about it to get in touch.

National figures show that the number of people coming forward to adopt is falling. The latest data shows there has been a 22 per cent increase in the number of children ready for adoption but not yet matched with an adoptive family in England in 2023-4, compared to the previous year. With fewer potential adopters coming forward, believed to largely be a result of the cost-of-living crisis, this means that nearly half (47 per cent) of all children face delays of over 18 months to move in with an adoptive family.

The most important thing for an adopted child is to feel loved and secure, with parents able to understand their needs and we know that there are people in Buckinghamshire right now who are able to provide that love and security. We want these people to know that they will not be alone, there will be a whole community of support around them throughout their adoption journey, they just need to take that first step and get in touch with us.

Caroline and Nate, one couple who adopted elsewhere and then moved to Buckinghamshire, talked about their experience: "When we moved to Buckinghamshire, we got in touch with the council's post-adoption support and we have had exceptional care ever since. In the three years prior to moving to Bucks, since we adopted our daughter, we really found things quite challenging. The system around adoption is different in every local authority you're in. Coming to Bucks has been an absolute blessing to us.

"Our daughter has had new assessments done and new support given. This has been done through formal support and the adoption team. We also have check-ins and one-off sessions for our daughter during school that have been helpful when we've encountered tricky life situations."

One of the best ways to find out if you could adopt is by completing the simple, online Adoption Ready tool: <https://adoption.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/>

Alternatively join one of the information sessions run by the adoption team. The next session takes place on Tuesday 5 November from 6-7.30pm: [Book an information event | Buckinghamshire Adoption Service \(buckscc.gov.uk\)](#)

To find out more about adopting in Buckinghamshire visit the website: [www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/adoption](http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/adoption)

Or contact the team:

- Telephone: [01494 586 349](tel:01494586349) (Monday to Thursday 1pm to 5pm and Friday 1pm to 4.30pm)
- Email: [adoption@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:adoption@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)

## Household Recycling Centres switch to winter opening hours

Visitors to Buckinghamshire's Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) are being reminded that from Tuesday 1 October, opening hours at all 10 centres across the county will be switching to the winter hours of 9am to 4pm.

The change in opening hours occurs every year, in line with shorter days bringing fewer visitors to the sites after 4pm.

Thomas Broom, Buckinghamshire Council's Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment said: "During the winter months we find far fewer residents visiting our HRCs after 4pm therefore we change the regular opening hours to reflect this."

Thomas continued: "All other site opening arrangements remain unchanged, so centres are open on the same days, it is just the hours that change between the beginning of October and the end of March."

To find out which days your local HRC is open and also further details of what can and cannot be taken to a centre, visit: [buckinghamshire.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling](https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling)

If you are worried about the site being busy you can check ahead and view live webcam footage via the council website and plan your trip accordingly.

Thomas added: "Don't forget, any items such as furniture, garden equipment, bicycles and household equipment in good condition that you are looking to get rid of, can be taken to any HRC where they are collected for reuse."

Items donated are sold on by South Bucks Hospice which runs the reuse shops in High Wycombe and Aston Clinton HRCs. Items for resale can be taken to any of the 10 sites and will be transported to the reuse shops.

## Teach in Bucks fair

**Are you inspired to teach? Find out more at our recruitment event**

Are you interested in teaching but don't know where to start? Then look no further than the free Teach in Bucks Recruitment Fair, taking place at Buckinghamshire New University's Aylesbury campus on Saturday 9 November.

Whether you are currently studying, have completed a teaching-related course or are considering a new career change, the specialist event, which runs from 10am to 3pm, offers the opportunity to find out everything you need to know about teaching, all under one roof.

The unique event brings together local and national industry experts including universities, teacher training institutions and representatives from the Department of Education. Attendees will have the opportunity to meet professionals and current students and also listen to a programme of talks from experts in education throughout the day.

Sessions include information on:

- Routes into teaching
- How to apply
- Teaching at different levels including early years, primary and secondary

Book your free place now <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/teach-in-bucks-recruitment-fair-tickets-1005091544867>

## Welcoming Spaces in Bucks: Stay warm, stay connected, stay supported

As the winter months approach, Buckinghamshire Council is announcing its Welcoming Spaces offer – warm, free, safe, and supportive environments available to all residents. These spaces are designed to provide a safe space where individuals can stay warm, save on heating costs, and access a range of beneficial services.

