

Wobesle

## Borough Councillor Annual Report 2016/17

### **Borough Council Budget 2017/18**

At a meeting on the 1<sup>st</sup> February 2017 councillors agreed the Borough Council's budget for 2017/18. A 4.75% increase in Council Tax was approved in response to the Council's challenging financial position, caused to a large extent by significant increases in demand for social care and constrained resources.

The budget agreed around £10m of service efficiencies in the next 3 years, including £3.7m of savings to be delivered in 2017/18. There will, therefore, be an array of service changes, some of which were subject to public consultation. Some higher-profile examples of such changes are set out below:

#### ***School Transport***

A general School Transport Policy was agreed by the Mayor's Executive in September 2016 to apply from September 2017. As it stands, pupils are able to access free transport to their 'catchment or nearest school', but a key change will see the Policy narrowed to apply to the 'nearest' school only, subject to a number of exceptions. The Policy will not apply to SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) pupils.

In addition, March 2017 saw the Mayor's Executive agree a change in the eligibility and fee for school transport for Post 16 (Sixth Form) pupils from September 2017.

The final proposals agreed by the Executive, which are estimated to save £150k per year, will now narrow eligibility, meaning that pupils will only be able to access transport if they are attending their nearest school, as opposed to attendance at their catchment school as at present (as per the general school transport Policy outlined above). Again, this is subject to exceptions and the change will not apply to current Sixth Formers.

Those Post 16 pupils who are eligible to use school transport will also now have to pay £890 per year to travel to school, as opposed to the current charge of £381. The current subsidy for low-income families will, however, be retained, which will see these pupils charged £190 a year.

Post 16 transport for Bedford College, Bedford 6th Form, Kimberley College and Shuttleworth College will be withdrawn entirely.

#### ***Discretionary Concessionary Travel Scheme***

The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) allows ENCTS pass holders to travel without charge on eligible routes between 9.30am – 11pm from Monday to Friday and anytime at weekends or Bank Holidays. Eligible ENCTS pass holders are those of state pension age or with certain disabilities. The Council also operated a discretionary scheme allowing ENCTS pass holders to travel for free at any time within Bedford Borough.

Following a public consultation, the decision was taken by the Mayor's Executive to introduce a £1 charge for ENCTS pass holders if they are using a bus service before 9.30am. It is estimated that this will save the Council £0.100m a year. While disabled ENCTS pass holders will pay £1 during the specified period, a companion will be able to travel with them for free.

#### ***Bin Collections***

Fortnightly bin collections came into operation on Monday 31<sup>st</sup> October in a move to save the Council 0.587m a year. This has seen green and recycling waste collected one week and black bin waste the next. In addition, green waste will no longer be collected over the months of December- February. Around 27% of households have seen a change in their collection day.

