



Cabinet agenda

Date: Tuesday 9 May 2023

Time: 10.00 am

Venue: The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF

Membership:

M Tett (Leader), Cllr A Macpherson (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing), G Williams (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment), S Bowles (Cabinet Member for Communities), S Broadbent (Cabinet Member for Transport), J Chilver (Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources), A Cranmer (Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services), C Harriss (Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure), P Strachan (Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration) and M Winn (Cabinet Member for Homelessness and Regulatory Services)

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To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 April 2023.

3 Declarations of interest

4 Hot Topics

5 Question Time

Question from Councillor Robin Stuchbury to Councillor Peter Strachan, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration

I have received an update from the archaeological department on the draft scope for the excavation work from Network Archaeology for the West End Farm site in Buckingham, outlining what analysis will be taking place as part of the post excavation assessment which includes radiocarbon dating to determine how old the skeletons are and the DNA analysis to assess and look at whether there was any family relationships. This information has been shared with experts at Historic England, who provided some useful feedback and suggestions. The Archaeological Team are awaiting information from Network Archaeology on the programme of works. Please could I have any additional information which you can share with me and also what information can be given to the wider community on the subject, including whether it would be possible to work with the local museum within Buckingham who could promote these historic findings.

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If you would like to attend a meeting, but need extra help to do so, for example because of a disability, please contact us as early as possible, so that we can try to put the right support in place.

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Cabinet minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 11 April 2023 in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF, commencing at 10.00 am and concluding at 11.10 am.

Members present

M Tett, G Williams, S Bowles, J Chilver, A Cranmer, P Strachan, M Winn, P Martin and Z Mohammed

Others in attendance

R Stuchbury

Apologies

Cllr A Macpherson, S Broadbent and C Harriss

Agenda Item

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Broadbent, Harriss and Macpherson and the Chief Executive, Rachael Shimmin. Cllrs Martin (Deputy Cabinet Member for HS2/EWR) and Mohammed (Deputy Cabinet Member for Public Health) were attending in the place of Cllrs Broadbent and Macpherson.

2 Minutes

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 March 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

3 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Hot Topics

The following hot topics were noted:-

Cabinet Member for Accessible Housing and Resources

The Council was asking for volunteers for the Customer Partnership Panel to listen to views and feedback on the Council's digital vision for the future including the website, council forms and how the Council communicated. This would take the form of online surveys, postal surveys and telephone surveys. This had been

advertised via social media and already 100 volunteers had put their name forward.
<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/your-council/customer-partnership-panel/join-our-customer-partnership-panel/>

Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Education

A session had been held on partnership working with regard to the Skills agenda for Councillors which had been well received.

Deputy Cabinet Member for Public Health

The Junior Doctors Strike Action was set to the biggest strike starting at 7am on Tuesday 11 April and ending on Saturday 15 April at 7am. Residents could help by attending their hospital appointment during the strike action unless they were contacted with alternative arrangements, phoning 999 in an emergency, using NHS 111, ensuring prescriptions were up to date and looking out for vulnerable family and friends. If an appointment was not rescheduled this should be followed up with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System.

<https://www.bucksoxonberksw.icb.nhs.uk/about-us/>

Following National No Smoking Day, a million smokers nationally would be offered vape 'starter kits' to combat the health risks of smoking and illegal vaping products. In terms of nitrous oxide a government commissioned review had concluded that the possession of nitrous oxide should not be banned, but that additional measures were needed to tackle non-legitimate supply. Nitrous oxide would remain under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 but this should be better enforced. The Act made production, supply, and importation of nitrous oxide for inhalation illegal, but not possession. However, national government has recently announced its intention to control nitrous oxide as a Class C drug. From 1st April 2023 the healthy lifestyle service, including stop smoking service, would be provided by Be Healthy Bucks:

<https://bhb.maximusuk.co.uk/>

Deputy Cabinet Member for HS2/EWR

Reference was made to the new Highways Contract which commenced on Saturday 1 April which operated seamlessly with continued maintenance and had been received positively. Briefings have also been held for Town and Parish Councils to explain the new contract. Plane and patch works would commence this week but were weather dependent.

<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/news/buckinghamshire-council-announces-new-highways-contractors/>

5 Question Time

Question from Councillor Robin Stuchbury to Councillor Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services

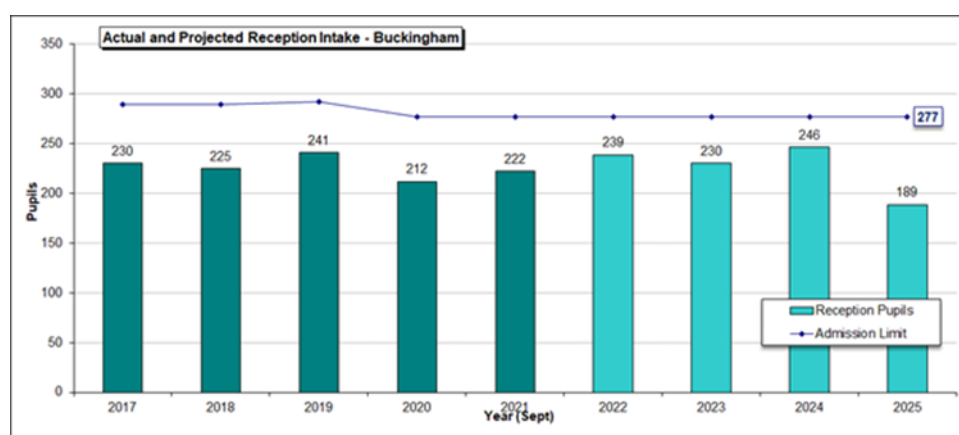
"In view of the rising demand for school places in the Buckingham catchment area, due to housing growth and sixth form places in Winslow not being available, what work is being undertaken to plan for primary and secondary school places in North Buckinghamshire and Buckingham in particular to meet current and future demand?"

RESPONSE from Councillor Cranmer

In response to the question that has been raised in relation to school places in the Buckingham catchment area, I can confirm the following:

Primary Provision in Buckingham

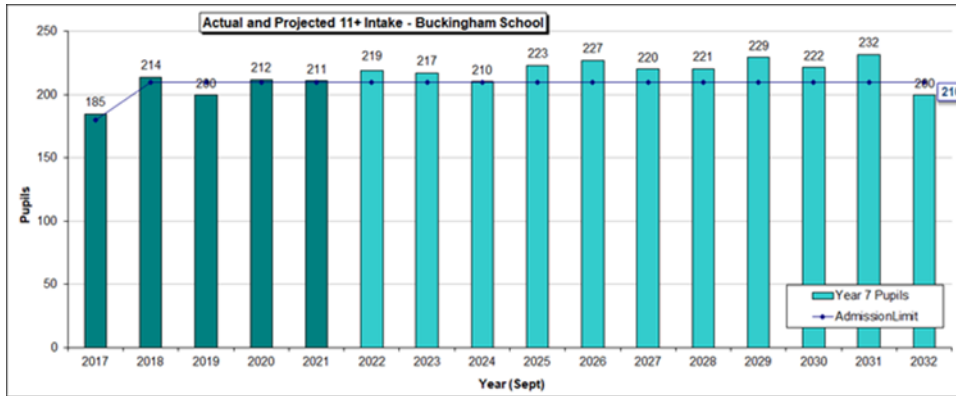
The projections indicate there are currently sufficient school places in the area although there is significant year on year volatility in births. The Council will need to monitor the impact of housing growth in the town and if necessary look to expand Maids Moreton CE School/Buckingham Primary School where feasibility studies have indicated the schools are suitable for expansion.



Secondary Provision in Buckingham

While Buckingham School is currently full in some year groups like most schools it admits a number of children from outside its catchment (i.e. in the 2022 admissions round 18 out-catchment pupils were allocated to the school largely from out county). Under the admissions code of practice, the Local Authority is not able to reserve places at schools for children moving into an area and has a duty to allocate any spare places in response to parental choice. As a result, parents moving into an area after the normal point of entry at Year 7, are at a greater risk of not securing a place at their local catchment school as any spare places may be taken up by children living outside the area.

The projections for Buckingham School suggest greater pressure on places which in the future may result in out catchment children being displaced.



Further, following the closure of its sixth form, Sir Thomas Freemantle School which shares part of Buckingham School’s catchment area admitted an additional two bulge classes in Sept 22 and again Sept 23. The Council is currently in discussion with the school about making this change permanent. Cottesloe School which also shares part of its catchment area with the Buckingham School also admitted an additional class in Sept 22 and is proposing to make this increase permanent. It is expected that these changes will reduce the pressure on places at Buckingham School although a feasibility study at the school has indicated that it may be suitable for expansion should there be a requirement subject to planning and consultation.

Predicting primary and secondary school demand is complex due to a number of factors:

- Fluctuations in population migration particularly due to housing growth;
- Population data less reliable since changes to child benefit eligibility rules;
- The shape of Bucks boundary (i.e. long and narrow bordered on all sides by other authorities) encourages significant cross border movement;
- Schools serve a rural population which requires extensive catchment areas;
- Parental choice (e.g. grammar school, independent sector, out-county pupils).

The Council will continue to monitor changes in capacity/trends in the future and if necessary have further discussions with the schools in the area to expand them on a permanent basis.

6 Forward Plan (28 Day Notice)

The Leader introduced the Forward Plan and commended it to all Members of the Council and the public, as a document that gave forewarning of what reports would be discussing at forthcoming meetings.

RESOLVED – That the Cabinet Forward Plan be noted.

7 Buckinghamshire Drugs and Alcohol strategy 2023-28

A new cross-Government 10-year national drugs strategy ‘From harm to hope’ had been published in April 2022, led by the Home Office. Guidance for local delivery had been published in June 2022. This set out a requirement for local areas to create a multi-agency Combating Drugs Partnership (CDP), undertake a needs assessment

and produce a local drugs strategy delivery plan by the end of December 2022.

The Buckinghamshire Combatting Drugs Partnership had been established on a Buckinghamshire Council footprint, the Senior Responsible Owner was the Director of Public Health, and its remit included alcohol as well as drugs. It had convened its first meeting in October 2022, terms of reference had been agreed and a needs assessment had been produced that was in the process of being published on the Council's website.

The previous Buckinghamshire Drugs and Alcohol Strategy had expired during the pandemic. A new strategy was therefore required, but the timeline was expedited in response to the above national guidance. Partners had worked together to produce the priorities and actions that would be taken locally to meet the national aims.

The Deputy Cabinet Member – Public Health introduced the report and made the following points:-

- This misuse of alcohol, and the use of drugs, could have devastating consequences for the person and for those around them. These issues also carried a significant financial cost to society – it was estimated that drug misuse cost £19 billion per year, and the harms from alcohol cost £21 billion. Drugs and alcohol dependence often co-exist with other health and social inequalities, like poor mental health and homelessness. Working collectively to address each individual's range of needs was critical to achieving successful recovery.
- The Strategy was owned and overseen by the Buckinghamshire Combating Drugs Partnership, a strategic group of key agencies all involved with delivering this vision and resulting actions; Buckinghamshire Council, BOB Integrated Care Board, Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust, Here4YOUTH, Jobcentre Plus, One Recovery Bucks, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, Police and Crime Commissioner's Office, Probation Delivery Unit, Thames Valley Police, Violence Reduction Unit.
- Two multi agency workshops took place in July and September 2022 led by the Cabinet and Deputy Cabinet Members for Health and Wellbeing. The discussions within the workshops generated four priority areas; Prevention, Addressing risk factors and additional support needs, Reducing harms and promoting safety and Working Together.
- Accompanying each priority was a description plus 'what we know' (key statistics), 'what we want' (aims and metrics), and 'what we will do' (actions) to achieve success. The actions underpinning each priority have been identified through discussions with stakeholders. Each action had a lead agency accountable for delivery, and a lead officer named and timeframe stated in the accompanying action plan.
- The majority (86%) of adults in Buckinghamshire drink alcohol. Most drinkers report drinking within recommended limits, but over 100,000 Buckinghamshire adults drink at levels that may harm their physical and mental health (14 units per week). Young people consuming drugs or alcohol

may experience physical and mental health problems, as well as doing less well at school. Personal relationships between families and friends could break down. The impact on a person's work life could range from lost productivity to unemployment, homelessness, and isolation.

- There have been a number of successes including the provision of Naloxone which could reverse life-threatening breathing difficulties in an opiate overdose. In Buckinghamshire 76% of those eligible entering drug treatment have access to naloxone, compared to 53% nationally.
- Clarification was given on the data and where it had been collected; school data came from the OxWell School Survey of which 3,000 children and young people in Buckinghamshire participated out of 31,400 from Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Milton Keynes and Merseyside. A survey would run again this year in Buckinghamshire to ensure there was some benchmarking data. The metrics have been broken down to key focus areas and further metrics would be sought from the National Outcomes Framework once it had been published. The Strategy would be accompanied by a multi-agency Communications Strategy. The Strategy would also focus across the ten Opportunity Bucks areas.

The Leader asked for the following action points to be taken forward with regard to the Strategy:-

- Within the metrics it was important for Cabinet Members to know by the end of Year 1 whether the Strategy was on the right track and therefore an update on these metrics should be supplied then to understand the trajectory run and if any remedial action needed to be taken.
- Some actions and targets could be more detailed so that the Strategy could be held to account in terms of its success rate. An example was given of an action under reducing harms for 'enhancing the identification of people who are responsible for a disproportionate amount of neighbourhood crime'.
- In addition, some metrics were standstill metrics in terms of not making anything worse than they were today and whether these metrics could be used to improve the current situation. The Deputy Cabinet Member reported that he had some concern about changing the standstill metrics as it could mean creating unrealistic targets with the current direction of travel. The Director of Public Health reported that nationally the situation was likely to get worse before it got better because of the impact of the pandemic and the increase in alcohol consumption (alcohol related deaths had risen by a quarter between 2019 and 2021 nationally). Figures were awaited for last year in Buckinghamshire, but before the pandemic Buckinghamshire had higher alcohol consumption than the national average. Some of the metrics had been developed by partners and some were a national target. The metrics would be monitored through the Combatting Drugs Partnership and would be subject to other partners reporting lines. The Leader commented that it would be helpful to obtain increased granularity of data.

- Local Members should be engaged in the development of Strategies before they were agreed at Cabinet so that they were able to influence the development of the Strategy. As this was a partnership document this was more difficult but it would be helpful to obtain local members views so that they could be taken into account before the Strategy was revisited. The Director of Public Health reported that they would be talking to Members about the Strategy through Community Boards and the Strategy could include new initiatives in the future.
- With regard to Nitrous Oxide the UK's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs recommended that it not be controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act. However, last month the Government announced its intention to control nitrous oxide as a Class C drug. The Strategy would need to respond to emerging guidance on nitrous oxide whilst also acknowledging that this was a concern for local residents with regard to littering and also to the health and wellbeing of residents who were misusing this. The Deputy Cabinet Member reported that further information would be available nationally in the next five or six months.
- The Director of Public Health reported that it was a developing Strategy which had to be developed quickly to meet the Government deadline. In terms of the Communication Strategy the Leader commented it would be helpful to get more data so that messaging can be targeted to particular communities and what their motivators were in terms of alcohol and drug use.

Other comments were made by Cabinet Members as follows:

- Clarification was given that national guidance referred to combatting drugs, but locally alcohol had been added in. Concern was expressed on whether this spread resources too thinly and whether alcohol and drug use affected two different demographics. The Director of Public Health reported that nationally it was a drugs strategy but they very quickly added guidance that alcohol could be included as they were often co-used and difficult to separate. The same support services were used. The majority of Combating Drugs Partnerships nationally had chosen to include alcohol. Insight work could be used to further identify cohorts of residents to tailor the Strategy's actions.
- A question was asked about engagement with higher education particularly with the alarming statistics relating to young people. The Director of Public Health reported that they were working on getting more detailed data to help inform the ongoing Strategy.
- The statistic that one in five young people of school age had been intoxicated in the last week was also alarming. A Cabinet Member referred to the metrics and the need to ensure that this serious issue was addressed. The Director of Public Health referred to a previous DPH report on alcohol including the pervasive nature of alcohol in society. Work was being

undertaken with schools on the dangers of alcohol but it was a wider societal issue affecting all demographics. The data would be broken down on demographics and another school survey was being commissioned which would be voluntary but they would be working with children and adult services to increase uptake. Work would also be undertaken in primary and secondary care about the importance of referrals.

- A Member asked whether the metrics were set down in a Government Strategy or whether there was flexibility. In addition whether specific action plans could be set up when targets were not reached. The Director of Public Health reported that there were some national metrics but they had not been published yet. There was some discretion over local targets and some partner targets. There needed to be more referrals into alcohol services and there needed to be an action plan around that. Partners would have their own action plans which might be difficult to influence.
- A Member queried whether this would go to the Voluntary and Community Sector Board and also welcomed the fact that it would be discussed at Community Boards. The Deputy Cabinet Member reported that it would be focussed on the larger Community Boards initially such as High Wycombe and Aylesbury which would disseminate this information to local partners. The Leader emphasised that the granularity of the data was key in terms of knowing how to focus messaging. A Needs Assessment would be published in May which would provide more information.
- The report referred to a number of portfolios in terms of issues such as licensing of alcohol, trading standards and also rough sleeping. Reference was also made to children following the same behavioural patterns as their parents in terms of alcohol and drug misuse and what can be done to prevent this. The Consultant in Public Health reported that under One Recovery Bucks there was a family service within that which helped with this issue which included one to one and family sessions. Training with teachers would help with recognising signs of concern. The Cabinet Member reported that Youth Concern did a lot of work in this area. There would also be a new service for lower level alcohol consumption which might appeal to drinkers from a wider section of society.

Cabinet Members agreed the resolution subject to four conditions as below:-

1. Local Members to be given the opportunity to input to the strategy.
2. As the granularity of data improves the Council needed to be clearer about which areas needed to be addressed particularly geographical areas impacted and the demographics of the residents who were at risk. The demographics should drive the Strategy.
3. A report should be submitted to Cabinet in a year's time with a review on the achievements of the Strategy with annual metrics which also needed to be more specific and measurable.
4. Nitrous Oxide – as further information became available nationally, reference

needed to be made in the Strategy's Action Plan about how to address use of nitrous oxide.

RESOLVED –

That the Drugs and Alcohol Strategy 2023-28 be NOTED and ENDORSED.

8 Budget Adjustments to the Approved Capital Programme

Cabinet received a report and was informed that changes to budgets within the Council's Capital Programme, where they reprofile or realign the programme agreed at Council, require a Key Decision under the Council's Constitution. The Reprofiles, Releases and Reallocations in this report have been recommended via the Member-Led Capital Boards - Property Board, Highways Board, HIF Board, or Corporate Capital Investment Board.

The Capital Boards had recommended reductions to the Capital Programme of £13.9m from £163.6m at Quarter 2 to £149.7m. This had been factored into the Quarter 3 Capital budget monitoring report. These changes related to:

- Re-profiled into future years - £19.6m, across a range of projects.
- Re-profiling funding brought forward - £2.6m, relating to Swan Car Park major works, SEALR phase 2 and the Princes Risborough Relief Road.
- Released funding - £1.4m, to address inflationary pressures in the Capital Programme the Corporate Capital Investment Board had recommended to release the budgets for projects relating to Housing Renovation grants, some specific buildings maintenance, property investment projects in Wycombe, a contribution to the CCG for adaptations to GP surgeries and for Respite Care.
- Reallocation's - £2.0m, across a range of projects.
- Technical Additions of Ringfenced Funding - £2.5m, relating to Leisure and Open Spaces funded schemes, new Road Safety projects (funded by HS2) and for the Wendover Community Library Hub.

The technical additions in the report were for new ringfenced funding (specific grants, and specific s.106), and the s.151 officer had delegated authority to make additions to the Capital Programme for these.

RESOLVED –

That the recommended amendments to the approved Capital Programme be APPROVED.

9 Date of next meeting

Tuesday 9 May 2023 at 10am.

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Buckinghamshire Council Cabinet/Leader forward plan

The local authorities (executive arrangements) (meetings and access to information) (England) regulations 2012

This is a notice of an intention to make a key decision on behalf of Buckinghamshire Council (regulation 9) and an intention to meet in private to consider those items marked as 'private reports' (regulation 5).

A further notice (the 'agenda') will be published no less than five working days before the date of the decision meeting and will be available via the Buckinghamshire Council website ([Cabinet agendas](#) / [Leader decisions](#)).

All reports will be open unless specified otherwise.