### Welcoming Spaces offer:

- **Warmth and comfort:** Escape the cold and enjoy a cosy atmosphere.
- **Cost savings:** Reduce your heating bills by spending time in a heated space.
- **Health and wellbeing:** Look after your physical and mental health with a supportive environment.
- **Support and advice:** Access valuable support and advice on a variety of topics.
- **Connectivity:** Free Wi-Fi to stay connected with loved ones and access online resources.

This is the third winter since we launched Welcoming Spaces in response to the cost of living crisis. Sadly, cost of living pressures are still having an impact on residents and if you are worried about putting your heating on at home, please remember you can come to one of our Welcoming Spaces. Not only can you relax in comfort, but anyone also seeking a bit of company can meet with others and staff are on hand with information and advice on a range of topics.

The initiative worked so well last year that we are keen to ensure that everyone knows that Welcoming Spaces are open again this year. Please spread the word. Tell your friends, neighbours and family that Welcoming Spaces are here to help people stay warm, connected, and healthy throughout the winter months.

Welcoming Spaces are now available at Buckinghamshire Council's main libraries and community libraries, as well as at some local churches and halls.

An online directory provides a [map and full list of local Welcoming Spaces](#) including their location and facilities.

You can also find out more, by visiting: [buckinghamshire.gov.uk/welcoming-spaces](http://buckinghamshire.gov.uk/welcoming-spaces) or calling **0300 131 6000** (Monday to Thursday 9am to 5:30pm, Friday 9am to 5pm.)

If you are struggling to heat your home or know someone else who is, contact the council's Helping Hand team: [buckinghamshire.gov.uk/helping-hand](http://buckinghamshire.gov.uk/helping-hand) or call **01296 531151**.

## Be Bright, Be Seen!

'Be Bright, Be Seen', that is the message Buckinghamshire Council is sending to residents after the clocks went back last weekend.

With darker mornings and evenings now upon us, the council is reminding people of the simple but sensible actions they can take to keep themselves and their families safe when out and about.

Dark days combined with foggy and misty weather all have an impact on visibility. To stay safe when walking, cycling or scooting to school, parents and carers are reminded about the importance of fluorescent and reflective materials on clothing. Fluorescent fabrics work well during daylight and the hours of dusk but won't show up in the dark so it's important to also look for reflective fabrics and consider adding reflective tape to bags and clothes to ensure you can be seen in the dark by car headlights.

Anyone cycling during winter months should ensure bike lights are clean and in good working order. It is important to remember, it is against the law to cycle at night without a white front light, a red back light and a red reflector at the back of your bike.

As we move closer to winter it is sensible to make a few quick changes to our habits to keep ourselves and others safe. For example, taking just five minutes to check your car, bike or scooter can give you peace of mind that you're doing everything you can to ensure safe travel over the winter months.

And if you're out and about walking or wheeling, then please follow the 'Be Bright, Be Seen' advice. This will make a difference to the safety of all road users, especially for children and parents going to and from school.

There is more information online to remind children and young people about the importance of wearing bright clothing when out and about – including the 'Be Bright, Be Seen' online game – on the [Think! website](#).



## Skills Bootcamps – unleash your potential!

Buckinghamshire Council is offering a fantastic and free opportunity to all residents who are interested in learning a new skill – which could pave the way to a new job, a promotion or a career change.

Funded by the government's Department for Education, the council's Skills Bootcamps are flexible training courses for adults aged 19 or over, leading to either an interview or employment at the end. Designed with employers, specifically for in-demand jobs in Buckinghamshire, these Bootcamps involve 60 to 100 hours of free learning on a flexible basis, so participants can study around any existing work commitments they already have.

There is also a really diverse range of courses on offer, from creative industries in TV and film production, to construction, to leadership and management courses. There are 19 Bootcamps to choose from and anyone over the age of 19 is eligible so long as they meet eligibility requirements such as having the right to work in the UK and live in England.

The courses launched earlier this year and are fully up and running; participants can register an interest and enrol at any time that the course is running.

- Skills Bootcamps currently running include courses in:
- Engineering
- Film and TV production
- Agriculture
- Digital

For more information and to enrol, go to [www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/skills-bootcamps](http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/skills-bootcamps)

- Skills Bootcamps are overseen and funded by the Department for Education
- Employers can also sign up their staff to the Skills Bootcamps, using the opportunity to develop their workforce. They would be required to pay a contribution from 10% (SMEs) to 30% for larger business towards the cost.



