

Topic: Community Boards - Discussion led by Councillor Liz Walsh

Summary

With technical difficulties resulting in a shaky start, we were pleased to learn details of the principles and practice of the newly introduced Community Boards in Buckinghamshire.

Discussion

Why are Community Boards necessary?

With the abolition of the local District Councils, it was felt that the new Buckinghamshire Unitary Council (BUC) for the whole of Buckinghamshire distanced the residents' ability to influence local government policy and actions. Hence the creation of 16 local community boards to provide a channel of communication. The BUC had the advantage of being able to learn from the experience of other earlier Unitary Councils, like Durham, in scoping the guidance, powers and make-up of these Boards.

What are the main purposes of Community Boards?

The Autumn issue of 'Your Buckinghamshire' contains an article with the subheading 'Making a difference where you live' and asks residents to join their local Boards so as to influence how decisions are made and how services are delivered. The overall budget for all Boards in Bucks is £3.9m and is distributed based roughly on the basis of population within each area.

The allocation for the Amersham Community Board (covering both top and bottom Amersham, Chesham Bois, Little Chalfont and Coleshill) is just under £85k for community area priorities, of which £29k has already been spent. Of this sum, nearly £20k was spent on supporting the 'Shop Local' initiative. There are separate budgets of £22k for Health & Wellbeing (almost all spent) and £36k for local infrastructure (of which £25k was spent on the scout hut near the railway line).

Who is involved in Community Boards?

Fire and police services, Bucks County, town and parish councillors, healthcare professional, voluntary & community sector groups and young people. The chairman and vice chairman are responsible for bringing the right people together to tackle local issues. They have to be skilled at managing meetings and able to inspire people to participate.

The chairman will work closely with community board coordinators, who champion their local areas, drive collaborative effort and are responsible for developing board action plans.

Conclusion

At least we now are more aware of the benefits that the creation of the new community boards can bring us.