Item and description	Wards affected	Councillor(s) / contact officer	Private report? (relevant para)	Date notified
Cabinet 9 May 2023				
6 Monthly Adult Social Care update To provide Cabinet with an update on the national and local issues relating to adult social care in Buckinghamshire.		Councillor Angela Macpherson Craig Mcardle		16/1/23

Item and description	Wards affected	Councillor(s) / contact officer	Private report? (relevant para)	Date notified
<p>6 month Children's Services update To provide Cabinet with an update on the national and local issues relating to the Children's Services Directorate.</p>		<p>Councillor Anita Cranmer John Macilwraith</p>		21/3/23
<p>Annual report of the Buckinghamshire Shareholder Committee For Cabinet to note the work undertaken by the Committee in 2022-23.</p>		<p>Councillor John Chilver Richard Ambrose</p>		26/1/23
<p>Buckinghamshire's Rural Business Grants Fund delivery and governance approach To agree the Council's approach in allocating the Rural England Prosperity Fund and the appropriate programme parameters</p>		<p>Councillor Martin Tett Lisa Michelson</p>		6/4/23
<p>Household Support Fund The report will provide details on the Government Household Support Fund 4 allocation for Buckinghamshire and detail options for the usage of this fund to support financially vulnerable residents of Buckinghamshire during the Fund period.</p>		<p>Councillor Steve Bowles Matthew Everitt</p>		7/3/23

Item and description	Wards affected	Councillor(s) / contact officer	Private report? (relevant para)	Date notified
<p>Safer Buckinghamshire Plan 2023-26 To ratify the Safer Buckinghamshire Plan for 2023-26.</p> <p>Buckinghamshire Council is a statutory member of the Safer Buckinghamshire Board which is the statutory Community Safety Partnership for Buckinghamshire.</p> <p>A key responsibility of the Safer Buckinghamshire Board is to maintain the Community Safety Plan for Buckinghamshire, based upon the strategic assessment of crime and community safety in the county, public engagement and other insight into crime and the causes of crime in Buckinghamshire.</p>		<p>Councillor Steve Bowles</p> <p>Dr Jane O'Grady</p>		7/10/22
Cabinet 13 June 2023				
<p>Budget Monitoring - Outturn 2022-23 For information</p>		<p>Councillor John Chilver</p> <p>Dave Skinner</p>		6/4/23
<p>Building Control Fee Increase Report to increase the Building Control fees</p>		<p>Councillor Peter Strachan</p> <p>Androulla Andreou</p>		26/1/23
<p>Q4 Performance Report 2022-23 For information</p>		<p>Councillor John Chilver</p> <p>Matthew Everitt</p>		6/4/23

Item and description	Wards affected	Councillor(s) / contact officer	Private report? (relevant para)	Date notified
<p>Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan - Mixed Use Housing Allocation D-AGT1 - Supplementary Planning Document</p> <p>This Supplementary Planning Document provides guidance for the development of the D-AGT1 allocation within the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan.</p>	Aston Clinton & Bierton; Wendover, Halton & Stoke Mandeville	Councillor Peter Strachan Simon Meecham		15/2/23
Cabinet 11 July 2023				
<p>Corporate Performance Indicators 2023-24</p> <p>This report will set out the proposed corporate performance indicators for 2023-24, highlighting the suggested targets and any changes for the year ahead.</p>		Councillor John Chilver Matthew Everitt		19/4/23
<p>Dementia Support Services - Rapid Review report</p> <p>For Cabinet to discuss the recommendations within the Health & Adult Social Care Select Committee's rapid review into the support for people living with dementia and their carers in Buckinghamshire</p>		Councillor Carol Heap Liz Wheaton		27/4/23
<p>Q1 Budget Monitoring Report 2023-24</p> <p>Quarterly report</p>		Councillor John Chilver Dave Skinner		19/4/23
<p>Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2023/24</p> <p>The Youth Justice Strategic Plan lays out the plans of the Buckinghamshire Youth Offending Service (YOS), explains our achievements during the last twelve months and our priorities for the coming year.</p>		Councillor Anita Cranmer John Macilwraith		6/4/23

Item and description	Wards affected	Councillor(s) / contact officer	Private report? (relevant para)	Date notified
Cabinet 12 September 2023				
<p>Buckinghamshire Healthy Ageing Strategy 2023-28 To approve the Council's Healthy Ageing Strategy 2023-2028. The Healthy Ageing Strategy sets out how the Council and its partners will work to make Buckinghamshire more age friendly, which is a priority in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This will support Buckinghamshire residents to live healthy, fulfilling, and independent lives for as long as possible, to 'age well'.</p>		<p>Councillor Angela Macpherson</p> <p>Dr Jane O'Grady</p>		23/12/22
<p>Indoor Leisure Facilities Strategy Report To provide an assessment of indoor sports and leisure facilities, considering future opportunities and demand around this provision.</p>		<p>Councillor Clive Harriss</p> <p>Sophie Payne</p>		26/1/23
April 2023 Leader Decisions				
<p>CYP Integrated Therapies (CYPITS) Recommissioning Recommission of the Buckinghamshire Children and Young People's Integrated Therapies service</p>		<p>Councillor Anita Cranmer</p> <p>Marie-Claire Mickiewicz</p>	Part exempt (para 3)	30/6/22

Item and description	Wards affected	Councillor(s) / contact officer	Private report? (relevant para)	Date notified
<p>Property acquisition in Aylesbury Property acquisition to support the Councils response to Residential Temporary Accommodation needs in Aylesbury.</p>	<p>Aylesbury East; Aylesbury North; Aylesbury North West; Aylesbury South East; Aylesbury South West; Aylesbury West</p>	<p>Councillor John Chilver Lisa Michelson, John Reed</p>	<p>Part exempt <i>(para 3)</i></p>	<p>21/3/23</p>
May 2023 Leader Decisions				
<p>Adult Social Care Travel Assistance Policy To agree the travel assistance policy for Adult Social Care</p>		<p>Councillor Angela Macpherson Tracey Ironmonger</p>		<p>22/9/22</p>
<p>All-age Autism Strategy To agree the All-age Autism strategy for Buckinghamshire</p>		<p>Councillor Angela Macpherson Simon Brauner-Cave</p>		<p>11/5/22</p>
<p>Aylesbury Grid Reinforcement - Update An update on the way forward for the Aylesbury Grid Reinforcement Project.</p>		<p>Councillor Martin Tett David Johnson</p>	<p>Part exempt <i>(para 3)</i></p>	<p>23/2/23</p>

Item and description	Wards affected	Councillor(s) / contact officer	Private report? (relevant para)	Date notified
<p>Bierton Traffic Calming Public consultation is to be carried out on a traffic calming scheme along the A418 through Bierton. The proposals include; narrowings, chicanes, build-outs, and pedestrian, cycle, and bus stop improvements. Public consultation and the delivery of a traffic calming scheme was secured as a s106 obligation of the nearby Kingsbrook development.</p>	Aston Clinton & Bierton	Councillor Steve Broadbent Christine Urry		25/5/22
<p>Chilterns Beechwoods Mitigation Strategy Report to consider the recreational disturbance mitigation strategy for Ashridge Commons and Woods.</p>	Amersham & Chesham Bois; Aylesbury South East; Chesham; Chess Valley; Chiltern Ridges; Great Missenden; Ivinghoe; Little Chalfont & Amersham Common; Penn Wood & Old Amersham	Councillor Peter Strachan Simon Meecham		18/10/22
<p>CYP Integrated Therapies Strategy Sign off of CYP Integrated Therapies Strategy</p>		Councillor Anita Cranmer Marie-Claire Mickiewicz	Part exempt (<i>para 3</i>)	30/6/22

Item and description	Wards affected	Councillor(s) / contact officer	Private report? (relevant para)	Date notified
<p>E-Bike Hire Following the conclusion of the ADEPT funded e-Bike trial at the Waddesdon Greenway, the Council is proposing a wider e-bike hire scheme to run in parallel with the e-scooter hire trial areas in Aylesbury and High Wycombe.</p>	<p>Abbey; Aston Clinton & Bierton; Aylesbury East; Aylesbury North; Aylesbury North West; Aylesbury South East; Aylesbury South West; Aylesbury West; Booker, Cressex & Castlefield; Downley; Ryemead & Micklefield; Stone & Waddesdon; Terriers & Amersham Hill; Totteridge & Bowerdean; Wendover, Halton & Stoke Mandeville; West Wycombe</p>	<p>Councillor Steve Broadbent Steve Bambrick</p>	<p>Part exempt (<i>para 3</i>)</p>	<p>7/3/23</p>

Item and description	Wards affected	Councillor(s) / contact officer	Private report? (relevant para)	Date notified
<p>Fleet Trading Account Budget To confirm details of the 2023/24 Fleet Trading Account budget, which is a zero balanced budget and therefore can't be included in the full council decision taken in February for other revenue budgets.</p>		<p>Councillor Steve Broadbent Lindsey Vallis</p>		7/3/23
<p>Formal appointment of Buckinghamshire Council as Responsible Body to lead preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategy Agreement of formal appointment of Buckinghamshire Council as Responsible Body to lead preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategy as required by Environment Act 2021</p>		<p>Councillor Gareth Williams David Sutherland</p>		23/2/23
<p>Freehold Acquisition of the High Wycombe Social Club Building To exercise an Option to Purchase the freehold of the High Wycombe Social Club building, on Queen Victoria Road, High Wycombe</p>	Abbey	<p>Councillor John Chilver Charles Brocklehurst</p>	Part exempt (para 3)	19/4/23
<p>Harmonisation of Pest Control Fees The harmonisation of policy and fees regarding which residents are able to access subsidised pest control treatment.</p>		<p>Councillor Mark Winn Jacqui Bromilow</p>		30/8/22
<p>Iver Village Infant School Decision required to approval lowering the age range at Iver Village Infant School</p>	Iver	<p>Councillor Anita Cranmer Paula Campbell-Balcombe</p>		7/3/23

Item and description	Wards affected	Councillor(s) / contact officer	Private report? (relevant para)	Date notified
<p>Leasehold Acquisition - Coombe Lodge, Wendover Leasehold Acquisition to support the Councils response to Residential Temporary Accommodation needs in Buckinghamshire at Coombe Lodge, Nash Lee End, Wendover HP22 6BH</p>	Ridgeway East	Councillor John Chilver John Reed	Part exempt <i>(para 3)</i>	2/2/23
<p>Market Sustainability Plan To agree the Market Sustainability Plan. As part of its adult social care reform programme, the government requires local authorities to submit a Market Sustainability Plan. The Market Sustainability Plan requires councils to identify the key risks to the adult social care market and plans to address those risks, including how the council will move towards a fair cost of care over the next 3 years.</p>		Councillor Angela Macpherson Tracey Ironmonger		26/10/22
<p>Prestwood Infant School Decision required to approval lowering the age range of the school</p>	Great Missenden	Councillor Anita Cranmer Paula Campbell-Balcombe		7/3/23
<p>Property at Cressex Road, High Wycombe Release of Covenant</p>	Booker, Cressex & Castlefield	Councillor John Chilver John Reed	Part exempt <i>(para 3)</i>	2/2/23
<p>Recommissioning of Buckinghamshire Adult Integrated Drug and Alcohol Treatment Service Recommissioning of Buckinghamshire Adult Integrated Drug and Alcohol Treatment Service</p>		Councillor Angela Macpherson Lisa Truett	Part exempt <i>(para 3)</i>	23/2/23

Item and description	Wards affected	Councillor(s) / contact officer	Private report? (relevant para)	Date notified
<p>Registration Service Non-Statutory Fees 2024/25 and 2025/26 To provide a 3 year fee plan so that customers can book ceremonies in advance, and the Council can secure budgeted income. To approve the proposed non-statutory Registrars fees for 24/25 and 25/26, with a year-on-year 3% inflationary uplift applied.</p>		Councillor Mark Winn Karen Collins		21/3/23
<p>The Courtyard, High Wycombe Disposal options for surplus land in High Wycombe.</p>	Abbey	Councillor John Chilver John Reed	Part exempt (<i>para 3</i>)	10/11/22

Item and description	Wards affected	Councillor(s) / contact officer	Private report? (relevant para)	Date notified
<p>Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan - Affordable Housing - Supplementary Planning Document</p> <p>This Supplementary Planning Document provides affordable housing guidance to the Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan Policies H1, H2, H6a, H6c, BE2.</p>	<p>Aston Clinton & Bierton; Aylesbury East; Aylesbury North; Aylesbury North West; Aylesbury South East; Aylesbury South West; Aylesbury West; Bernwood; Buckingham East; Buckingham West; Great Brickhill; Grendon Underwood; Ivinghoe; Stone & Waddesdon; Wendover, Halton & Stoke Mandeville; Wing; Winslow</p>	<p>Councillor Peter Strachan Simon Meecham</p>		<p>15/2/23</p>

Item and description	Wards affected	Councillor(s) / contact officer	Private report? (relevant para)	Date notified
<p>Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan - Design - Supplementary Planning Document</p> <p>This Supplementary Planning Document provides guidance to inform and guide the quality of development within the north and central planning areas.</p>	<p>Aston Clinton & Bierton; Aylesbury East; Aylesbury North; Aylesbury North West; Aylesbury South East; Aylesbury South West; Aylesbury West; Bernwood; Buckingham East; Buckingham West; Great Brickhill; Grendon Underwood; Ivinghoe; Stone & Waddesdon; Wendover, Halton & Stoke Mandeville; Wing; Winslow</p>	<p>Councillor Peter Strachan Simon Meecham</p>		<p>15/2/23</p>
<p>Water Stratford Traffic Calming Scheme</p> <p>Proposals to include dragon's teeth (white road markings), anti-skid surfacing/road marking improvements, and installing signs and gateways on the approaches to the Water Stratford village</p>	<p>Buckingham West</p>	<p>Councillor Steve Broadbent Tayo Akinyosade</p>		<p>19/4/23</p>

Item and description	Wards affected	Councillor(s) / contact officer	Private report? (relevant para)	Date notified
June 2023 Leader Decisions				
Mary Towerton Primary School Decision required on the future of The Mary Towerton School, Studley Green	Ridgeway West; West Wycombe	Councillor Anita Cranmer Paula Campbell-Balcombe		7/3/23
July 2023 Leader Decisions				
Physical Activity Strategy 2024 - 2029 To approve the Councils physical activity strategy for 2024-29. The physical activity strategy sets out how the Council and its partners will improve the levels of physical activity and opportunities for Buckinghamshire residents.		Councillor Angela Macpherson Dr Jane O'Grady		19/4/23
September 2023 Leader Decisions				
School Competitions Recommendation of Preferred Sponsors Recommendation of proposed Academy Sponsors for three new primary schools: Kingsbrook Primary 2 Hampden Fields Primary School South West Milton Keynes Primary School		Councillor Anita Cranmer Paula Campbell-Balcombe		19/4/23

Individual Leader decisions (in consultation with the Cabinet Member) are not discussed at meetings – a report is presented to the Cabinet Member and the Leader will decide whether to sign the decision.

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this forward plan, please get in touch with the contact officer. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team in good time ahead of the decision deadline date. This can be done by telephone 01296 382343 or email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk. You can view decisions to be made and decisions taken on the council's website.

The council's definition of a 'key decision' can be seen in part 1 of the council's [constitution](#).

Each item considered will have a report; appendices will be included (as appropriate). Regulation 9(1g) allows that other documents relevant to the item may be submitted to the decision maker. Subject to prohibition or restriction on their disclosure, this information will be published on the website usually five working days before the date of the meeting. Paper copies may be requested using the contact details below.

*The public can be excluded for an item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt (private) information as defined in part I of schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972. The relevant paragraph numbers and descriptions are as follows:

Paragraph 1 - Information relating to any individual

Paragraph 2 - Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual

Paragraph 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

Paragraph 4 - Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority

Paragraph 5 - Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings

Paragraph 6 - Information which reveals that the authority proposes:

(a) to give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or

(b) to make an order or direction under any enactment

Paragraph 7 - Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

Part II of schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972 requires that information falling into paragraphs 1 - 7 above is exempt information if and so long, as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. Nothing in the regulations authorises or requires a local authority to disclose to the public or make available for public inspection any document or part of a document if, in the opinion of the proper officer, that document or part of a document contains or may contain confidential information. Should you wish to make any representations in relation to any of the items being considered in private, you can do so – in writing – using the contact details below.

Democratic services, Buckinghamshire Council, The Gateway, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP19 8FF 01296 382343
democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk



Report to Cabinet

Date:	Tuesday 9 May 2023
Title:	Children's Services Update
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services
Author and/or contact officer:	John Macilwraith, Corporate Director Children's Services
Ward (s) affected:	All
Recommendations:	For Cabinet to note the national and local developments across the Children's Services Directorate

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Since the last update to Cabinet in October 2022, the Service has received two regulatory visits. The first was a Focused Visit from Ofsted that looked at our services and support offered to care leavers, and the second was an inspection of Youth Offending Services by HM Inspectorate of Probation. Both visits went well and confirmed that the Service continues on its improvement journey and whilst there is more to do, the Service has an accurate self-assessment and understanding of what needs to be done. In addition, two of our Children's Homes are now judged to be 'Outstanding' by Ofsted and our new 4 bedded Parent and Baby residential assessment resource has just opened, following registration by Ofsted.
- 1.2 IMPOWER have now completed their analysis of the profile of demand and developed a number of recommendations outlining how the Service could improve its financial sustainability by delivering better outcomes at less cost. The IMPOWER work also concluded that the service and its partners can work differently together to meet the needs of children and young people. The findings from this analysis has helped the Service refine our self-assessment from which a whole system Children's Services Transformation Programme has been developed. This change programme will redefine the support we provide to children and families and redevelop our model to enable interventions that

are more responsive to children's needs. Our ambition is to create more opportunities for professionals, including partner agencies, to integrate services around the needs of communities and move from a process driven case management model with multiple hand off points to a relationship based, solution focused system.

- 1.3 On the horizon there are a number of significant national policy changes and the proposed changes to the way in which the Service operates are in line with national policy direction and are based on ensuring that children receive a consistent, purposeful and child centred approach wherever they are on their journey of need from early help through to being in care.

2. National Context

- 2.1 The following section gives an overview of the key national policy developments relating to Children's Services.

Children's Social Care Review

- 2.2 On 2 February 2023, the Department for Education issued its response to the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#), [the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's inquiry](#) into the murders of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and the [Competition and Markets Authority's study](#) of the children's social care market, in three consultation documents:
 - i. An overarching strategy, [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#).
 - ii. [A report proposing reforms to agency social work](#).
 - iii. [A proposed national framework](#), setting standards and outcomes for children's services
- 2.3 The Government's implementation and strategy consultation, 'Stable Homes; Built on Love', is a direct response to the Care Review, the National Child Protection Review and the Competition and Markets Authority review, all of which reported in 2022. The government's implementation and strategy consultation document is seen as phase one of implementing a whole system change to how children's social care will operate over the coming two to five years. Realising a new vision for children's social care requires long-term reform, underpinned by further investment and changes to legislation. Phase one will be between now and the spending review in two years' time and will seek to make immediate improvements while laying the foundations for whole system reform. Activity in phase two will be about embedding reform everywhere. This will require further investment, legislation (subject to

parliamentary time) and a wider programme of support to embed the reset of the whole system envisaged within the implementation plan.

- 2.4 **Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation** sets out six pillars for reform underpinned by £200m of new investment alongside related consultations on a new national framework for children’s social care and the child and family social worker workforce. The 6 pillars and summary actions are as follows:

Pillar 1: Family help provides the right support at the right time so that families stay together

Pillar 2: A decisive multi-agency child protection system

Pillar 3: Unlocking the potential of family networks

Pillar 4: Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care

Pillar 5: A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one

Pillar 6: A system that continuously learns and improves and makes better use of evidence and data

- 2.5 **Funding:** £200m in funding over two years. The care review called for £2.6bn over five years.

- 2.6 **Social work training and development:** An early career framework will be established, replacing the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment, as recommended by the review. Practitioners will be supported to develop, and be assessed against, the “skills and knowledge needed to support and protect vulnerable children”, and, in years three to five, to develop into “expert practitioners”. This will be tested by a group of early adopter councils with a view to full implementation in 2026.

- 2.7 **Social work recruitment:** The DfE will “explore ways to support the recruitment of up to 500 additional child and family social worker apprentices” to help tackle staff shortages, though it has not provided details on how this will happen.

- 2.8 **Agency social work:** The DfE has proposed bringing in national rules to reduce the cost and use of agency social workers in children’s services. This would include capping the rates local authorities pay so that agency staff receive the equivalent of permanent workers doing the same role, once benefits have been taken into account.

- 2.9 **Social worker pay:** The DfE has rejected the care review recommendation for national pay scales for social workers on the grounds that this risked

destabilising the local government pay system for insufficient benefit. But it has said that it wants greater transparency in what councils pay social workers in children’s services and wants to see existing inequalities in pay for particular roles reduced.

- 2.10 **Social worker registration:** The DfE has also rejected a care review proposal for all registered social workers, including managers and academics, to spend 100 hours in direct work each year to remain close to practice. It said “it did not want to risk children facing more changes of practitioner or managers being drawn away from supervision”.
- 2.11 **Family help:** £45m will be allocated for up to 12 ‘families first for children pathfinder’ areas to trial the care review proposal to introduce multidisciplinary family help services, to provide “non-judgmental”, joined-up support for families affected by issues such as domestic abuse or poor mental health. This will bring together existing targeted early help and child in need services. As part of this, the DfE will consult on removing the requirement for social workers to lead child in need cases.
- 2.12 **Child protection:** Child protection lead practitioners, who will have received “advanced specialist training”, will be appointed to lead safeguarding cases in the pathfinder areas, as called for by the care review. As recommended by the care review, they will co-work such cases with family help teams. In addition, the pathfinders will test the national panel’s proposal to set up multi-agency teams consisting of social workers, police officers and health professionals to carry out child protection work. The DfE will also consult on new multi-agency child protection standards as part of a review of Working Together to Safeguard Children in 2023.
- 2.13 **Independent reviewing officers and child protection conference chairs:** The DfE has rejected the care review’s proposal to abolish the independent reviewing officer role. Instead, it has proposed to review and strengthen it. The strategy did not reference the care review’s separate proposal to abolish the child protection conference chair role.
- 2.14 **Involving family networks:** The 12 pathfinders will test using family group decision-making, such as family group conferences, at an early stage to support parents minimise risks to children. In addition, seven areas will test providing family support network packages providing resources to help families care for children and avoid them going into care.
- 2.15 **Kinship care:** A kinship care strategy will be published in 2023 while £9m will be spent on improving training and support for kinship carers. The government will also explore the case for the care review’s recommendations of a financial

allowance and the extension of legal aid for those who become special guardians or responsible for children through child arrangements orders.

- 2.16 **Foster care:** £27m will be spent on a carer recruitment and retention programme over the next two years focused on shortage areas, such as sibling groups, teenagers, unaccompanied children, parent and child placements and children who have suffered complex trauma. The care review called for the recruitment of 9,000 carers over three years. In addition, foster carers will receive an above-inflation rise in minimum allowances to deal with rising costs.
- 2.17 **Commissioning care placements:** The DfE has backed the care review's proposal to transfer responsibility for the commissioning of care placements from individual councils to regional groupings of authorities, regional care co-operatives (RCCs), which will initially be tested in two pathfinder areas before being rolled out. It has also accepted the Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) Study proposal to commission a national body to provide help for authorities/RCCs in forecasting demand and procurement. It said these measures would address the insufficiency of placements for children in care, improve outcomes and tackle the excess profit-making identified by the CMA among the largest providers.
- 2.18 **Financial oversight of providers:** A financial oversight regime will be introduced for the largest children's home providers and independent fostering agencies (IFAs), similar to that for adult social care, to reduce the risks of providers exiting the market suddenly.
- 2.19 **Relationships for children in care and care leavers:** £30m will be spent on family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes for looked-after children and care leavers, to help them find and maintain relationships, as the care review recommended.
- 2.20 **Support for care leavers:** The suggested grant made available to children leaving care will increase from £2,000 to £3,000, while the bursary for those undertaking apprenticeships will rise from £1,000 to £3,000, broadly in line with care review recommendations.
- 2.21 **Care experience:** The DfE has rejected the care review's call for care experience to become a protected characteristic under equality law, which would have required public bodies to tackle inequalities facing those with care experience and prohibit businesses and employers from discriminating against them. The department said it had heard significant concerns that self-declaration of care experience would increase stigma and that other measures in the strategy – including extending corporate parenting requirements to bodies other than local authorities – would have more impact.

- 2.22 **National standards and outcomes:** The DfE will consult on a children’s social care national framework, as proposed by the review, setting expected outcomes for children and families that should be achieved by all local authorities. The proposed outcomes would be for children and families to stay together and get the support they need, for children to be supported by their family network and to be safe in and out of home and for children in care and care leavers to have stable, loving homes. These will be underpinned by two “enablers”: that the workforce is equipped and effective and leaders drive conditions for effective practice. Ofsted inspections will be aligned to the national framework.
- 2.23 There is much to welcome in the Government’s children’s social care reform strategy, and we broadly support the 6 pillars and associated activities. A focus on earlier help, support that builds on the strengths within a child’s wider family network, and greater ambition for our children in care and care leavers are all areas where we can make an enormous difference. We are also pleased to see the consultation on children’s social work agencies. While there is a place for agency social work, too often we see a high churn of agency workers leading to poorer outcomes for children. That being said, the new strategy is limited in scope and appears to commit too little investment to implement a wholesale overhaul of the sector (as suggested in the MacAlister Review). The reforms also appear unlikely to reduce sustained current levels of demand for children’s home placements or properly address the severe undersupply of these placements, particularly in the short term. In addition, many of the planned reforms will also be slow to implement, beginning with long consultation processes and pilot schemes which will not help address the immediate pressures faced within the system in relation to demand, complexity, workforce and cost.
- 2.24 The strategy commits £200 million in additional funding to support children’s social care. Any additional investment is of course welcome and will be vital to implement reforms. However, LGA analysis prior to high levels of inflation indicates an existing shortfall of £1.6 billion per year simply to maintain current service levels. The Care Review recommended an additional investment of at least £2.6 billion over four years, prior to the impact of inflation, to improve the system to better meet children’s needs. And despite increasing their budgets by £708 million in 2020/21, councils still overspent their budgets by £800 million that year, indicating the scale of pressure on the system, across the country.
- 2.25 Although the strategy seemingly accepts the recommendations of the CMA’s market study, it is not particularly bold in its attempts to address the demand source for children’s services through well-funded early intervention schemes,

nor does it outline plans to increase supply of much-needed children's home placements. The new strategy rejects the policy direction taken in Wales and Scotland of removing profit from children's home provision, as well as the suggestion made in the MacAlister Review of a windfall tax on large providers. The establishment of a financial oversight regime (which is likely to be similar to that which exists in adult social care as part of CQC regulation) is aimed at ensuring that financial failure of providers does not negatively impact on the lives of children, and as in the case of the CQC, is not likely to represent a threat to profit-making by private providers. The CMA itself noted in its market study that it is cheaper for local authorities to commission children's home placements from the independent sector than to develop their own. Although a large part of the document is devoted to the aim of improving early intervention services for children, only £45m in funding has been committed for this (for an initial 12 pilot areas), with very little being allocated elsewhere. This means that children living in the vast majority of the country will not benefit from the additional funding that is desperately needed and the level of investment is unlikely to significantly decrease the number of children becoming looked after and requiring residential home placements. This is of concern for the service, given the significant increase in the cost of external placements.

- 2.26 One key commitment from the strategy that may impact the commissioning of placements is the establishment of Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs). These regional bodies aim to help commissioners of placements gain oversight and control of their local market and bring down placement costs by pooling resources and sharing information to better predict need and reduce the number of spot purchased placements. Implementation of RCCs is likely to be slow, with the initial pilot scheme set to cover two areas whilst a parallel consultation with stakeholders is held to define the scope and role of these bodies. The Local Government Association has also expressed concern that RCCs may represent another layer of bureaucracy and undermine localised, personalised interactions with looked after children. Wider regional commissioning groups may also clash with the government's goal of reducing placements that are at a long distance from the child's home. RCCs are unlikely to gain control of the market unless the root causes of demand for looked after children's residential placements, such as deprivation and family breakdown, are addressed and properly funded solutions are implemented. Recent years have seen a fall in government funding of early intervention and family support, whilst expenditure on statutory care services for looked after children has increased significantly. The root cause of the prevalence of long-distance placements is an undersupply of home capacity across local authorities in the region, and although regional resource pooling and information sharing may go

some way to reducing the number of out of area placements, it seems unlikely that it will be capable of fully addressing the underlying trends of sustained demand paired and a lack of local provision.

- 2.27 We would have liked to see more focus on some of those issues that lead to more children and families needing support from children's social care, including financial deprivation and access to children's mental health support. We agree with the assertion of the Care Review that without addressing issues such as these that are outside the remit of children's social care, "reforms to children's social care risk treating the symptoms and not the cause".
- 2.28 Overall, while it is positive there is now have a clear direction of travel following last year's reviews, the strategy points to a range of consultations over the coming year and a period of pathfinder and pilot activity. This is important for medium to long-term change; however, most of the changes signalled in this strategy will not deliver results quickly. Inflation and pressures on council budgets will only compound the difficulties facing services, while the impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis is increasing children's need for support every day.

Schools White Paper

- 2.29 As reported in the last Children's Services Update presented to Cabinet in October 2022, the Government published the [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) at the end of March 2022. This White Paper set out proposed reforms to the education system focused on providing an excellent teacher for every child, delivering high standards of curriculum, behaviour and attendance, targeted support for every child that needs it and a stronger and fairer school system. Specifically, the White Paper also set out plans for all state schools in England to be in or moving towards being in multi-academy trusts by 2030 and was followed by a Schools Bill that aimed to legislate for a new system for overseeing and regulating academy trusts.
- 2.30 The Education Secretary has since informed MPs that the Schools Bill "will not progress" in the third session of Parliament, However, ministers "remain committed" to the objectives of the Schools Bill, and "parts of the government's plan that did not need legislation changes were going to be implemented".
- 2.31 The Service will be watching carefully as further detail emerges on which parts of the plan will be progressed in the future; however, we do feel there is a missed opportunity to integrate family support and service arrangements for vulnerable children.

SEND Green Paper Response

- 2.32 Following the consultation on [SEND Review: Right support, right place, right time](#) which proposed reforms for a single, national SEND and alternative provision system, the DfE has recently released The SEND and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan which confirms investment in training for thousands of workers so children can get the help they need earlier, alongside thousands of additional specialist school places for those with the greatest needs.
- 2.33 The DfE report that “this plan follows extensive engagement with around 6,000 consultation responses and 175 events, ensuring the new reforms take into account the views of children, young people, parents and carers. The plan sets out a roadmap to transform the SEND and AP system and make it sustainable over the long term.”
- 2.34 Please see below a summary of the key points from the strategy below:
- 2.35 The transformation of the system will be underpinned by new national SEND and AP standards, which aims to give families confidence in what support they should receive and who will provide and pay for it, regardless of where they live.
- 2.36 There will be new guides for professionals to help them provide the right support in line with the national standards but suited to each child's unique experience, setting out for example how to make adjustments to classrooms to help a child remain in mainstream education.
- 2.37 To improve parents' and carers' experiences of accessing support, the plan will cut local bureaucracy by making sure the process for assessing children and young people's needs through Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) is digital-first, quicker and simpler wherever possible.
- 2.38 This package forms part of the government's significant investment into children and young people with SEND and in AP, with investment increasing by more than 50% compared with 2019-20 - to over £10 billion by 2023-24.
- 2.39 There will be expanded training for staff, ranging from up to 5,000 early years special educational needs coordinators to 400 educational psychologists, covering a wide range of educational needs. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education will develop an apprenticeship for teachers of sensory impairments.
- 2.40 The changes are also underpinned by a strengthened local authority inspection regime joint between Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission that became effective from January 2023. The Service is currently seeking clarification on

what this means for the inspection timeline; however, we are beginning to work on our inspection readiness.

- 2.41 The SEND and AP system needs a reset to make it work better for all children and families, to strengthen accountabilities and to reduce the insurmountable costs that threaten the financial sustainability of local authorities. Improving the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND is a joint endeavour and so we welcome the strengthened role and commitments of health partners as outlined and more consistent offers of support for children and young people who need it. However, the plan must go much further and faster in a number of areas. While the response is largely focused on children in school, there is more we must do to re-set the system so it has a sharp focus on outcomes, not just for children today but also for the adults they will become in the future.
- 2.42 The additional funding being made available to support the proposals is welcome, but with high needs budget deficits rising there is still not enough money in the system to meet the level of need being seen. The costs associated with the current SEND system are significant and this this must be addressed.

Spring Budget 2023

- 2.43 One of the greatest opportunities to make a tangible difference to a child's life is when they are very young and the recent Budget announcement provides some welcomed extra funding to support childcare providers.
- 2.44 Significant reforms to the childcare system will result in an extension to those eligible for free childcare. By September 2025, 30 hours of free childcare will be available for every child over the age of 9 months with working parents. This will be introduced in phases, with 15 hours of free childcare for working parents of 2-year-olds coming into effect in April 2024 and 15 hours of free childcare for working parents of 9 months – 3 years old in September 2024.
- 2.45 This extension in free hours will be very supportive for working parents as it will provide a consistent and substantial package of support which covers the entire period following paternity leave to when their child starts school. The extension of the 30 hours free childcare offer will mean more children and families can benefit from this policy, but government must ensure the hourly funding rate for providers significantly increases so it is closer to the actual costs of delivery. The government has committed to increase the funding by £204 million from this September rising to £288 million next year; however, there are concerns within the early year sector that the measures will not go far enough to address financial pressures facing providers.

- 2.46 The childcare sector, both nationally and locally is facing problems with recruitment of staff at all levels. Maintaining qualified staffing levels within the sector continues to be a priority and in order for the expansion of the free hours to be successful, additional financial support will be required to help the early years sector recruit, and retain, the high-quality workforce it desperately needs.
- 2.47 In addition to the free childcare extension, schools and local authorities will be funded to increase the supply of wraparound care, so that parents of school age children can access flexible childcare between 8am and 6pm – tackling the barriers to working caused by limited availability of wraparound care. In Buckinghamshire, our Early Years team actively support schools to work with the private, voluntary and childminder sector to provide sufficient wraparound care that meets the needs of parents, and we have a number of excellent examples of where successful partnership working within the sector has supported working parents outside school hours. This work will continue, and the team will support schools to strengthen its wraparound offer to parents where there is an identified need.
- 2.48 Whilst some of the proposals lack detail at this early stage, more children having access to high quality, affordable childcare is something the Council welcomes and will give children a better start in life as well as playing a crucial role in levelling up outcomes and closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. The service is awaiting further detail and will explore how this initiative will benefit and align to ‘Opportunity Bucks’.

3. Local Context

- 3.1 The following section gives an overview of the key developments in Buckinghamshire Children’s Services.

Children’s Services Transformation

- 3.2 Since 2020, the Service has experienced an unprecedented increase in demand, with referral and re-referral rates significantly higher than statistical neighbours. which will be contributing to demand pressures. The level of demand experienced at the front door (MASH) continues to remain high and this high volume of work has impacted the timeliness of contact and referral activity. Inconsistencies in the quality of referrals and understanding of threshold across the partnership are also contributing to the demand pressures and the further work is ongoing with our partner agencies to address these areas. Causes of volume are being managed, but this surge has also led

to significant increases in the child protection cohort and changes to the profile of children who become looked after with more adolescents entering care. This is having a significant impact on the directorate's budget.

- 3.3 This increase in demand is mirrored across other areas. Nationally, there has been a 32% increase in children subject to Child Protection Plans, in the 10 years to 2019/20. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care projects an increase in the number of children in care from 80,000 (May 2022) to approximately 100,000 in a decade.
- 3.4 In late 2022, IMPOWER was commissioned to support further analysis of the profile of demand and develop recommendations outlining how the Service could progress the transformational journey to increase financial sustainability through delivering better outcomes at less cost. The findings aligned to the Service's self-evaluation and consolidated what was known around key issues which included:
 - i. Opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of support provided by improving collaboration through better sharing of information and increased system-wide multi-disciplinary ways of working.
 - ii. Opportunity to target need variation through locality specific services and community offers.
 - iii. Opportunity to reduce the numbers of children and families supported through statutory services by promoting a focus on "family first".
 - iv. Reflection of the dominant "social care" culture with partners driving an increase in demand in statutory services through a very high number of unsuitable referrals. There was clear evidence to demonstrate that a risk averse culture at the front door is a core driver of demand and that this should be addressed through implementation of 'early help first' thinking during triage of cases to decrease the number of children and families escalating to unnecessary levels.
 - v. The need to rebalance from process and performance to longer term demand management with system-wide support that can reduce avoidable demand by focusing on the most prevalent presenting needs.
 - vi. Services need to be targeted at both the most prevalent needs and towards families most at risk of their needs escalating into requiring a more intensive social care intervention.
- 3.5 On the horizon there are a number of significant national policy changes (as mentioned in section 2) that have enabled the service to consider the way in which both social care and education services are designed and delivered to

the children and young people of Buckinghamshire. The proposed changes to the way in which the Service operates are in line with national policy direction and are based on ensuring that children receive a consistent, purposeful and child centred approach wherever they are on their journey of need from early help through to being in care. The following key principles have already been agreed and will inform the new delivery model and address some of the barriers that exist currently:

- i. The new model will be based on multi-disciplinary locality-based working that is closer to the communities, boosting the contribution of partners.
- ii. We will reduce hand off points and minimise assessments for families and enable the system to respond to changing risks.
- iii. There will be alignment between services and seamless transition at all points of the child's journey.
- iv. We will introduce and embed a clear practice model and methodology that is all about nurturing relationships with children and families.
- v. We will ensure that the most trusted professional and lead professional is working with the child and family.
- vi. A workforce development strategy will be developed to support the continuous professional development of staff.
- vii. A menu of evidenced based interventions will be available.
- viii. We will work to mature and improve the children's system across the county.

3.6 In addition, the current structures with the Service have led to significant issues with recruitment and retention in certain teams, particularly within Help and Protection, where staff have carried caseloads that are higher than we would like, for a significant period. Across these teams, the high caseloads continue to contribute to over-reliance on a high-cost agency workforce and the teams have struggled to achieve the stability necessary to deliver high quality support for children and families. Our social work qualified agency rate across the service is currently 26%; however, is higher in our front line child protection teams. Mitigating activity, including the introduction of the Social Work Academy, has supported the stabilisation of the service and there is clear evidence that for some teams, such as Children with Disabilities, this has been impactful with the team now benefitting from a skilled, predominantly permanent workforce. However, for Assessment and Help and Protection, the benefits have not been fully realised due to high demand for services,

complexity of work and pressured caseloads. That being said, results from our most recent workforce survey data shows that:

- 84% feel motivated to do my best
- 82% happy working at the BC
- 88% positive working relationship
- 88% trusted and enabled to do my job

3.7 Many Local Authorities have already moved to create multi-disciplinary locality-based services as this is considered to be best practice within the field of Children's Services with several good and outstanding Ofsted rated Local Authorities (for example, Hampshire) having already adopted their own version of this model. The move away from process-led referral pathways has been endorsed by the Government who is intending to pilot this new approach with a select number of local authorities in the coming months. Moving to the locality-based model will support the Service's expression of interest in participating in the pilot.

3.8 Without a move to a more streamlined model, which prioritises the development of supportive and enabling relationships between families and professionals, the service will struggle to improve practice further and may not progress beyond the 'requires improvement to be good' Ofsted judgement. In addition, our ability to secure a permanent and stable workforce will remain limited. The move to a locality-based model of delivery also presents the opportunity to rebalance the skills and knowledge of the workforce equitably to ensure children and young people receive the right support from appropriately qualified practitioners that meets their needs.

3.9 The move to a locality-based model will also support the service to address the financial pressures and to deliver services within the financial envelope of medium-term financial plan (MTFP).

3.10 A Children's Transformation Board will be established that will support the implementation of the inter-linked workstreams for the re-design of the delivery model across Children's Services. The Transformation Board will provide the strategic input and oversight to ensure that the changes planned are implemented as set out in the individual plans.

3.11 The Board will make evidenced based decisions whilst ensuring that there is creativity and innovation during the delivery of the programme and the robust tracking of milestones and outcomes. The oversight will include monitoring of the transformation programme and the way we work to ensure that we use our human and financial resources wisely on those things that work best for children and families. The transformation programme will be aligned to

delivering the priorities and efficiencies identified within the medium-term financial plan and report into the Council’s Better Buckinghamshire Board.

Demand levels

3.12 Demand levels across Children’s Services remains higher than pre-pandemic levels; however, despite an increase in contacts during the last 6 months, the number of children and families that are open to children’s social care has reduced slightly compared to the previous 6 months. The number of children supported by our Family Support Service continues to rise and does the number of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan.

	Apr 2022 – Sept 2022	Oct 2022 – Mar 2023
Contacts	12,895	13,686
Referrals	7,363	4,721
Section 47 enquires	1,458	1,393
Children subject to a child in need plan	1,170*	990*
Children subject to a child protection plan	630*	541*
Looked after Children	498*	509*
Children open to the Family Support Service (Council Early Help Team)	831*	1,045*
Children with an Education, Health and Care Plan	5,698*	6,034*

*as at 31 March 2023

Ofsted Focused Visit

3.13 In October 2022, in line with the inspection of local authority children’s services (ILACS) framework, Ofsted conducted a Focused Visit that looked at our services and support offered to care leavers. Whilst this was not a graded inspection, Ofsted has now published their findings from this visit. The full report can be accessed [here](#); however, please see the key headlines below:

- i. The support to care leavers in Buckinghamshire has improved since the last inspection. While progress is evident, there remain inconsistencies in the quality of practice.
- ii. Younger care leavers and those in education are encouraged to be successful and ambitious by committed workers, managers, leaders and the lead member for children, who are proud of the young people's achievements.
- iii. Many visits are regular, proportionate and carefully planned, while others lack purpose or focus only on the current pressing issue for the care leaver.
- iv. Caseloads for some practitioners who are supporting care leavers are high. This makes it more challenging for them to undertake meaningful direct work with young people.
- v. While care leaver participation has been strengthened in Buckinghamshire, their voices at corporate parenting panel are inconsistent.
- vi. Leaders in Buckinghamshire have an understanding of the strengths of the service, the areas for development and the future challenges.
- vii. Pathway plans are written confidently and warmly with, and to, the care leavers. The young person's voice and experience are well captured. While most pathway plans are reviewed six monthly, they are not routinely updated when young people's circumstances change. Care leavers are strongly encouraged to engage in education and training. This is a real strength in Buckinghamshire.
- viii. Most care leavers are living in suitable accommodation where they feel safe and which meets their need
- ix. Most care leavers have access to universal health services and, when needed, are supported by their PAs to attend key health appointments.
- x. Gaps in service provision, different thresholds between children and adult services or insufficient planning mean that some care leavers' emotional health needs are not met in a timely way.
- xi. Care leavers, including those over 18 who are at risk of or experiencing exploitation, benefit from effective multi-agency risk management meetings and specialist, meaningful direct work via the exploitation team.

- xii. Comprehensive performance data is used to support the progress of work effectively across the service. Check and challenge meetings help to provide leaders with an additional line of sight to practice.
 - xiii. Senior leaders made a conscious decision to target quality assurance activity at areas of greatest risk within the wider children's service. Subsequently, a very small number of care leavers' records have been subject to formal audit in the past six months. While there is evidence of dip sampling by senior managers to seek to understand and influence practice, the low number of records subject to formal audit is a missed opportunity to identify practice changes, formalise learning and contribute to a learning and feedback loop.
 - xiv. The revised care leaver offer is clear and accessible and includes an aspirational emphasis on education. Care leavers spoke positively about their PAs and the local offer, with some saying that they felt they had received financial and practical support that exceeded offers for care leavers in other areas. One care leaver told inspectors, 'I feel so lucky to be a Bucks care leaver.'
- 3.14 Inspectors also identified the following areas of practice that need to improve:
- i. The number, quality and impact of audits and the extent to which care leavers' voices are included in this work to help underpin learning.
 - ii. The number of 22- to 25-year-olds who are aware of the local offer and accessing support.
 - iii. The consistent voice of care leavers at corporate parenting panel.
 - iv. The sense of permanence and stability for care leavers in staying put arrangements.
- 3.15 Of course, there is always more to do and the Service we will remain focused on progressing Ofsted recommendations as well as further improving the service in our drive towards delivering the council's ambition to provide consistently good services for Buckinghamshire's children and young people.

Youth Offending Service Inspection

- 3.16 In January 2023, HM Inspectorate of Probation published their findings following an inspection of [Youth Offending Services \(YOS\) in Buckinghamshire](#).
- 3.17 Overall, Buckinghamshire YOS was rated as 'Good'. As part of the inspection, inspectors also reviewed the quality of resettlement policy and provision, which was separately rated as 'Outstanding'. This is a very significant achievement and the outcome is testament to the hard work, dedication and

skill of our colleagues within the YOS as well as across the Council and partner agencies.

3.18 A summary of the key findings from the report can be found below:

- i. The governance and leadership of this service is strong.
- ii. The youth justice plan has been developed with input from board members and is based on detailed understanding of the profiles of children and their needs.
- iii. Board arrangements are effective, and mechanisms are in place to oversee the delivery of the strategy.
- iv. Comprehensive data reports about the profile of children, as well as YOS performance enable the board and management team to oversee service delivery.
- v. We were pleased to see the focus on addressing ethnic disproportionality being driven at board level.
- vi. Children have access to a range of services and interventions that meet a spectrum of needs and they are supported to access these.
- vii. The positive feedback we received from children confirms that they are getting the support and help they need.
- viii. A skilled, stable, highly motivated, staff team are supported by a competent management team that promotes a culture of learning and development.
- ix. There are excellent training and development opportunities and a strong connection between operational delivery and strategic priorities.
- x. All aspects of post-court work are excellent.
- xi. Case managers take a holistic approach to their work. They balance children's desistance, and safety and wellbeing needs, with an equal focus on protecting the public where a risk of harm has been identified.
- xii. The consistent quality of statutory work was impressive. However, the services delivered to children who receive out-of-court disposals is not of the same quality as that received by children on court orders.
- xiii. Assessment of children's own safety and wellbeing and planning to manage and reduce the risk of harm they may present to others require improvement.
- xiv. Information sharing and joint work with social care is strong; however, further work is needed to ensure information within out of court disposal assessments consistently reflects social care input.

- xv. Leaders also need to better understand the reintegration rates for children who are not in mainstream education to make sure every child has the best possible education placement.
- 3.19 As a result of our inspection findings, the following recommendations were made.
- i. Monitor the reintegration rates of YOS children into mainstream education to make sure that children return to full-time mainstream education in every case where this is appropriate.
 - ii. Ensure information within out of court disposal assessments consistently reflects social care input and that the roles and responsibilities for each service area are clearly identified within a children's plans.
 - iii. Improve the quality of assessment and planning for out-of-court disposal work to focus on the safety and wellbeing of children and the management of risk of harm to others.
 - iv. Review the out-of-court disposal guidance so that it sets out explicitly how the service intends to meet all diversity, safety and wellbeing needs, and risk of harm to others.
 - v. Strengthen out-of-court disposal assessment processes so that children and families are engaged at the earliest opportunity and ensure their views routinely contribute to disposal decisions
 - vi. Consistently ensure that suitable supervision arrangements for children completing reparation and expand the number of projects available.
 - vii. Seek to proactively diversify the pool of volunteers so that it reflects the children and families the service works with.
- 3.20 An action plan has been developed in response to the above and the Service will of course continue to stay focused on further improving the service and ensuring that our services to vulnerable children and young people are the best that they can be. Progress against the plan will be overseen by the YOS Strategic Partnership Board.

Local Area SEND Inspection

- 3.21 As report previously, in March 2022 Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspected the services provided for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Buckinghamshire. Following inspection, the Local Authority and the Integrated Care System (formerly the CCG) were jointly responsible for submitting an action plan to

Ofsted, detailing how the following 3 areas of significant weakness would be addressed.

- i. The lack of a cohesive area strategy to identify and meet the needs of those children and young people requiring speech and language, communication and occupational therapy
- ii. Waiting times for assessments on the autism and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder diagnosis pathways and the system-owned plans in place to address this
- iii. Waiting times to see a community paediatrician.

3.22 The action plan, known as a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) was co-produced with key stakeholders across education, health and care services including voluntary and community sector organisations and parent representatives. The WSOA was submitted and approved by Ofsted in August 2022.

3.23 Since finalising the WSOA significant work has been undertaken to establish the infrastructure and monitoring mechanisms. This has included:

- i. The development of detailed operational plans with metrics to capture the specific activity and targets that underpin the published high level WSOA.
- ii. Alignment of activity with the wider SEND improvement programme to prevent duplication, ensure interdependencies are understood, and wider priorities continue to be addressed.
- iii. The development of a dashboard to track Key Performance Indicators and visually evidence progress.
- iv. Allocation of a dedicated project manager to oversee progress and escalate issues where this is insufficient. An additional health funded project support officer role is also in the process of being created.
- v. Establishment of a WSOA governance structure, including a monthly meeting with leaders across education, health, care and parent representatives, as well as a SEND Improvement Board that will scrutinise progress and ensure accountability.
- vi. Wide scale mapping of existing resources and support available across the local area for children and young people with SEND.
- vii. An under 5s Task and Finish Group has been created, with key professionals across the Local Area to identify key improvement actions, prioritising early identification of need, by providing the

right support at the right time for children under 5 regardless of wait times.

- 3.24 As part of ongoing monitoring, our first meeting with the DfE to review progress within the WSoA was held in December 2022. This was an opportunity to provide an update on each action identified within the WSoA, to ensure progress is being achieved at pace and reflect any evidence available, demonstrating a positive impact to the lived experience of children and young people.
- 3.25 Feedback following this meeting was positive; however, progress needs to be maintained within all workstreams to ensure improvement work continues at pace. Progress against the WSoA will continue to be monitored through day-to-day project management, monthly reporting to the WSoA Group, and presentations at the SEND Improvement Board which continues to meet every 6-8 weeks.
- 3.26 To support progress in this area, colleagues across our local area partner organisations, schools and parent/carer representatives all came together at an event held on Tuesday 7 March 2023 to talk about co-production. Co-production is about developing equal working partnerships between children and young people who use services, their families, carers and professionals. The aim of the event was for colleagues to find out more about the benefits of co-production, what is currently happening in Buckinghamshire and how we can all play our part in championing co-production in SEND services. During the day, the Buckinghamshire SEND Co-production Charter was launched. The Charter is the agreed shared principles and way of working for co-production in SEND services across the Buckinghamshire local area. We also launched the Buckinghamshire Co-production Promise, a way for people to sign-up to support the Buckinghamshire Co-production Charter. The event was very well attended with almost 100 colleagues coming together to hear guest speakers share examples and case studies of co-production they have worked on with children and young people with SEND and their families. Attendees also took part in a group workshop activity, the outputs of which will feed into the ongoing SEND improvement work programme. Feedback from attendees about the event was extremely positive. Alongside the event, resources are being developed to help co-production embed across the local area; including a co-production toolkit, aimed at anyone working with children and young people with SEND and/or their families. The toolkit will give a practical understanding of what co-production is, how effective it can be and how to do it well. We plan to continue the co-production conversation during National Co-production Week in July 2023 and on an ongoing basis.

Placements for Looked After Children

- 3.27 Looked After Children (LAC) are the responsibility of the local authority where they ordinarily reside. That local authority has the legal responsibility for placing their LAC in either registered (with Ofsted) foster placements or registered children's homes. Buckinghamshire, like all local authorities, utilises a mixture of internal placements, those run by the Council, and external placements run by private organisations.
- 3.28 Currently, the service has 18 residential beds available across our 4 children's homes, this includes 4 beds within our newly establish parent and baby unit, Sunflower House. The quality of provision across our homes is also extremely high with 2 of them now rated by Ofsted as 'Outstanding'. One of the homes is rated as 'Good' and Sunflower House is yet to be inspected.
- 3.29 Since October 2021, it has become increasingly difficult to find placements, particularly for children aged 12 plus with complex needs. Until recently, this Council had never placed a young person in unregistered provision and it is always our intention not to do this. However, as the availability of placements for the most complex children and young people became virtually non-existent, this has led the Council and all other local authorities in the country to be faced with using provision that is not Ofsted registered for some under 16-year-olds. At the time the report was written, there were 6 young people in unregulated placements. All of whom have carefully planned arrangements that are monitored and agreed by the Service Director. Once the child is placed, the allocated social worker will visit weekly and our commissioners will undertake, within 4 weeks, an unannounced visit where they will speak to the child, the manager and check paperwork such as child's records, staffing rotas and staff DBS records. In addition, the service is currently developing, with legal colleagues a set of practice standards for children and young people in such placements. Where we have young people in unregistered provision, staff in children's placements, commissioning, allocated social workers and senior officers work relentlessly to identify alternative registered provision. This includes encouraging the unregistered provider to register with Ofsted and find alternative solutions that cost less and will be safe for the individual young person.
- 3.30 The solutions to the complex scenario of a young person with high needs, difficult behaviours and an unregistered provision take a considerable time to create and manufacture. One potential solution for some of the young people involved is for satellite homes to be created that are linked to our own registered children's homes. This is something that the service is actively exploring. In addition, we are developing a Placement Sufficiency Strategy that accurately reflects the current position and clearly articulates the service's

plans to increase the availability of provision for our children and young people that meet their needs and provides them with a safe place to live and thrive within Buckinghamshire.

- 3.31 Buckinghamshire Council has now, along with all other local authorities, been mandated to take Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) when they are referred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). In addition, the Council is also now required to continue to receive referrals until it reaches 0.10% of the child (0-18) population (128 individuals for Buckinghamshire) compared to the previous ask of 0.07%, 89 individuals for Buckinghamshire. At the time of writing, the Service supports 73 UASC, an increase from 48 in September 2022.
- 3.32 These decisions by central government are having a significant impact directly and indirectly on the Council's budgets. The direct impacts are on placement costs and on subsistence payments. Indirectly, the impact on placement availability for all children has and continues to decrease supply, hence why this Council as well as all other local authorities in the country are having to use unregulated provision.
- 3.33 A number of commissioning actions are underway to procure increased provision for care leavers including UASC. This includes block purchasing 'semi-independent' provision increase the supply of placements at a lower price. The Service will also continue to work with colleagues from Housing and our Housing Associations to ensure care leavers access their own tenancies in a timely and cost-effective way.

Corporate Parenting

- 3.34 As mentioned above, when a child comes into care, the council becomes their Corporate Parent. As Corporate Parents it is our collective responsibility to provide the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by us. Looking after and protecting children and young people is one of the most important jobs that councils do and when a child, for whatever reason, cannot safely stay at home, it is up to us as the local authority to step in and give them the care, support and stability that they deserve.
- 3.35 Our Corporate Parenting Panel supports the council to ensure that it is fulfilling its duties towards those children looked after corporately. It also oversees the services provided to children and young people in care. The Panel consists of a cross party group of elected Members supported by council officers as well as representatives from partner agencies responsible for aspects of working with children in care and care leavers. Children in care and care leavers engage in the Panel also.

- 3.36 During the last year, the panel has focused on the following areas:
- i. To ensure a focused approach to identifying and addressing issues relating to the health, both mental and physical of young people in the care of the local authority.
 - ii. To ensure a focused approach to identifying and addressing issues relating to housing and care leavers.
 - iii. To ensure a focused approach to identifying and addressing issues relating to education, employment and training.
- 3.37 Further updates on the progress made against the above priorities will be shared during the next Cabinet update.

Peer review

- 3.38 Buckinghamshire is part of the South East Sector Led Improvement Programme (SESLIP), which is a membership group of all single/upper-tier local authorities in the South East that aims to:
- Improve outcomes for children and young people across the South East.
 - Establish a culture of honest and constructive dialogue and challenge within and between authorities.
 - Demonstrate the capacity and capability of the sector to achieve a coherent and consistent self-improving system.
- 3.39 As part of the programme, local authorities routinely take part in a range of improvement activities and on 10 February 2023, the Service's senior leadership team participated in the peer challenge process, with Southampton and Slough, facilitated by a member of the SESLIP team. Feedback on the Service included:
- i. Strong leadership team that knows the service well
 - ii. Clear priorities and focus in order to improve the service.
 - iii. Progress evident since the full inspection and peer review last year.
- 3.40 The Service was very pleased with this feedback and will continue to utilise the learning from the sector led programme of support to assist the improvement journey in Buckinghamshire.

Youth Voice Bucks

- 3.41 On Thursday 23 February 2023, the first ever Bucks Youth Summit took place at the Waterside Theatre in Aylesbury. The event was planned and hosted by the young people in our county-wide Youth Forum, Youth Voice. The event invited students from schools across the county to share their voice on the biggest issues and areas of interest for young people in Buckinghamshire today. The event also acted as the launch of the Youth Participation Strategy for young people.
- 3.42 142 students from 16 schools attended and spoke about a number of key themes that matter to them, ranging from mental health, a youth-led conversation on sexual violence and access for young people in rural communities
- 3.43 The event was youth-led, exciting, lively, and empowering for the young people that took part, and the feedback has been incredible. The outputs of each conversation are being collated by facilitators and workstreams are launching to ensure action is taken in response to the young people's feedback. These workstreams will be monitored by the Youth Voice forum and young attendees will be kept updated on progress via email and the [YouthVoiceBucks website](#). Due to the event's huge success, Youth Voice Bucks and the Youth Voice forum plan to make this an annual event! The next Youth Summit will take place on Wednesday 28 February 2024, again at The Waterside Theatre.

4. Other options considered

- 4.1 N/A

5. Legal and financial implications

- 5.1 There are no specific legal or financial implications as a result of agreeing to the recommendations the paper. However, there are significant financial pressures associated with a number of areas detailed within the report, particularly pertinent to the mandated transfer scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, demand pressures faced across the Service and the reliance on agency staff due to the significant social worker recruitment challenges.

6. Corporate implications

- 6.1 Similar to above, there are no specific corporate implications as a result of agreeing to the recommendations the paper; however, changes made as part

of the Transformation Plan no doubt require additional support from corporate support services such as HR and Finance.

7. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

7.1 N/A

8. Communication, engagement & further consultation

8.1 N/A

9. Next steps and review

9.1 The next update will be provided to Cabinet in Autumn 2023.

10. Background papers

10.1 N/A

11. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by email [democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk]



Report to Cabinet

Date:	9 May 2023
Title:	6 Monthly Adult Social Care update
Cabinet Member(s):	Councillor Angela Macpherson
Contact officer:	Craig Mcardle Corporate Director Adults and Health Craig.Mcardle@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
Ward(s) affected:	All wards
Recommendations:	Cabinet is asked to note the latest developments in relation to adult social care both locally and nationally
Reason for decision:	N/A

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This update sets out recent developments in adult social care, both locally and nationally, and plans for the next period. It includes updates on several recent developments in April including the Next Steps to put People at the Heart of Care government White Paper and the findings of the Hewitt Review into Integrated Care Systems.

2. The National Picture

Next Steps to put People at the Heart of Care

- 2.1 The [Next Steps to put People at the Heart of Care](#) white paper on adult social care reform was published on 4th April 2023 and sets out progress since the [People at the Heart of Care](#) white paper was published in 2021; and the next steps.
- 2.2 The white paper contains new announcements on the adult social care reform programme, including greater use of technology and digitisation and a range of national measures to support the adult social care workforce. It also includes the creation of an Older Person's Housing Taskforce to develop more retirement housing

and measures to enable innovative local projects. However the white paper is silent on the social care charging reforms which were a prominent feature in the 2021 white paper.

Social Care Charging Reforms

- 2.3 The Government's proposals, originally due to come into effect from October 2023, included the introduction of a care cap, more generous capital limits and arrangements for self-funders to ask local authorities to organise their care.
- 2.4 Across the local government sector, there were considerable concerns that the funding requirements of these reforms was significantly underestimated and the timeframe for implementation too tight, particularly given the substantial workforce challenges.
- 2.5 In the November 2022 budget, the Government announced that the implementation of these reforms was postponed until October 2025. However, some of the associated activity relating to the development and sustainability of the care market has continued on the original timetable. As already stated, the latest white paper on social care reform (Next Steps to put People at the Heart of Care) makes no reference to these charging reforms.

Liberty Protection Safeguards

- 2.6 Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) are due to replace the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) through amendment to the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) Code of Practice. LPS are designed to be more streamlined, improving the system by spreading the responsibility for the protection of a person's rights across hospitals, clinical commissioning groups and social care.
- 2.7 LPS were deferred from an original implementation date of April 2022. In early April this year, the government announced that implementation will be delayed beyond the life of this parliament to prioritise other work on social care. i.e. until 2025 at the earliest. This means that implementation will not be before 2025 unless there are further changes.
- 2.8 The transition from DoLS to LPS was requiring significant planning, recruitment and training. The Adults and Health Transformation Board has been overseeing the project to implement LPS in Buckinghamshire.
- 2.9 The impact of the delay is that the DoLS system will continue with the burden of administration with local authorities and the issues that LPS was designed to address such as people outside the scope of DoLS such people deprived of their liberty in the community or under the age of 18. Whilst maintaining a state of readiness for when an implementation date is announced, in the meantime we will be able to reduce the resources that had been allocated to this.

Mental Health Reforms

- 2.10 In June 2022, the government published the [draft Mental Health Bill](#). This aims to modernise the framework for services including the criteria for detention and amending the definition of a mental disorder so that people can no longer be detained solely because they have a learning disability or are autistic. The council has participated in the consultation on the proposed changes.
- 2.11 The changes in the draft Bill largely affect the NHS and criminal justice system. However there are changes to determining which local authority is responsible for arranging aftercare in the community; and a reversal of the burden of proof so that the local authority responsible for arranging guardianship must prove that the person meets the guardianship criteria.
- 2.12 The Bill is currently going through parliament and has completed the Joint Committee Inquiry stage. The Joint Committee has published its [report](#). It has recommended the Bill must be strengthened to address rising numbers detained under current legislation, tackle failures on racial inequalities and strengthen duties for Integrated Care Boards and Local Authorities to ensure adequate supply of community services for people with learning disabilities and autistic people to avoid long-term detention.
- 2.13 It is intended that once adopted, the Mental Health Act will have a staggered implementation, with first duties to be introduced in mid-2024/2025 and full implementation by 2030-31.

Care Quality Commission Assurance

- 2.14 The Health and Care Act 2022 introduced Care Quality Commission (CQC) assurance of how councils are discharging their adult social care duties as defined by the Care Act. Councils were last subject to CQC assurance of adult social care in 2010. Buckinghamshire County Council was inspected in 2008 with an outcome of “good”.
- 2.15 The CQC has shared its draft assurance framework, which is due to be signed off by the Minister for Social Care in the spring, with the CQC’s assurance responsibilities to start in April. On 28th February, the CQC published interim guidance which confirmed that:
- Local authorities will be provided with an overall rating using the CQC’s established ratings categories of ‘outstanding,’ ‘good,’ ‘needs improvement’ and ‘inadequate.’
 - Reports will be published and will also include a narrative and indication of the direction of travel.
- 2.16 With 152 councils in scope, the CQC will be conducting its first round of assessments over 2 years, starting in April 2023 with a number of pilots before progressing to all

councils into 2024. At present it is not known how the CQC will determine the assessment order for councils.

- 2.17 The CQC also has a parallel responsibility for assurance of Integrated Care Systems (ICS) and has indicated that the phasing of local authority inspections will be linked to ICS inspections to reduce the burden of inspection on local authorities.

National Workforce Challenges

- 2.18 Recruitment and retention continue to be a severe problem in adult social care, both for councils and for social care providers. This has been attributed to the impact of increased competition for staff from other sectors, such as retail and the NHS, staff burnout as a result of Covid and a reduced supply of workers from Europe.
- 2.19 In October 2022, the CQC published [The state of healthcare and adult social care in England 2021/22](#). In its workforce chapter, it highlights that 87% of care home providers and 88% of homecare providers reported experiencing recruitment challenges. Over a quarter of care homes were not admitting any new residents due to workforce issues.
- 2.20 Recognising these pressures, in February 2022, the Government added care workers to the shortage occupation list to support providers in addressing workforce pressures. This is enabling the sector to employ overseas recruits to help provide care this winter and beyond. In February, the government also announced a [£15m international recruitment fund](#) available over 2023 and 2024 for the adult social care sector - this fund is to enable a support offer to be set up at regional level which can be made available to all providers within the area. For this purpose, Buckinghamshire is within the South East Care Association region and the Milton Keynes and Buckinghamshire Care Association is acting as the representative for Buckinghamshire providers. The allocation for the southeast in 2023/24 is £2.4m.
- 2.21 The Government also launched a new domestic recruitment campaign – Made with Care – on 2nd November, running until March 2023.
- 2.22 And in the Next Steps to Put People at the Heart of Care white paper, the government sets out plans for the care workforce, including a care workforce pathway, new Care Certificate qualification, funded training for care workers and registered managers, and funded continued professional development training, as well as a digital skills passport.

The Hewitt Review

- 2.23 The [Hewitt Review](#) was established in December 2022 to review integrated care systems (ICS) - Buckinghamshire Council responded to its Call for Evidence in January 2023. The Hewitt Review published its findings and recommendations in April 2023.

2.24 Much of the Council's submission is reflected in the recommendations. Key points and recommendations are:

- The NHS is over-focused on acute healthcare rather than prevention and recommends a shift in NHS resources towards prevention – an increase of at least 1% at ICS level over the next 5 years; and ICBs to baseline current investment in prevention order to calculate what a minimum 1% increase would be
- The government to develop a national social care workforce strategy (and make investment in social care and workforce a national priority)
- The importance of the health and welfare needs of young people and children; and recognition that children's social care is linked to both adult care and the wider health system
- Simplified budget arrangements for health and social care integration
- An explicit role for Health Scrutiny Committees (HASC in Buckinghamshire) and Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committees for system overview and scrutiny
- A reduction in national targets to a maximum of 10
- A cross-government review of the entire NHS capital regime with a view to implementing its recommendations from 2024

2.25 The government is now considering its response to these recommendations.

3. Buckinghamshire Health and Social Care Integration

Integrated Care System Development

3.1 Buckinghamshire is a 'place' within the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care System (BOB ICS) and its governance and working arrangements have been developing over the last year. The key governance elements are:

- Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Integrated Care Partnership (ICP)
- Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC)
- Executive Partnership (EP)
- The Buckinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Board (BHWB)

Integrated Care Board

3.2 The BOB Integrated Care Board is the statutory NHS organisation responsible for managing the NHS budget and arranging for the provision of health services in the ICS area. The establishment of ICBs replaced clinical commissioning groups (CCGs). Local authorities have a single representative on the ICB, currently Stephen Chandler, Oxfordshire County Council.

Integrated Care Partnership

3.3 The [BOB Integrated Care Partnership \(ICP\)](#) is a statutory committee jointly formed between the NHS Integrated Care Board and all local authorities with public health

and social care responsibilities in the ICS area. It is responsible for publishing the Integrated Care Strategy which sets out priorities for improving the health and wellbeing of people across the BOB area. The ICP membership is:

- Local authorities: Councillors from the member authorities (representation linked to population size not just number of authorities); the three Directors of Public Health, a Director of Adult Social Services and Director of Children’s Services from the member authorities
- Chair and Chief Executive of the ICB
- Representatives from health and social care providers, including primary care
- Wider stakeholders – Healthwatch, the Academic Health Science Network and voluntary sector representation

3.4 The Vice Chair of the ICP is Councillor Macpherson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member, Health, and Wellbeing for Buckinghamshire Council. Other Councillors representing Buckinghamshire Council are Councillor Tett (Leader) and Councillor Mohammed (Deputy Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing). Councillor Macpherson also represents the council on the Bedfordshire, Luton, and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Partnership.

3.5 The ICP consulted the public in December and January on its proposed strategy, which was agreed at its meeting on 24th March 2023. The [ICP strategy](#) builds on the joint Health & Wellbeing Strategies across the BOB region and identifies 5 key principles: preventing ill-health, tackling health inequalities, providing person centred care, supporting local delivery and improving the join up between our services.

Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3.6 The Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West joint health scrutiny committee (BOB JHOSC) has been set-up to scrutinise and challenge the activities of the Integrated Care Board and Integrated Care Partnership. Buckinghamshire-based health and social care activity will continue to be scrutinised by the [Buckinghamshire Health & Adult Social Care Select Committee \(HASC\)](#).

3.7 Buckinghamshire Council's representatives on the BOB JHOSC, which held its first meeting on 25th January 2023, are Councillor MacBean (who is also the Chair), Councillor Heap, Councillor Mordue, Councillor Morgan and Councillor Turner.

Buckinghamshire Executive Partnership

3.8 Within the county, the Buckinghamshire Executive Partnership brings together senior executives from the council, NHS providers and the ICB.

3.9 The purpose of the Executive Partnership is to focus on the priorities defined by the ICP and Buckinghamshire Health & Wellbeing Board, ensure strategic alignment, best

use of resources and operational oversight of integrated care across the Buckinghamshire health and care system.

Additional responsibilities for the Health and Wellbeing Board

3.10 As part of the implementation of integrated care systems, the ICB must now consult with the Health and Wellbeing Board on its 5-year joint forward plan and as part of its annual review. The NHSE must also consult with the Health and Wellbeing Board on whether its views have been considered by the ICB. Councillor Angela Macpherson is Chair of the Buckinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Board.

Buckinghamshire Health and Care Integration Programme

3.11 The Buckinghamshire Health and Care Integration programme has been established to improve hospital discharge performance so that more residents can be discharged as soon as it is clinically sound to do so, be provided with rehabilitation and therapy support to enable them to regain as much of their former independence as possible and, where they can, return safely to their own home.

3.12 There are three main work streams:

- Transitioning to a new community-based model – including a new intermediate care centre in Amersham, providing 22 beds with reablement and therapy support
- Implementing a ‘transfer of care hub’ – a new integrated service that will support better co-ordination of discharges and engage with patients on the ward to understand their needs and plan their discharge as early as possible.
- Developing a stronger performance and discharge culture across the system and improve the quality and sharing of information around discharge

3.13 The Government provided two grants to support discharge over the winter of 2022-23, both of which had to be spent by the end of March 2023:

- £500m national adult social care discharge fund of which Buckinghamshire is receiving £3.79m. This has been spent on a range of measures by Buckinghamshire Council and Buckinghamshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) to manage the winter pressures and speed up the discharge process from being in a hospital bed through to the person being settled in their long-term accommodation.
- £200m discharge funding for step down care of which Buckinghamshire ICB is receiving £1.73m. This has been used to support the costs of residential care post-discharge.

3.14 Key activities in the last 6 months have included:

- Removing barriers to assessing patients (for their long-term social care needs) in hospital and delivering more assessments in hospital. In the future this will mean that where a patient requires a relatively simple assessment, this can be done quickly in hospital so they can be discharged directly to their long-term care.

- Reducing the length of time Buckinghamshire residents spend waiting in ‘discharge to assess’ beds, and in the “medically optimised for discharge” ward in Amersham. Patients in these settings are being reviewed weekly for opportunities to accelerate their discharges.
- Stronger partnership working with neighbouring integrated care systems – Frimley system (Wexham Park Hospital treats the largest proportion of Buckinghamshire residents after Stoke Mandeville Hospital) has representatives on the key groups that govern the County’s integration programme (including the Buckinghamshire Executive Board) and are key participants in designing our future model for discharge and intermediate care.
- A new set of twelve beds in Burnham opened in January to support discharge of patients through the most intense period of winter. This has especially helped more Buckinghamshire residents to be discharged from Wexham Park hospital.
- Six short-term housing units for residents with housing issues so they can be discharged whilst waiting for a longer-term housing solution. This initiative launched in February.
- A scheme to temporarily house homeless patients in hotel accommodation during January – enabling them to be discharged from hospital and into more appropriate accommodation.

3.15 Targets for the next period are:

- Implementing an ‘integrated discharge team’ by June (this is the patient-facing part of the Transfer of Care Hub mentioned above)
- Implementing the full Transfer of Care Hub by October
- Winding down the remaining 30 discharge-to-assess beds, and standing up two new short-term interim bed hubs, and a new intermediate care centre in Amersham

3.16 The programme is overseen by the Buckinghamshire Executive Partnership and also reports to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Better Care Fund and Spending Plan

3.17 The Better Care Fund (BCF) is a national vehicle for driving health and social care integration using pooled budgets. In Buckinghamshire, the BCF is managed through a joint arrangement with the NHS delegated by the Health and Wellbeing Board to oversee the delivery of the BCF Plan. The value of the BCF in Buckinghamshire for 2022-23 is £44,540,754 of which the Adult Social Care allocation is £11,872,603 a 5.66% increase on 2021-22.

3.18 The BCF Plan for 2021-22 focussed on the five key areas that would yield significant benefits from a stronger partnership approach. The priorities, shaped by the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Integrated Care Partnership, are:

- Hospital discharge

- Admission avoidance
- Mental health
- Primary care community services
- Health inequalities with a focus on cardio-vascular disease

3.19 In September 2022, the Health & Wellbeing Board approved the 2022-23 BCF Plan, which include:

- Development of a sustainable intermediate care offer for Buckinghamshire.
- A carer's transformation programme which includes the development of a Carers Co-production Board.
- Six priority areas for improving outcomes for people living with dementia and their families.

4. Adult Social Care Workforce

4.1 The adult social care market is facing significant challenge. The Covid-19 pandemic and EU Exit have added pressure on a workforce that was already experiencing long-term difficulties due to factors such as level of pay and competition from other sectors.

4.2 Feedback from providers to the council indicates their experiences mirror the national picture. Last year, the Council undertook a survey of adult social care providers and recruitment challenges, risk of 'burn-out' increasing pay to recruit and retain staff and dependency on higher cost agency staff were identified as key concerns. Some providers reported care staff moved away from permanent employment to assume agency work and there was a strong feeling that the main opportunity to increase the social care workforce is from greater and easier access to overseas workers. The Council is collaborating across the south-east to support access for Buckinghamshire providers to the DHSC international recruitment fund.

4.3 The Council is experiencing similar pressures in recruitment and retention of staff across adult social care and the commissioning service. Work continues to improve recruitment and retention, including the development of career progression pathways for staff and a 'grow your own' approach.

4.4 In addition, the Buckinghamshire Health, and Social Care Academy (a non-profit partnership organisation by health and care bodies including the Council) provides workforce planning and development including the requirements of social care providers.

5. The Care Market

5.1 There are over 190 organisations delivering adult social care in Buckinghamshire. The local care market includes a number of smaller and independent providers with less provision delivered by larger national chains. Of the five largest care home providers nationally, only three operate in Buckinghamshire and have low numbers of local

authority clients. This means that many of our providers have a strong local connection but limited organisational infrastructure. Recruitment and retention of staff, cost of living and inflation make the provision of social care very challenging for all of our providers.

- 5.2 Post Covid, there is an emerging trend in the increasing complexity of care needs of people being discharged from hospital. Supporting more people to stay in their own homes is resulting in an increase in the average number of hours per client for domiciliary care. There are also more people with challenging behaviours due to levels of dementia.
- 5.3 As part of the social care reforms, local authorities were required to undertake a [Fair Cost of Care exercise](#) and a [Market Sustainability Plan](#). The Market Sustainability Plan sets the anticipated demand on the care market, key risks and what can be done to address those risks.
- 5.4 The Council's commissioning service has developed a robust approach to managing quality in the care market and the support we offer to care providers. On 13th March, the Council led a [DHSC webinar](#) on our approach to quality and working with providers.

6. Buckinghamshire Council Adult Social Care

Director for Adult Social Services

- 6.1 Each upper tier authority with responsibility for Adult Social Care must appoint an officer as the statutory Director for Adult Social Services (DASS). In March 2023, Craig Mcardle joined the authority as the new Corporate Director for Adults and Health and the Council's DASS.

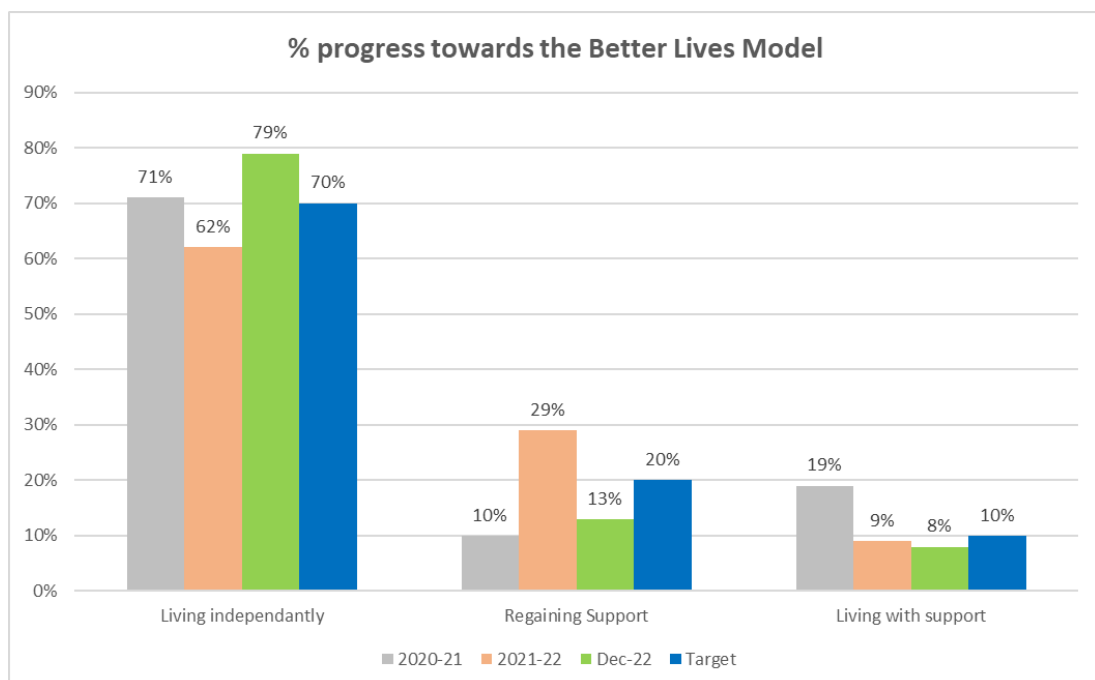
Better Lives Strategy 2022-2025

- 6.2 The Better Lives Strategy continues to provide the framework for the transformation of the Council's adult social care services. The aim of the Better Lives Strategy is to significantly reduce the number of people progressing into long-term services when they can be supported to live independently at home. The Better Lives approach has 3 main parts:
- [Living Independently](#) - helping people to stay living independently through information, advice, and guidance, including linking people up with local support networks.
 - The aim is for 70% of people being supported to live independently.
 - [Regaining Independence](#) - short-term support to help people recovering from an illness or injury or living with long-term social care regain independence.
 - The aim is for 20% of people to receive short-term support to regain independence.

- **Living With Support** - providing person-centred long-term support when a person is no longer able to live independently.
 - The aim is for 10% of people to move directly into receiving long term services.

6.3 Whilst we still need to support more people to regain independence, overall, we have made considerable progress against this objective – at the end of December 2023:

- **Living Independently**
 - The number of new people being supported through information and advice, or signposting increased by 82% since 2020-21 (from 1,500 people per quarter to 2,740 people per quarter this year).
- **Regaining Independence**
 - The number of new people being supported by either Occupational Therapy support or equipment, or Telecare equipment has increased by 275% since 2020-21 from 95 people per quarter to 355 people per quarter this year. However, we know that we need to significantly increase the number of people that can benefit from our reablement service.
- **Living With Support**
 - The number of new people supported with a long-term service has reduced by 8% since 2020-21 from 300 people per quarter to 275 per quarter this year.



- 6.4 The transformation programme supports the implementation and outcomes of the Better Lives Strategy. The priorities are being reviewed in line with capacity for change and the delay in the social care reforms implementation. Whilst these are still being confirmed, the priority areas being delivered include:
- Improving information, advice, and guidance through a collaboration with the voluntary sector.
 - Carers' support.
 - Development of specialist housing, as part of the emerging corporate housing strategy
 - Service finding and brokerage – to improve services for people with direct payments or who are self-funders.
 - Direct payments – improvements in user experience and efficiency in processes.
 - Digitalisation – improved self-service options for residents who choose these channels and improved digital “backroom” processes to improve efficiency, especially greater automation of financial processes.
- 6.5 A number of projects in the transformation programme will be able to deliver savings within a year or so and these opportunities will be built into the future savings programme for Adult Social Care.

Demand for Social Care

- 6.6 Adult social care is still experiencing increasing demand for services. The number of new people contacting the council for support has increased by 65% since 2020-21 from 2,090 per quarter to 3,450 per quarter this year. Of the 10,400 people who have contacted the Council so far this year:
- 79% were supported with information and advice (tier one of the Better Lives Strategy)
 - 13% received universal or reablement services (tier 2 of the Better Lives Strategy)
 - 8% entered long term support (tier 3 of the Better Lives Strategy)
- 6.7 It is good that people seek information from the Council for advice and guidance, as this can significantly prevent or delay the need for formal social care and is in line with the Better Lives Strategy ambition. However, the number of people requiring formal social care services is growing in line with the growth in the ageing population and complexity of conditions as people live longer. This is translating into growing numbers of people receiving services funded by the Council, with those receiving care in the community significantly exceeding the annual projections for 22/23.
- 6.8 Over the period 2019 to 2023:
- The number of long-term clients in residential and nursing care has decreased from 1,530 to 1,437.
 - Home care, direct payment and Supported Living clients have risen from 3,239 to 3,611.

The decrease in residential clients and increase in clients living independently is line with our Better Lives strategy to support people to stay living in their own home.

- 6.9 Overall, the number of long-term clients we are supporting has increased by almost 6% and we are projecting the numbers of both groups of clients to increase in the coming years. This increase may, in part, be linked to lockdown and the direct and indirect impact on people's frailty – if so, this effect should diminish in time. However, demographic change – the increase in older people in the population, people living longer and with more years with frailty and complex conditions – will be the greatest cause of increasing demand.

Preparation For CQC Inspection

- 6.10 The Council is taking a proactive approach to preparation for its future CQC inspection. A key element has been to undertake a self-assessment using a tool developed by the Local Government Association. The main areas that we are identifying for further improvements are:
- How we work with residents to improve services.
 - Support for carers.
 - Information, advice and guidance and self-service support.
 - Consistency of practice, including application of the strength-based approach and prevention, and the effectiveness of care planning and multi-disciplinary team working.
 - Ongoing safeguarding improvements.
 - Identifying and responding to unmet needs.
- 6.11 An improvement plan has been developed and work is already underway to address many of the areas for improvement. Networking across the local government sector is also enabling services to follow best practice.
- 6.12 The CQC is seeking to reduce the inspection burden on councils by conducting much of its research into the Council online, so additional work is taking place to ensure our online information is comprehensive and easily accessible.

Preparation for Implementation of the Social Care Reforms

- 6.13 Prior to the Government's announcement to delay the implementation of the social care reforms, the detailed planning work undertaken with the support of Ernst & Young and the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), identified that:
- Notwithstanding demographic change, the charging reforms are estimated to more than double the number of residents (an extra 2,300 to 3,000 people) who will be eligible to access services funded by the Council.
 - Without making any other changes, an additional 115 full time equivalent staff would be required across the Council to support the extra work involved.

- 6.14 The preparation work identified a number of improvements such as “backroom” automation and more easily accessible information which could significantly improve user experience, efficiency in managing the extra demand and reduce the number of extra staff required.
- 6.15 Whilst the delay in the reforms has extended the timescale, the changes and improvements will be incrementally introduced as they will additionally help to manage demand for services, regardless of the reforms.
- 6.16 The Council remains concerned that the majority of the costs of implementation will be an unfunded burden for the Council.

Key Staffing Issues

- 6.17 Across the adult services, vacancy rates remain high, running at c. 24%. Alongside a rolling recruitment and retention programme, agency staff are used where necessary. There are currently 68 FTE agency staff (January 23), of which 28 FTE are externally funded.
- 6.18 Since February 2021, the adult social care service has received a total of 1199 applications for social work/occupational therapists posts, with just 141 appointments confirmed. The challenges in converting applications into appointments include candidates requiring more flexibility and wanting to work more from home, agency terms and conditions being preferred; and being offered posts elsewhere. A range of initiatives have been undertaken in the last year including:
- Meet The Expert - which showcase the experts and talent at the Council.
 - Virtual Try Before You Apply and targeted recruitment campaigns - to enable candidates to meet the teams and find out more about the work environment.
 - Agency conversion - promoting the corporate rewards and benefits, highlighting the benefits of converting to a permanent contract and holding specific sessions for agency staff to showcase the career development available at the Council.
 - Participating in external job fairs and skills shows.
- 6.19 Recognising the national and local challenges, a joint adults and children’s social care taskforce group has been established to strengthen and widen our recruitment approach, including:
- Return to Social Work - developing a programme and training plan for returnees.
 - Considering an overseas recruitment approach.
 - Combined recruitment - shared social media campaigns and job fairs for both services, including a Council social care recruitment fair in April.
- 6.20 As well as recruitment, the service is also focusing on retention and career development through a ‘grow-your-own’ programme, including:

- Social work apprenticeships – a 3-year scheme which, by the end of 2023, will have seen 11 members of staff awarded with a social work qualification.
- Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) - supporting newly qualified social workers joining adult social care in Buckinghamshire.
- An 18-month post-graduate degree programme.
- A wide range of other in-house training, including specialist training.
- A social care trainee apprenticeship – an entry level role to encourage new staff into the health and social care sector.

6.21 Other key initiatives, in collaboration with the Buckinghamshire Health and Care Academy, include:

- Accreditation of an Approved Mental Health Practitioner (AMHP) Programme - the first in the country to be approved by Social Work England. This programme commenced in January 2023.
- A Buckinghamshire bespoke Occupational Therapy Programme - with multiple partners across the Health and Social Care Academy.

Adult Social Care service performance and new developments

Seeleys Respite Centre

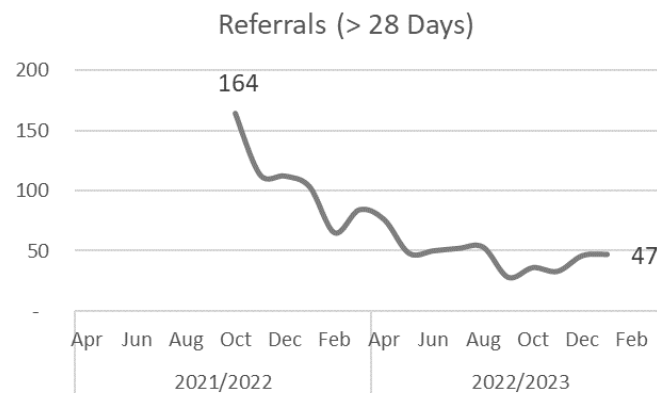
6.22 Seeleys House Short Breaks Centre is the Council's overnight residential service offering a respite care service for people with learning and/or physical disabilities in Beaconsfield. Seeleys House is registered to provide support for up to 12 residents. The service was inspected by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in January 2023 and received a CQC Inspection rating of 'good' across all 4 criteria.

6.23 This rating shows significant progress from the previous 'requires improvement' rating received in 2019. The full CQC report has been published and is available to read on [the CQC website](#). Highlights include:

- Lots of appropriate, professional interaction between staff and residents. Residents were observed to be smiling, laughing, and relaxed in the home. Relatives described the staff as 'excellent,' 'approachable, caring, efficient, interested in who they are looking after,' and 'professional and friendly.'
- Right Support: The service gave people care and support in a safe, clean, well-equipped, well-furnished, and well-maintained environment that met their sensory and physical needs.
- Right Care: Staff promoted equality and diversity in their support for people and understood people's cultural needs and provided culturally appropriate, kind, and compassionate care.
- Right Culture: People received good quality care, support and treatment because trained staff and specialists could meet their needs and wishes. People received compassionate and empowering care that was tailored to their needs.

Referrals

- 6.24 Over the past year, the service has focussed on reducing the waiting times for people to be allocated to a social worker. At the end of January, there were 47 new referrals for clients that had been pending allocation to a social worker for more than 28 days. This has fallen steadily since October 2021/22 when there were 164 clients waiting for longer than 28 days.



- 6.25 The service maintains contact with clients that are waiting for an assessment to ensure that their situation is not deteriorating and where appropriate, community café appointments are offered. Additional capacity is being added to support with assessments relating to welfare needs and occupational therapy assessments at the front door, which will further reduce the number of clients waiting over 28 days to be allocated to a worker.

Community

- 6.26 The community café service continues to be offered as an alternative way for people to receive adult social care support and guidance. The cafés are now also supported by Occupational Therapy, the Council's Helping Hands service and Voluntary Sector partners such as One Recovery Bucks, Women's Aid and Connections Support.
- 6.27 Three community cafés are held each week, operating from 6 locations across the county - Aylesbury, Chesham, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, High Wycombe, and Burnham. 1,114 people have used the service in the 12 months up to February 2023 - an average of 86 people per week. An online booking system is being developed so that people can book straight into a café.
- 6.28 As the support is often advice and signposting, measuring the impact of the service is challenging. We receive good feedback about the experience of using the service and, anecdotally, reports of good outcomes for people. In the coming period, we will be reviewing how we can more formally measure the impact of this service.

Safeguarding

- 6.29 Safeguarding concerns continue to be an area of considerable demand. Currently about 50 referrals are received each day, with a monthly average in 2022/23 of 1,013. This compares to a monthly average of 914 in 2020/21. Through a series of improvement measures, this has reduced to 275 enquiries as of at the end of February 2023 - with 211 of those generated in January and February '23 alone.
- 6.30 Buckinghamshire Council consistently receives many more safeguarding concerns than other councils. A major element is inappropriate referrals from partner agencies and a key area of activity is to reduce this element. However, performance is comparable with other local authorities in reducing or removing risks and in relation to the proportion of outcomes achieved by the individuals.
- 6.31 Although the responsibility of the partnership Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Adults Board (BSAB), the Adult Social Care and Integrated Commissioning services participate where appropriate in the Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs). During the last 6 months, the BSAB was involved in five SARs and also ran one safeguarding practice learning event. Once completed, the SARs are published on the [BSAB website](#).
- 6.32 A key improvement in the SAR process is better involving families in reviews. There has been a Good Practice Guide developed as a guide for professionals running Reviews, based on the Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AAFDA) '7 Steps' model, and there has been a parallel leaflet developed for families to be given at the start of the Review process along with information about SARs and the work of the BSAB.

Locality Development

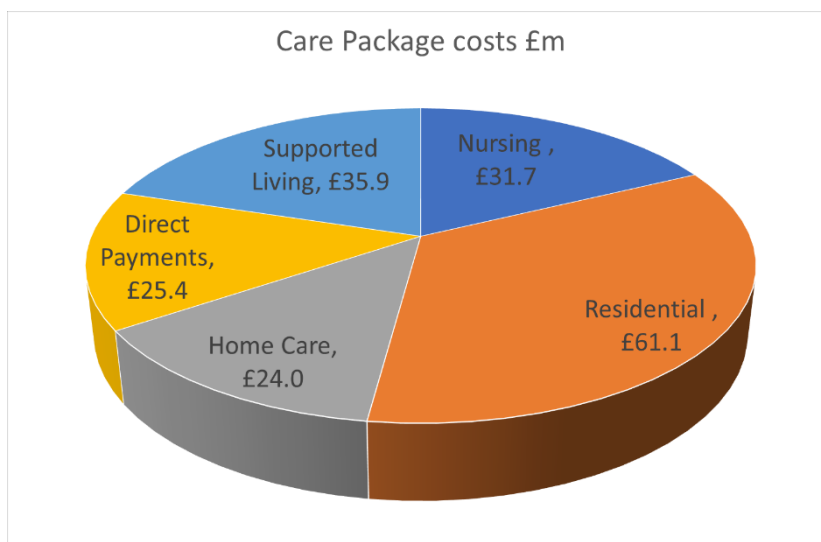
- 6.33 During the last year, adult social care has developed closer working relationships with the local Primary Care Networks (groups of GP practices) and the Council's community board officers. This has included establishing links, where capacity allows, with individual PCNs, attending GP surgery meetings to discuss concerns, linking with social prescribers, and identifying community activities that clients can join in their local communities.

7. Financial Performance

- 7.1 At the end of quarter 3 of the current financial year, adult social care was projecting a year end overspend of £2.7m on a £168.0m budget. This represents a 1.6% overspend. Further mitigations include -£1.6m remaining contingency, -£0.25m Direct Payment additional clawbacks, and the potential use of further contingency to cover inflation and National Living Wage pressures from providers.
- 7.2 As reported in the last update to Cabinet in October, the increasing costs are due to increased numbers of clients, increased complexity of the needs of clients and increased price pressures. Inflationary pressures are one of the largest risks with

annual increases currently around 7%. For example, the average cost of nursing home care for a new client is £61k p.a. compared to £56k p.a. for clients leaving the service. Reasons for the increase in complexity and volume are in part due to changes in hospital discharge, general demand of an aging population, the complexity of young people transitioning from Children’s Social Care and service users moving to social care after exhausting their own funds.

7.3 The vast majority of the adult social care budget is spent on the cost of social care for our residents as illustrated in the chart below.



7.4 Adult social care has delivered 94% (February 2023) of its savings target of £3.258m in 2022-23 and is on track to deliver 100% by the end of the financial year.

7.5 To achieve this has been very challenging when set against the increasing number of clients and their complexity. For example, the budget had assumed that more people would be supported to remain at home rather than people entering residential and nursing care. Although this has been achieved, the overall numbers of people requiring a service has been more than budgeted.

8. Other Options Considered

8.1 N/A

9. Legal and Financial Implications

9.1 N/A

10. Corporate Implications

10.1 Adult social care services are provided as part of the Council’s delivery of its corporate plan priority of ‘Protecting the Vulnerable.’ The update provided above has identified implications for the Council.

11. Local Councillors & Community Boards Consultation & Views

11.1 This report does not require consultation with local councillors or Community Boards.

12. Communication, Engagement & Further Consultation

12.1 No specific communication or engagement is required in relation to this report.

13. Next steps and review

13.1 N/A

14. Background papers

14.1 N/A

15. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

15.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report, please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider, please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by email to democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

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Report to Cabinet

Date:	9th May 2023
Title:	Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy 2023-26
Cabinet Member(s):	Cllr Steve Bowles, Cllr A Hussain
Contact officer:	Gideon Springer
Ward(s) affected:	All

Recommendations:

- *That the priorities and key actions for the Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy 2023-26 be endorsed*
- *That the next steps be noted, which include*
 - *Publication of the Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy 2023-26 by 15th May 2023*
 - *Development of detailed delivery plans for each priority area*
 - *Development of measures to track and demonstrate progress and impact*

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The 2020-2023 Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy ends on 31st March 2023. Following the completion of the Community Safety Strategic Assessment and public consultation, the 2023-26 Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy has been produced ready for publication on 15th May 2023.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) (as revised by the Police and Justice Act 2006, and the Policing and Crime Act 2009) places a duty on the Safer Buckinghamshire Board (SBB) to undertake a strategic assessment of community safety in its area and produce a three-year community safety strategy.
- 2.2 The Safer Buckinghamshire Board considered the findings and recommendations of the Strategic Assessment at its meeting on 5th December 2022. The Strategic Assessment was circulated in the papers for the meeting of 5th December, and is also available from communitysafety@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

- 2.3 As part of developing the strategic priorities for the Safer Buckinghamshire Board it is also a legislative requirement that there be public engagement. During September and October, through a survey and extensive communications plan, we asked people in Buckinghamshire what their community safety concerns and priorities were. The survey, which included multiple choice questions and the opportunity to make additional comments, was also promoted to Councillors and Town and Parish Councils in Buckinghamshire. An analysis of the public engagement was also presented to the Safer Buckinghamshire Board on 5th December 2022.
- 2.4 Taking the Strategic Assessment, the public engagement findings and other known insights into account, the Community Safety Team developed proposed priorities and key actions. Engagement for the priorities has included:
- A discussion with the SBB Chair, Chief Supt for Buckinghamshire
 - Sharing with the LPA Commanders for South Bucks and Aylesbury
 - Sharing with Service and Corporate Director
 - A partnership workshop at the SBB meeting on 5th December 2022

3. Proposed Priorities

- 3.1 The 5 proposed priorities, outlined in more detail within the Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy 2023-26, are:

- **Neighbourhood crime**
- **Anti-social behaviour**
- **Serious violence**
- **Violence against women and girls**
- **Exploitation of vulnerable people**

- 3.2 The Council's Communications team will assist in the production of this document, ensuring the Plan document meets accessibility standards. As a consequence, some of the detailed wording in the proposed priorities and key actions may need to be amended to meet these requirements. We will work closely with the Communications Team to make sure that accuracy and intended meaning is not lost in this process.

4. Delivery Plans

- 4.1 In line with the new priorities, five Priority Sponsors from different organisations will work with identified multi-agency subgroups to develop Delivery Plans.
- 4.2 The Delivery Plans will be taken to the Safer Buckinghamshire Board for approval, and updates on all actions will be provided at each meeting of the Board. A key action for the Neighbourhood Crime Priority will be to establish a multi-agency operational group who will direct partnership activity, resources and communications in hotspot locations. The Serious Violence subgroup will support early intervention for vulnerable young people and those becoming at risk, and the Exploitation of Vulnerable People Priority will include actions relating to providing training for professionals to improve understanding of exploitation and contextual safeguarding.
- 4.3 The Strategic Assessment identified the top 5 wards which experience the highest crime rates for each crime type. When collated, 13 wards were found to be in the top five for all crime types. Of these 13, 6 are wards that the Opportunity Bucks programme will initially be focusing on.
- 4.4 One of the priorities with the Quality of the Public Realm theme is Reducing crime and Anti-Social Behaviour. The Delivery Plans that will be developed for the Safer Buckinghamshire Plan 2023-26 Priority 1 - Neighbourhood Crime and Priority 2 - Anti-Social Behaviour will ensure there is a focus on the areas with highest crime and disorder rates, including these particular wards.
- 4.5 The attached table provides an update on the work the Council's Community Safety Team are already undertaking within some of these wards. We will explore opportunities to expand appropriate projects into these wards, working with the Priority Sponsors, to help with the levelling up agenda.
- 4.6 A query has been raised in relation to Domestic Abuse (DA) training for Buckinghamshire Council staff. In December 2022 a multi-agency DA and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) training strategy was produced and a fully funded training catalogue launched to internal colleagues and partners. In total there are 15 types of course, which include DA Act, Coercive Control, Adolescent to Parent Abuse and a course on the impact of domestic abuse on children and families. Since the launch last month, 184 people have attended training. Attendees are from Buckinghamshire Council, DA and VAWG specialist services, Police, OPCC, NHS, education, housing associations, solicitors and many more. In addition, two Domestic Abuse Triage Workers have been funded by the Community Safety team, and they work within the Adult Social Care and Children Social Care, in order to provide expertise and guidance on how to deal with domestic abuse cases.

5. Legal and financial implications

- 5.1 The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) (as revised by the Police and Justice Act 2006, and the Policing and Crime Act 2009) places a duty on all Community Safety Partnership to produce a three-year community safety strategy. Within Buckinghamshire the partnership is called the Safer Buckinghamshire Board, and the community safety strategy is called the Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy. The current plan ends on the 31st March 2023, so the Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy 2023-24 needs to be published by 1st April 2023.
- 5.2 At present, all Community Safety Partnerships receive a Community Safety Grant from the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) which is to be used to fund projects which will assist with the delivery of the community safety strategy. The Safer Buckinghamshire Board in conjunction with the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), manage the Community Safety Grant. Bids for the funding are reviewed by the Priority Sponsors, and the Board, to ensure the projects meet the requirements of the Safer Buckinghamshire strategy.
- 5.3 If the decision was made by the PCC that the funding for the Community Safety Partnership was to be reduced, or managed differently by the OPCC, this could impact on the delivery of the Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy 2023-26 and the Delivery Plans.
- 5.4 Over the last 5 years the volume of crime has increased by 14% and it is likely that the demand on community safety partners will continue to increase due to the significant challenges facing the community currently. It may be that economic hardship increases crime levels including fraud even further.
- 5.5 This/These projects can be delivered within the existing funding received and expected in budgetary terms. However, there are continued resource constraints on both the Council and our community safety partners which could see an impact on our delivery.

6. Corporate implications

- 6.1 The Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy 2023-26 and the implementation of the Delivery Plan will contribute towards the Buckinghamshire Council Corporate Plan through the following key priorities:
- Strengthening our communities
 - Protecting the vulnerable

7. Local councillors and community boards

- 7.1 The public consultation was shared with the Community Board and Councillors as part of the communications plan.

8. Communication, engagement and further consultation

- 8.1 During September and October a community safety residents survey was posted on Your Voice asking people in Buckinghamshire what their community safety concerns and priorities were. The survey, which included multiple choice questions and the opportunity to make additional comments, generated 1,264 responses, which was an increase of 21% when compared to the previous survey

9. Next steps and review

- 9.1 The Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy will be published on the Buckinghamshire Council website.
- 9.2 The Safer Buckinghamshire Board Managers will work with the relevant Priority Sponsors to:
- Ensure that detailed delivery plans are developed for the delivery of the priorities;
 - Ensure mobilisation and delivery of the Strategy, commissioning task and finish groups etc. as required;
 - Develop a dashboard that will include delivery impact measure for the plans.
- 9.3 The Annual report on the work of the Safer Buckinghamshire Board will be produced in February/March 2024.

10. Background papers

- 10.1 None

Your questions and views (for key decisions)

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by email to democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

Opportunity Bucks – Community Safety projects currently underway

Current project/activity (with brief detail)		Lead	Timescale
Aylesbury North West			
Aylesbury serious violence open spaces project- aiming to increase confidence of park users whilst decreasing crime, ASB and serious violence. Various initiatives fall under this umbrella.		Chris Geen	Ongoing
Aylesbury North			
Aylesbury serious violence open spaces project- aiming to increase confidence of park users whilst decreasing crime, ASB and serious violence. Various initiatives fall under this umbrella.		Chris Geen	Ongoing
Aylesbury South West			
South Court	Redeeming Our Communities led by local Baptist Church Mentoring for families and young people, Boxing activities Club, Community Café/drop in centre	Chris Geen/Rachel Robinson	Project running for last 12 months and is ongoing
Chesham			
Chesham Town	Chesham multi agency tasking group – Following information from MACE in relation to a group of young people vulnerable to drug and ASB issues engagement with schools and local N/Hood policing, parent safeguarding sessions were conducted for a core vulnerable group who were engaged with, and safeguarding conversations conducted, Youth out-reach work is in action to reach young people in known areas where they gather to sign post them to diversionary activities and support.	Chris Geen/Eve Chason	Project running last 9 months and is ongoing



	Community Safety Officer has recently linked in with the Job Centre, and will be planning drop in sessions which will involve other partners	Eve Chason	Unknown at present
West Wycombe			
Booker, Cressex and Castlefield			
Castlefield	Castlefield problem solving group. A group currently comprising of Community Safety, NHPT, CADO & Bucks Council ASB team. Looks at issues which can be addressed by partnership working such as littering, broken fencing, school engagement, traffic calming issues, family centre engagement etc. Meets every 8 weeks.	Alyss Ord/ Chris Geen	Currently ongoing as actions arise organically.
Abbey			
Dovecot Road Underpass	Knife amnesty bin looking to be installed. Location agreed by highways who own the land. Installation being discussed and banner to advertise being designed.	Alyss Ord/ PCSO Bennett.	April 2023
Terriers and Amersham Hill			
Ryemead and Micklefield			
Totteridge and Bowerdean			

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Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy

2023 – 2026

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Introduction

We are pleased to introduce the Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership Strategy for 2023 – 2026 which sets out the strategic areas that we have prioritised to tackle over the next three years. The central vision of the Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership is for Buckinghamshire to continue to be one of the safest places to grow up, raise a family, live, work and do business.

The Safer Buckinghamshire Board, which is the multi-agency partnership responsible for tackling crime and disorder within Buckinghamshire, is committed to addressing the issues that cause the greatest level of harm to our communities. The priorities within this Strategy are informed by an in-depth analysis of data from a range of community safety agencies which are contained in the Partnership Strategic Assessment, along with the views of people living and working within Buckinghamshire.

Our 2023-2026 priorities are:

- Neighbourhood Crime
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Serious Violence
- Violence against Women and Girls
- Exploitation of Vulnerable People

We recognise we can only achieve our vision with our communities. With community involvement, we will be more able to protect individuals and property and make our neighbourhoods even safer. We want to reduce crime and disorder and protect vulnerable people in Buckinghamshire. Crime is constantly changing, and we face increased pressures on our resources. A partnership approach that involves local communities is the best way to tackle these challenges.

We would like to acknowledge all of the hard work and efforts of partner agencies and Council services who, on a daily basis, contribute significantly to keeping Buckinghamshire safe – and we look forward to replicating further successes throughout 2023 – 2026.

Chief Supt Michael Loebenberg
Chair – Safer Buckinghamshire Board

Dr Jane O-Grady
Vice Chair – Safer Buckinghamshire Board

The Safer Buckinghamshire Board

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 placed a duty on the police and local authorities to work together with named partner organisations to form a Community Safety Partnership and develop an action plan to reduce crime within the local area. In Buckinghamshire this partnership is called the Safer Buckinghamshire Board.

The members of the Safer Buckinghamshire Board are:

- Buckinghamshire Council
- Thames Valley Police
- Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service
- Buckinghamshire Integrated Care Board
- National Probation Service – Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire
- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner

The Board works with a wide range of partners from the statutory, community/voluntary and business sectors; and other organisations are invited to attend Board meetings and be involved in the work of the Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership.

The Safer Buckinghamshire Board works closely with other strategic boards to support the delivery of the priorities set out in the Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy. Issues such as domestic violence and abuse, tackling serious violence and keeping children and young people safe, requires a safeguarding focus and long term health interventions, to ensure that the underlying causes are addressed. A number of the priorities and actions outlined in the Strategy are shared across the four strategic partnerships, with regular meetings of the chairs of the boards enabling delivery of our shared priorities.

The Board has Statutory Duties in in relation to:

- Domestic Homicide Reviews
- Annual Partnership Strategic Assessment
- Community Safety Strategy
- Community Engagement and Consultation
- Information Sharing Protocols and Information Sharing Agreements
- Reducing reoffending
- Preventing extremism
- Modern Slavery
- Anti-social behaviour
- Drugs and alcohol misuse

Key Legislation

Key pieces of legislation govern the priorities in this Strategy. Due consideration has been given to the following:

Crime and Disorder Act 1998, Police and Justice Act 2006, Policing and Crime Act 2009

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 gave a statutory responsibility to local authorities, the police, and key partners to reduce crime and disorder in their communities. Responsible authorities, commonly referred to now as Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs), are required to carry out audits every three years and to implement crime reduction strategies.

The Police and Justice Act 2006 introduced amendments, including the addition of anti-social behaviour and substance misuse within the remit of the Community Safety Partnership strategies. Reducing reoffending was added by the Policing and Crime Act 2009.

Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004

The requirement for Community Safety Partnerships to conduct Domestic Homicide Reviews came into effect in April 2011 as a result of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.

Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

This introduced directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to replace Police Authorities in England and Wales. It is a requirement for the PCC to have regard to the priorities of the responsible authorities making up the CSPs and for those authorities to have regard to the police and crime objectives set out in the Police and Crime Plan. The legislation also brought with it a mutual duty for the PCC and the responsible authorities to act in co-operation with each other in exercising their respective functions.

The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014

The Act introduced simpler and more effective powers to tackle anti-social behaviour and provide better protection for victims and communities. This includes a new Community Trigger and Community Remedy to give people a greater say in how agencies respond to complaints. Updated statutory guidance from the Home Office released in December 2017 has brought greater clarity around the use of the tools and powers introduced by the Act.

Safeguarding legislation

Between 2014 and 2016 a number of pieces of legislation were introduced, including the Care Act 2014, Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, Serious Crime Act 2015, Modern Slavery Act 2015 and Psychoactive Substances Act 2016. Legislation introduced duties including new reporting, referral and decision-making mechanisms, staff awareness requirements and impacts on contract management in the work of relevant organisations.

Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015

This places a legal duty on local authorities “when exercising its functions, to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism”. Prevent is one of four strands of the government’s counterterrorism strategy and aims to stop people

becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. Section 36 of the CTSA places a duty on local authorities to ensure that a Channel Panel is in place for their area that provides support for people who are identified as being vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism.

Domestic Abuse Act 2021

The changes introduced through the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 will impact on victims, families and agencies by improving the response to domestic abuse. The Act included a statutory definition of domestic abuse; introduction of a Domestic Abuse Commissioner; a new Domestic Abuse Protection Notice and Order; a new duty on local authorities in England to provide support to victims and their children in safe accommodation.

Serious Violence Duty (Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022)

The Serious Violence Duty requires local authorities, the police, fire and rescue authorities, specified criminal justice agencies and health authorities to work together to formulate an evidence based analysis of the problems associated with serious violence in a local area, and then produce and implement a strategy detailing how they will respond to those particular issues. Prisons, youth custody agencies and educational authorities may also need to work with these core partners.

National Drugs Strategy – From Harm to Hope

A new cross-Government 10-year national drugs strategy was published in April 2022 with 3 core priorities:

- Break drug supply chains
- Deliver a world class treatment and recovery system
- Achieve a shift in demand for recreational drugs

Guidance for local delivery partners sets out a requirement for local areas to have a multi-agency Combating Drugs Partnership (CDP), accountable for delivering against the new National Combating Drugs Outcomes Framework.

About Buckinghamshire

Buckinghamshire is a county in the south-east of England, bordering Greater London and Berkshire to the south, Oxfordshire to the west, Northamptonshire to the north, Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes to the north-east and Hertfordshire to the east. Buckinghamshire consists of 12 key towns: Amersham (New and Old Town); Aylesbury, Beaconsfield (old and new town), Buckingham, Chesham, Gerrards Cross, Great Missenden, High Wycombe, Marlow, Princes Risborough, Wendover, Winslow.

- The population size in the County has grown from around 505,300 people in 2011 to approximately 553,100 people in 2021. An increase of 9.5 per cent (2021 Census).
- In England, over the same period (2011 to 2021), the population grew by nearly 3.5 million to 56,489,800, an increase of 6.6 per cent. The growth is 2.9 per cent lower than the increase in Buckinghamshire (2021 Census).
- There were 6.2 per cent more 20-39-year-olds in Buckinghamshire in 2021 than previously estimated by the ONS. However, there were 3.3 per cent fewer 0-14-year-olds than previously estimated (2021 Census).

Buckinghamshire is an affluent county but contains some of the lowest levels of deprivation in England, with 3.3% of the population categorised as living in the 3 most deprived Indices of Multiple Deprivation deciles.

The relative affluence masks areas of poverty, with the greatest deprivation in Buckinghamshire found in the population of 'Urban City and Town' areas.

Buckinghamshire has better health overall in comparison to England and the South East. Life expectancy is higher for men and women; however, the health of residents varies within, and between, local areas. For example, people living in more deprived areas are more likely to live in poor health and die younger than people living in more affluent areas. They are also more likely to develop multiple long-term conditions earlier, such as diabetes and heart disease.

- In 2018 to 2020, the average life expectancy for men in Buckinghamshire was 81.5 years, and the average life expectancy for women was 85.1 years.

People in Buckinghamshire have also experienced declining mental health with rising diagnoses, referral rates and greater social isolation. COVID-19 has also impacted income, employment, and education – all factors that can affect someone's health and wellbeing.

Buckinghamshire has lower crime rates than England, the South East and Thames Valley. However, examining data at a smaller geographical level reveals areas within the county that experience crime rates far higher than the average rate for the county. Thames Valley Police is responsible for policing Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, along with Berkshire and Oxfordshire. It is the largest non-metropolitan force in England and Wales.

What have we done in the last three years?

The priorities we committed to delivering in the previous Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy covering the period 2020-23 are set out below:

- Helping communities to become more resilient - targeting support to those communities experiencing greater levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Protecting vulnerable adults and children - working with them to reduce their chances of experiencing or committing serious crime, especially violent crime, or being exploited.
- Addressing the impact of drugs, alcohol, and poor mental health - working to reduce levels of crime and harm linked to these factors.
- Tackling domestic violence and abuse - focusing on early intervention and improving services for victims.
- Dealing with offending - acting as early as possible to prevent first time offending and bringing offenders to justice and working hard to stop re-offending.

For the duration of our previous Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy 2020-23, we were able to make substantial headway on achieving our aims through the delivery of projects, partnership working, and placing the victims of crime at the heart of our response to crime and disorder. However, the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic must be acknowledged. During the last three years, the pandemic has forced the agencies involved in the Safer Buckinghamshire Board to adopt new ways of working. Across all of our priorities, we have addressed the impact of Covid-19 and taken steps to reduce its impact on crime and the causes of crime.

This has undoubtedly been a difficult period, but the strength of partnership working in Buckinghamshire has enabled the Community Safety Partnership to remain assured that community safety issues across Buckinghamshire are identified, addressed and reviewed.

During the last three years we have:

- Expanded the Council's Street Warden Team to cover not only High Wycombe town centre, but also Aylesbury. They have been working with partners to address town centre issues of begging and rough sleeping – supporting and referring individuals who are genuinely homeless, along with identifying those who are exploiting visitors to our town centres.
- The Community Safety newsletter, which includes a variety of community safety information and signposting to local services, now reaches almost 4000 subscribers each quarter.
- Buckinghamshire Council were awarded accreditation as a Friends Against Scams (FAS) Organisation.
- The Council's Community Safety Team are working alongside Trading Standards and Thames Valley Police to establish a local multi-agency Task and Finish Group to raise public awareness of fraud and scams.
- Environmental Visual Audits (EVAs) have been regularly undertaken alongside community members, Thames Valley Police and representatives from other partner

agencies in some of our local areas, to identify issues of concern. Partners have then developed a holistic approach in taking action to address the problems.

- Buckinghamshire Council Serious Violence Officers are linked into the Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) funded Hospital Navigator post, based within Stoke Mandeville Hospital. The Navigator, alongside vetted volunteers, work within the A&E Unit to identify individuals who may be a victim or perpetrator of serious violence. They are approached and offered support and if accepted, signposted on to further services.
- The Buckinghamshire Serious Violence Reduction plan has been developed and embedded across the Partnership, which includes the development of the VRU multi-agency data-sharing and analytical platform Thames Valley Together.
- There has been an increase in service and partnership representation within our Anti-Slavery and Exploitation Network (A-SEN), which aims to raise awareness of issues within this area and share knowledge and best practice. Speakers have included nationally recognised organisations such as: The Salvation Army, Gangmaster and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA), Anti-Slavery Commissioners Office and Human Trafficking Foundation.
- The Buckinghamshire Hotel Watch Scheme has been expanded to over 80 premises across the county - all of which have been provided with information and guidance on how to spot the signs and report concerns, of exploitation.
- Following training, 3 community hubs were created to support and work with LGBTQ+, disability and ethnic minority communities. The hubs delivered projects during National Hate Crime Awareness Week
- Police and Crime Commissioner Community Safety funding has been allocated to support specialist intervention activities to students who are at highest risk of engaging in activities that put them at risk of exploitation and/or serious violence and criminality
- Partners are delivering the Blue Light project, which utilises behaviour change and assertive outreach strategies with complex drinkers, whose alcohol use and associated lifestyle contributes to a pattern of more frequent contact with a range of frontline public services. This is a highly diverse service user group whose social circumstances range from being housed to homeless, involved in the criminal justice system, commonly experiencing mental health problems, facing financial difficulties, and lacking in social capital or support networks.
- Criminal Justice Community Connectors have been recruited and work in the courts and police custody suite screening people, giving harm reduction advice and, where appropriate, Naloxone training and issuing a Naloxone kit. This work has resulted in a steady increase in referrals for individuals requiring structured drug/alcohol treatment.
- Needle Exchange Dispensing Unit has been installed within Aylesbury Custody Suite and TVP have been working in partnership on a harm reduction initiative to ensure appropriate access to needles for people who inject drugs. A Needle and Syringe dispensing machine has now been fitted within Aylesbury custody suite to dispense 1ml & 2ml packs. The dispensing units will be managed and restocked by One Recovery Bucks.
- The Buckinghamshire Council Community Safety team were successful in obtaining funding from the Ministry of Justice. With this, Women's Aid successfully appointed

a Complex Needs Floating Support Worker in December 2020. The worker provides intensive one to one work with clients of all risk levels who are survivors of domestic abuse but are unable to access emergency refuge accommodation. Clients are offered support, information and advocacy when dealing with other issues relating to their domestic abuse whilst in temporary accommodation.

- Talkback were commissioned by Buckinghamshire Council in March 2020 to produce a research and recommendations report into domestic abuse and learning disability and/or autism in Buckinghamshire. Following on from this, Talkback Advice Bureau (a drop-in service) was launched in Wycombe in November 2021. A second drop-in centre will open in Chesham in 2022. Funding is also in place to develop a service online.
- Development of a 24 hour mental health helpline to provide advice during covid pandemic
- There are 441 trained Domestic Abuse Champions across a range of organisations in Buckinghamshire.
- The PCC funded Youth Offending Service multi-agency project has enabled effective prevention work to be carried out across 16 schools in Buckinghamshire with young people at risk of offending.
- National data shows that Buckinghamshire had 132 First Time Entrants per 100,000 young people aged 10-18 in the October 2020 to September 2021 period. This is a decrease from October 2019 – September 2020 where there were 153 First Time Entrants per 100,000. Buckinghamshire Youth Offending Service is performing better than the National and Thames Valley rates against this indicator.
- The Safer Buckinghamshire Board allocated funding from the PCC Community Safety grant to increase the outreach capacity for both Wycombe and Aylesbury Women's Aid in response to increased demand following Covid lockdown.
- A professional's toolkit of learning disability and domestic abuse advice materials and publicity has been created and is being regularly updated. Buckinghamshire Council has started work to create an Easy Read website for those with learning disabilities. One of the roles of this website will be to host the Toolkit.

What you told us

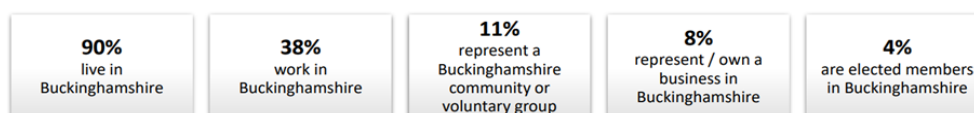
Each year the Safer Buckinghamshire Board undertakes an annual public consultation in order to understand the views and concerns of residents and communities.

In September 2022, we asked people in Buckinghamshire what they thought the biggest community safety issues were. The survey included multiple choice questions and the opportunity for people to give comments.

However, due to the sad passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, a few days into the survey we halted the promotion and communications for a few weeks, out of respect.

Nevertheless, we received 1,264 responses, an increase of 20% on last year

- Demographic information was collected for the first time this year and indicates a reasonable distribution across age, sex, and ethnicity. A slightly higher proportion of women completed the survey (57%) and the age groups between 35 and 74yrs are over-represented (75% in total).



- Distribution of respondents were heavily weighted to the south of the county, with 50% from Chiltern and South Bucks area.
- When asked how much of an issue respondents felt a list of crime types were over the last 12 months, the following were selected as the most concerning – this is compared to those selected in 2021:

Top Concerns Related to Crime 2022	% of respondents with 'Very Big' or 'Fairly Big' concerns
Fraud /scams (including online fraud)	67% ←
Theft from a motor vehicle	52% ↑
Criminal damage	49% ↑
Cyber crime / cyber bullying	44% ←
Theft of a motor vehicle	43% ↑
Theft of equipment / tools from van	42% ↓
Burglary - sheds and garages	41% ←

Top Concerns Related to Crime 2021	% of respondents with 'Very Big' or 'Fairly Big' concerns
Fraud / scams (including online fraud)	69%
Theft of equipment / tools from van	49%
Theft from a motor vehicle	48%
Cyber crime / cyber-bullying	44%
Criminal damage	43%
Burglary - sheds and garages	41%

- As the tables illustrates, fraud and scams continue to be of most concern to respondents. The remaining crime categories that are of most concern have remained similar to those selected in 2021, however with the addition of theft of a motor vehicle as a fairly big/very big concern.

- The most common reasons for responding that a type of crime is a 'Very Big' or 'Fairly Big' concern is 'you heard about it in the local news' (54%) and 'it has happened to someone you know' (52%).
- When asked how much of an issue respondents felt a list of types of anti-social behaviour (ASB) were over the last 12 months, the following were selected as the most concerning – this is compared to those selected in 2021:

Top Concerns Related to ASB 2022	% of respondents with 'Very Big' or 'Fairly Big' concerns	Top Concerns Related to ASB 2021	% of respondents with 'Very Big' or 'Fairly Big' concerns
Speeding	66% ←	Speeding	77%
Fly tipping	65% ←	Fly Tipping / Litter	76%
Parking	56% ←	Parking	64%
Criminal damage / vandalism	48% ↑	Dog Fouling	51%
Dog fouling	44% ↓	Criminal Damage / Vandalism	43%

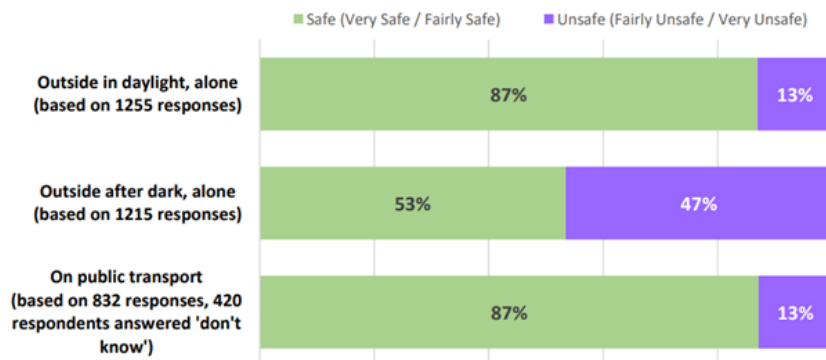
- Although the top three issues remain the same as last year, the proportion of respondents considering them to be either Very Big or Fairly Big issues has fallen in each case.
- Criminal damage / vandalism is the only ASB issue to see an increase, up 5%. This was also reflected in the Crime question.
- The most commonly selected reason for responding that a type of ASB is a 'Very Big' or 'Fairly Big' concern is 'it has happened to you / you've seen it before'.
- Concerns relating to ASB continue to primarily be based on personal experience of the responder, rather than hearing about it from a third party. This was also the case in the 2021 survey
- When asked how much of a problem respondents felt a list of drugs and alcohol related issues were, the following were selected as fairly and very big concerns:

Top concerns relating to Alcohol and Drugs 2022	% of respondents with 'Very Big' or 'Fairly Big' concerns	Top Concerns Related to Alcohol and Drugs 2021	% of respondents with 'Very Big' or 'Fairly Big' concerns
Drug paraphernalia discarded (canisters)	43% ←	Drug paraphernalia discarded (canisters)	47%
Drug use	43% ←	Supply / selling of drugs	43%
Behaviour related to drug use	42% ←	Drug use	43%
Supply / selling of drugs	42% ←	Behaviour related to drug use	43%
Drug possession	39% ←	Drug possession	37%
Alcohol disorder / behaviour	38% ←	Alcohol disorder / behaviour	36%

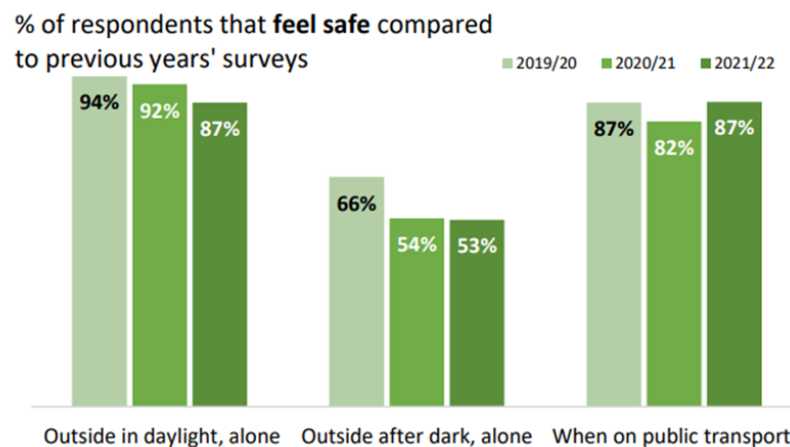
- The most common reasons for responding that a Drugs concern is 'Very Big' or 'Fairly Big' is 'it has happened to you / you have seen it before'. This was also the case in the 2021 survey.
- The proportion of respondents that were a victim of a crime in the 12 months leading up to the survey was 29%, higher than 2021 (20%). The proportion of crime

victims that did not report the crime in 2022 is 33%, slightly lower than 2021 (36%). Direct comparison with last year is difficult due to a different question configuration – however, ‘Little chance of catching the perpetrator’ is the most common reason in both years

- When asked how safe/unsafe respondents feel in their local areas, 47% felt unsafe/very unsafe after dark, whilst 13% felt unsafe/very unsafe when outside in daylight. 13% of respondents felt unsafe/very unsafe on public transport, however only 832 residents answered this question, and 420 responded ‘don’t know’.



- The following table illustrates the difference in responses over the last three years regarding people’s feeling of safety:



Crime and Community Safety in Buckinghamshire

The Strategic Assessment is produced 3-yearly, assessing crime and crime related issues across the county to inform the priorities of the Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership. The last report was completed in 2020, reviewing the 5-year period between 1st April 2014 and 31st March 2019. The 2023 Strategic Assessment includes data from Thames Valley Police, Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue and Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards, it covers the time-frame April 2017 – March 2022.

The crime rate in Buckinghamshire in 2021/22 has marginally increased for the fourth year (excluding 2020/21 – see below regarding Covid Pandemic) to 59.6 crimes per 1000 population. Compared with the wider Thames Valley (72.4 crimes per 1000 population) and England (88.7 crimes per 1000 population), Buckinghamshire remains an area of relatively low levels of crime. Nevertheless, between 2017 and 2022 there were 152,235 crime occurrences across Buckinghamshire with 79,198 recorded victims, 21% of whom were victimised on more than one occasion.

The high-volume crime in Buckinghamshire is similar to that identified 3 years ago, with violent offences (37%) and theft offences (30%), accounting for most crimes. However, the increasing levels of violent crime identified in the Strategic Assessment 2020 have continued, as has the identified trend of theft crimes reducing (even without the impact of Covid). The result is that violent crime is now the highest volume crime type in Buckinghamshire, with theft offences now accounting for the second highest volume of crime. This pattern is repeated nationally and is not unique to Buckinghamshire. Public order is the third highest volume crime with 14% share, which has also increased over last 3 years. Other crime categories continue to account for broadly the same proportion of crime as 3 years ago.

2021/22 crime rates:

- Violence against the person offences 22.1 crimes per 1000 population – an increase of 9.6 over last 5 years
- Criminal damage and arson 5.7 crimes per 1000 population – a decrease of 1.4 over 5 years
- Public order offences 8.3 crimes per 1000 population – and increase of 6.7 over 5 years
- Theft offences 17.6 crimes per 1000 population – a decrease of 8.5 over 5 years
- Sexual offences 2.2 crimes per 1000 population – an increase of 0.6 over 5 years
- Drug offences 2.0 crimes per 1000 population – a increase of 0.5 over 5 years

Covid Pandemic

In March 2020, a global pandemic placed the UK into a series of national lockdowns and restrictions and there has been significant impact on many aspects of life, both during and since the key periods of lockdown. Crime levels reflected some of the significant changes. The Office National Statistics (ONS) highlighted an instant drop in overall crime. This same pattern can also be seen in the crime levels of Buckinghamshire.

Figure 12 - Crime level changes June 2019 - May 2020, England and Buckinghamshire



The drop was not consistent across all crime types, the pattern in Buckinghamshire mirrored the national pattern. Those crime types that fell significantly, nationally were Sexual Offences, Robbery Offences, Criminal Damage & Arson Offences, and Theft Offences as outlined by ONS2. Such changes are likely a result of:

- People being instructed to stay home, with the closure of the night-time economy and non-essential retail
- Reduced movement of people, limiting the opportunity for perpetrator and victim to come into contact, and those people not at home being more visible.
- The act of staying home had a protective effect against some crimes such as residential burglary and vehicle crime.

The pandemic also had a significant and widespread economic and social impact. Living under Covid-19 restrictions compounded existing vulnerabilities and, in some cases, individuals not previously identified as vulnerable may have become so because of the pandemic.

Challenges were not felt equally across all communities; while some were grateful to spend more time with families, stop long commutes, achieve a better work / life balance and save money, other people experienced increased levels of loneliness and isolation and reduced personal resilience and loss of income, this was particularly noted in young people and older adults.

As the financial crisis now takes hold, those people who struggled economically, in health and / or socially are facing this next challenge with reduced resilience and resources.

War in Ukraine

Many Ukrainians have sought refuge in the UK. The Government's Homes for Ukraine scheme has resulted in Ukrainian refugees moving into Buckinghamshire. Some of these people may have experienced trauma, be vulnerable to exploitation and potentially could become victims of domestic violence in this country. There is also the potential that they could experience hate crime.

Financial crisis

For the first time in a generation or more, interest rates are increasing, which together with increasing energy, fuel and food prices is creating cost of living increases that many people cannot absorb.

Our priorities for the next three years

Using all the information available we have developed a set of priorities for 2023-26. They focus on the known causes of crime and also the concerns of people in Buckinghamshire.

1. *Neighbourhood Crime*
2. *Anti-Social Behaviour*
3. *Serious Violence*
4. *Violence against Women and Girls*
5. *Exploitation of Vulnerable People*

Cross Cutting Priorities

Underpinning these five priorities will be common themes that are applicable to any or all of the priorities to a greater or lesser degree. Those common themes are:

- **COVID-19 recovery**

It is important to look at how we return our services to 'business as usual' as we move out of the pandemic, recognising the impact COVID-19 has had on residents' and businesses, and using what we have learned to enhance and improve our approach.

- **Drugs and Alcohol**

Drug use drives crime, damages people's health, puts children and families at risk and reduces productivity – it impacts all of the country, with the most deprived areas facing the greatest burden. A new cross-Government 10 year national drugs strategy 'From harm to hope' was published in April 2022. This followed the publication of Dame Carol Black's independent drugs review in 2020 and 2021, commissioned by the Home Secretary. The strategy is led by the Home Office and includes additional investment for local authorities to supplement the public health grant tied to specific actions as agreed with the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities.

The strategy has 3 core priorities:

- a) Break drug supply chains
- b) Deliver a world class treatment and recovery system
- c) Achieve a shift in demand for recreational drugs

Guidance on the strategy sets out a requirement for local areas to have a multi-agency Combating Drugs Partnership (CDP), accountable for delivering against the new National Combating Drugs Outcomes Framework. A Buckinghamshire Combating Drugs Partnership has been established on the Buckinghamshire Council footprint and is chaired by the Director of Public Health and Community Safety.

While the key focus is on drugs, it is recognised that alcohol is frequently used alongside drugs and that treatment services tend to be integrated across alcohol and drugs (as in Buckinghamshire). It has been agreed nationally CDPs should cover both alcohol and drugs as their use is interlinked.

As well as being driven by the Combatting Drugs Partnership, tackling the impact of drugs and alcohol will also feature within the delivery plans for each of the Safer Buckinghamshire Board priorities for 2023-26.

- **Offending**

The number of young people entering the youth justice system for the first time is lower in Buckinghamshire than national rates and rates across the Thames Valley. The rate of young people reoffending in Buckinghamshire is also currently lower than that seen nationally, and across the Thames Valley. However, both national and local data clearly shows that young people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are over-represented within the criminal justice system. Buckinghamshire's Youth Justice Plan sets out its ambition to continue to focus on prevention and diversion to ensure these rates remain low and that disproportionality is addressed across the county.

The causes of offending are broad and complex, so it is important that a range of organisations work together to help prevent offending and re-offending. Once someone has begun offending, there is a greater chance that they will re-offend. For adults in particular, the risk of reoffending is reduced if people can rebuild community and family connections and access safe, stable accommodation. Employment and education are also critical, along with providing continuity of care for offenders who experience substance misuse issues, especially when they leave prison. The criminal justice partnership plans focus on these important issues.

The Safer Buckinghamshire Partnership will maintain strong links with this agenda to ensure we support partners to deliver positive actions, through our delivery plans and through funding opportunities.

- **Levelling up**

Whilst the majority of our communities are thriving in the county, we know that in some areas of Buckinghamshire people are experiencing significant hardship. As partners, we want to come together with these communities and draw upon our collective resources to enhance opportunities and promote community wellbeing.

The Government has placed 'Levelling up' at the heart of its agenda to recover after the pandemic.

Within Buckinghamshire, 'Opportunity Bucks - Succeeding for All' provides a framework for bringing partners together to focus our collective resources in tracking those local priorities that will make a difference to the outcome of residents. It will focus on five themes:

- Education and Skills
- Jobs and Career Opportunities
- Quality of our Public realm
- Standard of Living
- Health and Wellbeing

Initially, the programme will be focused on 10 wards in three areas – parts of Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham. Local action plans will be developed through engagement with the communities, led by the Community Boards.

Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour is one of the priorities within the Quality of our Public Realm theme, therefore the Safer Buckinghamshire Board will undertake co-ordinated, joined up work with the Opportunity Bucks Quality of the Public realm Working Group to deliver reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour in identified locations.

Delivery Plans

Delivery Plans will be produced for each priority setting out clear measures so that we can track the impact of our actions.

The plans will seek to tackle each of the priorities by taking a public health approach and addressing the underlying factors in order to provide the maximum benefit for the largest number of people.

It is also important to work with our local communities to understand local priorities and develop an approach that is responsive and effective in increasing feelings of safety.

We will use our funds, including the Community Safety Grant from the Police and Crime Commissioner, to support these priorities. Our focus will be on early interventions to prevent crime at the earliest opportunity.

The [Thames Valley Police and Criminal Justice Plan](#) sets out the strategic priorities for policing between 2021 and 2025:

- Strong local policing – preventing crime and protecting communities
- Fighting serious organised crime – protecting vulnerable people
- Fighting fraud and cybercrime – fighting modern crimes
- Improving the criminal justice system – reducing reoffending
- Tackling illegal encampments – enforcing with partners

The new Safer Buckinghamshire Board priorities will contribute to the delivery of the above Police and Criminal Justice Plan priorities.

Priority 1 - Neighbourhood Crime

Our research, analysis and consultation feedback has told us that:

‘Crime destroys lives. Victims are often left traumatised, injured or heartbroken. Crime can ruin neighbourhoods and does great economic damage to our country. It makes people feel unsafe on the street and in their homes. Criminal activity fuels and funds huge criminal enterprises. Involvement in crime can set someone on a path that brings enormous harm to themselves and others.’ (*Beating Crime Plan, 2021*)

When asked how much of an issue respondents felt a list of crime types were over the last 12 months, Fraud and Scams continue to be of most concern to respondents, with 67% of those completing our survey feeling it was a ‘fairly big’ or ‘very big’ concern. This was followed by theft from motor vehicle (52%), criminal damage (49%), cybercrime (44%) and theft of a motor vehicle (43%).

The National Crime Agency (NCA) states that fraud is the most experienced crime in the UK. Fraud can be defined as trickery used to gain a dishonest advantage, which is often financial, over another person. Fraud is an under-reported crime, the NCA estimates only 20% of crimes are reported to the police.

Tackling and reducing crime is the central aim of a Community Safety Partnership, and therefore it is essential as one of the priorities.

We will:

- Work with key partners to establish an operational group, who will take an evidence-informed approach to crime hotspots and trends. The group will direct partnership activity, resources and communications, taking into account the community safety concerns identified through the public consultation.
- Continue to raise awareness of fraud, scams and cybercrime and how people can report incidents, providing support for those that need it.
- Support the work of the Combatting Drugs Partnership, recognising drugs and alcohol as drivers of crime and associated criminalities.
- Work with communities and partners to raise awareness of Hate Crime, building trust so people feel confident in reporting.
- Support innovative projects that address the prevention and reduction of offending behaviour.

Priority 2 - Anti-Social Behaviour

Our research, analysis and consultation feedback has told us that:

Anti-social behaviour can be described as behaviour/actions which cause or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress and, if left unchecked, can have a serious adverse effect on individuals, communities and the environment. Victims of anti-social behaviour can become frightened of leaving their home and even feel unsafe when in their homes, meaning they are less likely to engage in community activity, thus creating a more fragmented and less cohesive community.

Anti-social behaviour in Buckinghamshire continues to be a key community concern, identified annually in the Residents Community Safety Survey, which highlighted discarded drug paraphernalia (43%) and behaviour related to drug use (42%) as being a very big or fairly big problem.

Everyone has the right to feel safe in their own homes and neighbourhoods.

We will:

- Work with partners to raise awareness of the ways in which people can report anti-social behaviour, ensuring that safe reporting mechanisms are accessible to all.
- Develop a multi-agency approach which maps occurrences of anti-social behaviour, locations and times. To identify repeat victimisation, known perpetrators, affected parties and direct partnership activity and resources.
- Consider a wide range of preventative and diversionary activities to help respond to anti-social behaviour.
- In partnership with registered social landlords, Community Boards, residents and other key partners, utilise all appropriate tools and powers to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- Support victims of anti-social behaviour by providing practical guidance in partnership with support agencies; to address victim's needs, particularly those who are considered vulnerable.

Priority 3 - Serious Violence

Our research, analysis and consultation feedback has told us that:

Serious violence has a negative impact on individuals, communities and the county as a whole. It stops people feeling safe and affects their wellbeing. We also know that traumatic and negative experiences, especially in childhood, can have a lasting effect and make someone more vulnerable to harm in later life.

Nationally, serious violence and knife crime increased by 84% between June 2014 and June 2020. Concerns around serious violence and the need for specific and co-ordinated attention from partners as a priority matter gained traction with the publication of the national Serious Violence Strategy, April 2018. The Strategy highlighted increases in knife crime and serious violence and was followed in 2019 by the Serious Violence Duty and in 2022 by the Act, placing a legal duty on 'Duty holders' to work together to prevent serious violence – making it a priority within the 2023-26 Safer Buckinghamshire Strategy.

Tackling serious violence is not a law enforcement issue alone. It requires a coordinated approach involving a range of partners across difference sectors.

If serious violence is not appropriately addressed, it can deter individuals from actively engaging in and connecting with leisure, social and community activities.

We will:

- Raise awareness of serious violence through communication, education and training; so that professionals and those in our communities can recognise signs, how to report their concerns and make referrals to other agencies (as appropriate).
- Support early intervention for vulnerable young people and those becoming at risk.
- Deliver the key actions as set out in the partnership [Safer Buckinghamshire Serious Violence Reduction Plan](#)
- Develop awareness of, and embed, the Serious Violence Agenda and Duty requirements amongst the partnership.
- Enhance appropriate support for those who are released from prison, who are most at risk of re-offending.
- Undertake a proactive partnership response to cohorts and locations vulnerable to serious violence.

Priority 4 - Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Our research, analysis and consultation feedback has told us that:

Crimes of violence against women and girls are many and varied. They include rape and other sexual offences, stalking, domestic abuse, 'honour-based' abuse (including female genital mutilation, forced marriage and 'honour' killings), 'revenge porn' and 'upskirting'. These crimes are deeply harmful, not only because of the profound effect they can have on victims, survivors and their loved ones, but also because of the impact they can have on wider society, impacting on the freedom and equality we value and enjoy.

One in 20 adults are estimated to experience domestic abuse every year, equating to almost 21,000 people a year in Buckinghamshire, or 57 people every day. It is a crime which disproportionately affects women, but also happens to men and is irrespective of sexuality, religion, gender, ethnicity, income or age. Individuals and families may live with domestic abuse for a significant time and suffer a multitude of incidents before asking for help. It can have a devastating impact upon physical and mental health and wide-reaching consequences for children who witness and experience it.

We will:

- Deliver early intervention and prevention initiatives to reduce violence against women and girls.
- Raise awareness of these crimes through communication, education and training, so that professionals and those in our community know what to look out for, know how to report their concerns, and make referrals to other agencies (as appropriate)
- Deliver the key actions as set out in the partnership [Domestic Abuse Strategy](#).
- Work to prevent and reduce domestic abuse at the earliest opportunity through proactive use of communication and cross-agency training
- Provide effective services that meet the needs of victims and their families, including male victims and other vulnerable communities.
- Ensure a wide range of safe accommodation options are available for victims, survivors and their children
- Develop a multi-agency approach to dealing with perpetrators

Priority 5 - Exploitation of Vulnerable People

Our research, analysis and consultation feedback has told us that:

Exploitation involves being groomed, forced or coerced into doing something for someone else's gain. The exploitation of vulnerable adults and children is a national issue, often complex and intertwined with serious violence, organised crime, drugs and county lines. Modern Slavery, as defined by the [Modern Slavery Act 2015](#) includes all forms of exploitation. It encompasses slavery, servitude, forced or compulsory labour and human trafficking. Victims are often hidden away, may be unable to leave their situation, or may not come forward because of fear or shame.

We know that in Buckinghamshire less affluent areas and urban areas experience disproportionately higher levels of crime. Many of these areas also experience other deprivations such as Health and Social Care Support needs which can heighten their vulnerability to crime. With the current cost-of-living crisis, it is likely that vulnerabilities will increase, and therefore vulnerability to crime including exploitation, will also increase.

In 2021, 12,727 referrals of potential victims of modern slavery were made in the United Kingdom through the National Referral Mechanism process. This represents a 20% increase in referrals compared to the preceding year. An accurate estimate of the true number of victims is difficult to achieve; recent research suggests only 20-30% of victims are known. If this is the case the number of victims is likely to be 5 times higher than that recorded. In Buckinghamshire criminal exploitation is the most significant form of exploitation and low reporting rates remain a concern for all areas.

Extremism causes harm to individuals and whole communities. By intervening at the earliest opportunity, we can work in partnership to address the personal and social factors which make people more receptive to radicalisation, diverting people away from being drawn into violent ideologies and criminal behaviour.

We will:

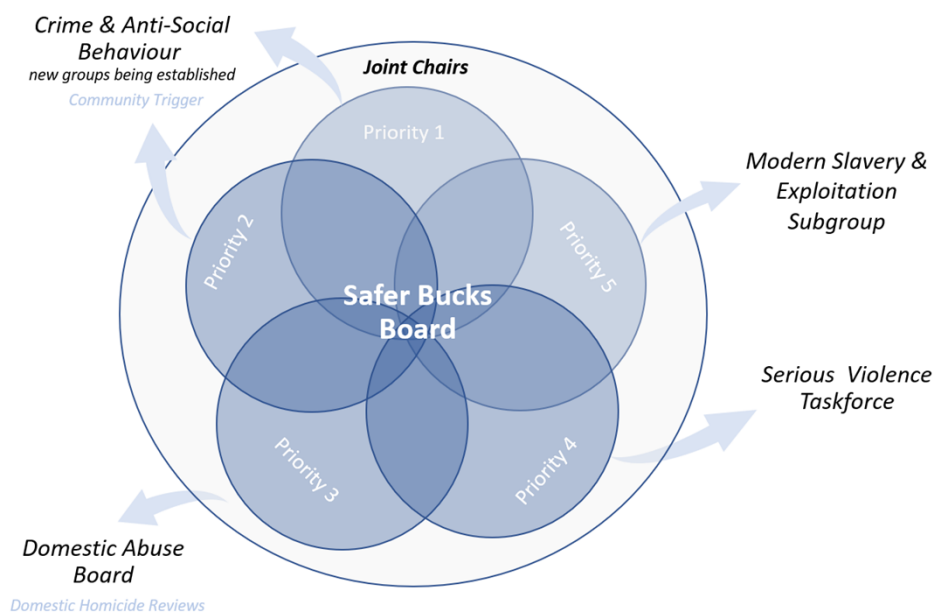
- Identify young people at risk of exploitation and deliver early intervention and prevention projects to prevent further harm.
- Improve reporting and referral processes to effectively identify and safeguard victims of modern slavery and exploitation
- Work with local communities to ensure they can recognise the signs and know how to report exploitation
- Provide training for professionals to improve understanding of exploitation and contextual safeguarding
- Empower those affected by child exploitation, supporting them to identify strategies to exit & withdraw safely
- Identify vulnerable groups and locations where exploitation is at risk of occurring and take action to reduce the risk in these groups and areas.
- Use intelligence to disrupt perpetrators and bring them to justice
- Provide support for individuals (and where appropriate their families) who are vulnerable to radicalisation and extremism leading to terrorism.

How we will work in partnership

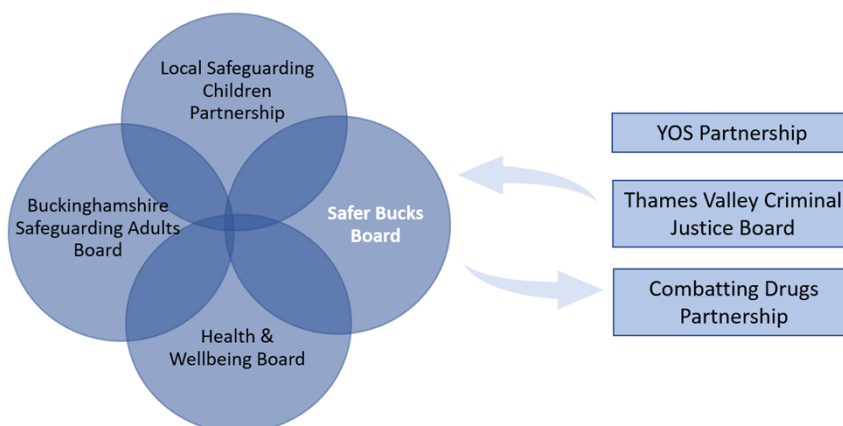
The Safer Buckinghamshire Board has the responsibility to deliver the priorities that are set out within this Strategy. The Board is also responsible for the strategies that flow from this Strategy, including the Serious Violence Plan and the Domestic Abuse Strategy.

This requires partner organisations to work together to share skills, knowledge, and resource in order to effectively deliver a service that achieves our ambitions and makes Buckinghamshire a safer place to live, work and visit.

Partnership Landscape



Strategic Partnerships



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Report to Cabinet

Date:	9 May 2023
Title:	Cost of Living Support for Buckinghamshire Residents
Cabinet Member(s):	Steve Bowles – Cabinet Member for Communities
Contact officer:	Matt Everitt – Service Director, Business Intelligence and Community Support
Ward(s) affected:	None specific
Recommendations:	<p>To note the range of support provided by the Council for individuals experiencing hardship across the county</p> <p>To approve the arrangements for deploying the new Household Support Fund allocation</p>
Reason for decision:	The Government announced final allocations for the Household Support Fund on 20 th February 2023. This report sets out proposals for use of the funding to provide support for Buckinghamshire residents between April 2023 and March 2024 inline with Government guidance.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 As a Council, we recognise the growing pressures being faced by our residents linked to the increases in the cost of living. We have developed and delivered a range of initiatives this year to support residents and staff in regard to these cost of living pressures; and have committed to ensuring the continuation of our Helping Hand service to provide support to residents who need it most.

- 1.2 We are pleased to receive confirmation of the fourth tranche of Household Support Fund grant allocation for the period from April 2023 to March 2024, which will be used to continue to provide essential support to residents during the year.
- 1.3 This builds on the funding we have received from Government since 2020, initially through the Winter Grant and Local Support Grant, and subsequently through the Household Support Fund.
- 1.4 Previous allocations of the Household Support Fund were awarded for a 6-month period only. For the period 1st October 2022 to 31st March 2023, Buckinghamshire was awarded £2.4m of funding from the Household Support Fund to provide support for residents in need of help with food, fuel and other essential household costs.
- 1.5 This paper outlines the support we have provided, and continue to provide, to support residents with cost-of-living pressures. This paper also details how the previous Household Support Fund allocation was used and sets out a proposed use of the new allocation between 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024, ensuring that this is targeted to residents in need of support and in line with the Government guidance.
- 1.6 Further information about usage of previous Household Support Fund allocations can be viewed in previous reports:

<https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=865>



**helping
hand**

Helping Hand 2022/2023

Applications and support provided
1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023



11,390
Total applications



17,146
Total provisions



4,758
Individuals
receiving provisions

Provisions

1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023

17,146
Total provisions



5,040
Referrals



1,538
White goods



990
Essential goods



9,144
Food and fuel



434
Grants

Community Support - School Holiday Vouchers 2022/2023

School Holidays



May Half-Term
13,000



Feb Half-Term
14,139



Summer Holiday
13,650



Easter Holiday
14,500



October Half-Term
13,700



Christmas Holiday
13,950

Total Vouchers Delivered
82,939

2. Cost of Living Initiatives

2.1 Buckinghamshire Council has continued to make further provision to assist both residents and employees who are in need, developed through close partnership working, particularly with the voluntary and community sector.

2.2 Key initiatives have included:

2.2.1 Development of a comprehensive support package for Buckinghamshire Council employees including a dedicated section on the intranet, webinars delivered by Citizens Advice on Debt and Money Management, an Employee Hardship fund for employees who are facing significant challenges, additional support payments to all staff, the launch of an office pantry scheme and development of a cost-of-living staff network.

2.2.2 The relaunch of the Food Champions Network – inviting residents to assist with generating donations for food support organisations.

2.2.3 The launch of Welcoming Spaces where people can come together in a warm, safe and supportive environment. These have been delivered in collaboration with local partner organisations, to provide safe and inclusive spaces for residents to access, free of charge, to stay warm, enjoy a little company and make use of facilities available including Wi-Fi. Initially launched in our Council and Community Libraries there are now over 50 listed on the Bucks Online Directory.

2.2.4 The provision of Warm Boxes, providing key items to enable residents to keep warm and distributed through our county libraries and other key sites.

2.2.5 The Christmas Giving appeal - organising food bank collection points in council offices and encouraging donations in supermarkets.

2.2.6 Developing an Energy Doctor scheme to support eligible households with smaller energy efficiency measure such as draught-proofing and energy saving lightbulbs.

2.3 Further information about the range of support available can be found on our website, which has been updated as a comprehensive source of information for people who need support with the cost of living:

<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/cost-of-living/>

2.4 In partnership with Heart of Bucks, we established a Crisis Fund to raise money to help Buckinghamshire residents in need. Whilst appreciating that the ongoing rising costs are impacting everyone, we also know the incredible generosity that exists in Buckinghamshire and during the cost-of-living crisis many of our residents have wanted to help or offer financial assistance. With Heart of Bucks, for those in a position to do so, we invited people to donate what they could into this fund so the money can be best channelled to get support to the people in our communities who need it most.

2.4.1 This Crisis Fund has raised more than £182,000 in donations, which is being used to support local people who are in the most need with energy, food and other essential costs.

2.5 The Buckinghamshire Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme is funded by the Department for Education and provides free, high-quality holiday activity clubs with a healthy hot meal for children from low-income families. The government has confirmed

the continuation of the HAF programme for the next two financial years until March 2025. The programme runs in the longer school holiday periods (Easter, summer and Christmas) for children in Reception to Year 11 inclusive who receive benefits-related free school meals.

2.5.1 Throughout 2022 the HAF programme enabled over 5,001 individual children and young people across the county to enjoy over 17,500 holiday activity club sessions and hot meals during the school holidays. The range of activities on offer throughout 2022 increased with the inclusion of 'added value' providers who offered one off activities such as mobile farms, roller discos and beatbox workshops. This, alongside the inclusion of family events, take home activity packs and HAF activity booklets, strengthened the offer in Buckinghamshire. With over 5,500 holiday activity club sessions planned for Easter 2023, the number of children accessing HAF is expected to grow during the 23/24 financial year with additional organisations getting involved and offering an increasing number of holiday sessions.

2.5.2 The Council can also offer HAF holiday club places to certain groups of children and young people who are not in receipt of benefits-related free school meals, but who could benefit from HAF provision. This means that we will be able to reach and support more vulnerable children and young people in Buckinghamshire to have a more enjoyable holiday experience. Across 2022, 496 individual children and young people in this category have benefited from HAF provision.

2.6 In addition to the support we are providing locally, the Government has also provided a range of support including:

2.6.1 A £650 one-off Cost of Living Payment delivered through DWP in 2022 to residents on means tested benefits. This support was extended in the Autumn 2022 statement with an announcement that further payments would be made of £300 in Spring 23, £300 in Autumn 23 and a £299 payment made in Spring 2024.

2.6.2 This includes all households receiving: Universal Credit, Income-based Jobseekers Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Pension credit.

2.6.3 The Energy Bills Support Scheme, which provided all households with £400 of support with their energy bills via a discount of £66 applied to their energy bills in October and November, rising to £67 each month from December through to March 2023.

2.6.4 In early 2023, a scheme was introduced to ensure those off-grid (who were eligible) also received this support. In addition, the Alternative Fuels Payment scheme was introduced for households who used alternative fuels for heating. The Energy Price guarantee scheme has also been extended from April 2023 to April 2024.

2.6.5 Pensioner households received an extra £300 in 2022 to help cover the rising cost of energy over the winter, and this was paid to all pensioner households

who receive the Winter Fuel Payment on top of any other one-off support a pensioner household is entitled to. In the 2022 Autumn statement it was announced that this would be repeated in the Winter of 2023.

2.6.6 People who are in receipt of particular disability benefits received a one-off payment of £150 in September, which was exempt from tax and did not count towards the benefit cap nor will it have impacted on existing benefit awards. This scheme was extended in the 2022 Autumn statement with a further payment being made in summer 2023.

3. Household Support Fund 1st October 2022 to 31st March 2023

3.1 Funding allocated during this period totalled £2.4m, via the Household Support Fund.

3.2 This fund was intended to provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs. Authorities had flexibility within the fund to identify which vulnerable households were in most need of support and apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility, ensuring that residents who were not receiving other means of Government support had access to this fund.

3.3 Authorities were required to operate an application-based service for support to ensure those in need had a route to emergency support.

3.4 Within the parameters set out in 3.2, the Household Support Fund could be used to cover:

3.4.1 Energy bills relating to heating, cooking or lighting; and water bills.

3.4.2 Support with food costs either through vouchers or cash.

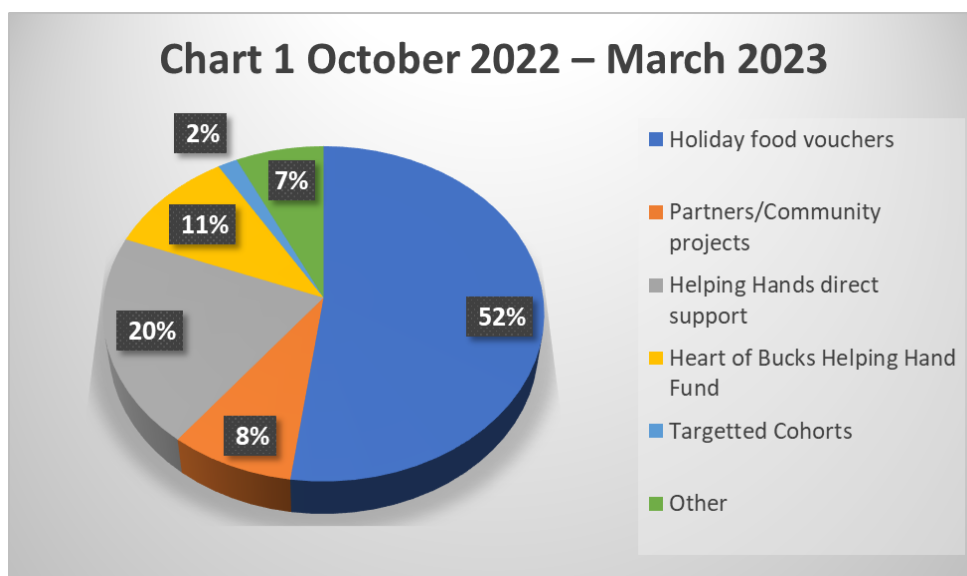
3.4.3 Other household essentials – this may include those linked to energy and water, for example sanitary products, boiler repair or servicing, warm clothing, purchase of fridge/freezers; or for wider essentials, for example broadband costs, phone costs, clothing, transport-related costs such as car repairs.

3.4.4 Housing costs could be covered in exceptional circumstances and where existing housing schemes did not meet this exceptional need. For example, the fund could not be used to provide mortgage support but could be used to cover historic rent arrears that have been built up prior to receipt of other benefits.

3.4.5 The fund could also be used to cover reasonable administration costs, including staff costs, web page design, IT system costs and promotional activity and content to raise the profile of the scheme.

3.4.6 As before, the fund could not be used to cover mortgage costs and could not be used to provide debt and financial advice services.

3.5 Allocated use of this funding is detailed in Chart 1:



3.6 The fund between October 2022 and March 2023 has:

- 3.6.1 Funded more than 56,200 digital food vouchers issued to, on average, 14,000 young people during October Half Term, Christmas, February Half Term and Easter Holidays. Eligible young people are those in receipt of Free School Meals/Early Years' Pupil Premium/2-year-old funded free education places.
- 3.6.2 Funded local food banks who have supported approximately 44,450 adults and children between October 2022 and March 2023.
- 3.6.3 Supported over 30 voluntary and community sector support activities ranging from cookery courses to lunch clubs benefitting over 84 adults and 299 children.
- 3.6.4 Supported over 380 Care Leavers with the provision of supermarket vouchers.
- 3.6.5 Supported 41 households, via a Heart of Bucks grant, with housing costs and arrears, without which these households would have been at serious risk of homelessness and may have required temporary accommodation.
- 3.6.6 The Helping Hand team directly delivered over £490,000 value of support to residents through purchasing essential white goods and essentials to keep them warm including clothing and other essential items.

4. Helping Hand

4.1 The Helping Hand team has led and coordinated use of these funds across Buckinghamshire for the Council, and has continued to provide an application-based service in line with the requirements set out by Government.

4.2 This team works collaboratively across internal Council departments and with partners

to identify, engage and assist residents who require additional support for Food, Warmth and Household living costs. This includes working with Adult Social Care and Children's Services, and referrals are received from social workers on behalf of their clients.

- 4.3 This service model has enabled the development and maintenance of excellent relationships between the Council and the voluntary and community sector, and ensured that the impact of funding provided through these grants is enhanced through further community based-support in areas of need. For example, we have provided support into community groups where we know there is the greatest need and where perhaps the community were less likely to reach out for support.
- 4.4 This approach has also resulted in better insight and intelligence to enable better understanding of our residents and communities, which can then be used to inform activity and interventions delivered by the Council, by the voluntary and community sector, and by our strategic partners including housing associations and the Department for Work and Pensions.
- 4.5 The Helping Hand delivery model accepts direct applications from residents, ensuring that the right support can be provided quickly to those who are in most need.
- 4.6 The Helping Hand Team has delivered awareness raising activity within job centres, with Housing Association Welfare Teams and with the Social Prescriber Network to ensure all those who are engaging with residents are aware of what is available.
- 4.7 There are significant challenges that the service has overcome to enable successful utilisation of these funds for vulnerable residents in Buckinghamshire, including:
 - 4.7.1 Quickly scaling up the offer in line with the Government framework, developing the Helping Hand approach and ensuring visibility for residents and partners.
 - 4.7.2 Managing service delivery tightly in line with the Government framework and the short-term nature and notice of the government funding.
 - 4.7.3 Ensuring that residents most in need benefited from the funds, including using a broad range of data to identify these cohorts and address stigma that can be associated with asking the Council for help.
 - 4.7.4 Establishing at pace appropriate systems, tools and controls for case management, voucher delivery and grant funding to the voluntary and community sector.
- 4.8 The number of direct applications received by the Helping Hand team since 1st April 2022 and the number of services provided is detailed in the tables below:

Table 1: 1 April 2022 – 30 Sept 2022	
Total direct applications:	5,067
Total services delivered:	8,771
Unique people receiving services:	2,933

Table 2: 1 Oct 2022 – 22 Mar 2023	
Total direct applications:	5,845
Total services delivered:	8,134
Unique people receiving services:	2,792

4.9 Table 3 shows a breakdown of the type of services being delivered following direct application into the Helping Hand team:

Table 3 - Services Delivered					
1 April 2022 – 30 Sept 2022			1 Oct 2022 – 22 Mar 2023		
Service	Quantity	%	Service	Quantity	%
Referrals	2685	31%	Referrals	2218	27%
White Goods	707	8%	White Goods	790	10%
Wider Essential Goods	429	5%	Wider Essential Goods	540	7%
Food & Fuel	4715	54%	Food & Fuel	4308	53%
Grants	235	3%	Grants	278	3%
Total	8771		Total	8134	

4.10 Applications in to the Helping Hand team are often complex. An example recently was of a young man, fleeing honour based violence and domestic abuse. He fled without any ID and was placed in temporary accommodation. Had no access to a GP, no bank account, no phone and no money. Our team worked with the P3 Housing Charity to ensure benefits could be applied for. Food vouchers were issued, the team supported him to register with a GP and successfully applied for a grant to clear rent arrears and support with living costs until he received his first benefit payment.

4.11 Another example includes a father and 15-year-old son. The father is unable to read and write. The mother died a couple of years ago, the family were then evicted from their home and subsequently the family has been struggling financially after moving in to a private rented property. The father thought he was receiving additional benefits for his disability but because he can't read he hadn't realised that these had stopped last year. The Helping Hand team asked the Family Support Worker to re-apply for his Personal Independence Payment. A Heart of Bucks grant was awarded to clear his

electric and gas debt and support with living costs whilst waiting for his benefits to be re-assessed.

5. Household Support Fund 4 - April 2023 to March 2024

- 5.1 It has now been confirmed by Department for Work and Pensions that the Household Support Fund is being extended. The fourth tranche of the Household Support Fund will cover a 12 month period and this equates to a further £4.8m for Buckinghamshire to use to support residents between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024.
- 5.2 In line with previous allocations of the Household Support fund, the new fund is intended to provide crisis support to vulnerable households in most need of support to help with significantly rising living costs.
- 5.3 Authorities have flexibility within the fund to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility, ensuring that residents who are not receiving other means of Government support have access to this fund. Local Authorities are expected to use the wide range of data and sources of information at their disposal, including through engagement with relevant Third Party Organisations, to identify and provide support to a broad cross section of vulnerable households to prevent escalation of problems.
- 5.4 Authorities must operate an application-based service for support to ensure those in need have a route to crisis support throughout the duration of the fund, either continuously over the majority of the fund period or in regular intervals throughout the scheme.
- 5.5 The main change to the fourth tranche of the Household Support Fund is that it may be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice, where Authorities consider this appropriate. However, it has been made clear that the primary intention of the fund is to provide crisis support for households, and its use for any advice services would need to complement this. It is clearly articulated in the guidance that there must be a connection between the funding provided for advice services and the practical support provided through this funding.
- 5.6 The guidance clearly states how Local Authorities should use their local insight and intelligence to determine the beneficiaries of the fund, and it is specifically highlighted that support to both disabled people and those with caring responsibilities should be considered given the disproportionate impact that rising costs have had on these residents.
- 5.7 There is a requirement to provide quarterly returns during the HSF4 grant period with the final return to cover the whole period due by 26 April 2024.
- 5.8 Within the parameters set out in 5.3, the fund can be used to cover:
- 5.8.1 Energy bills relating to heating, cooking or lighting; and water bills

- 5.8.2 Support with food costs either through vouchers or cash
- 5.8.3 Other household essentials – this may include those linked to energy and water, for example sanitary products, boiler repair or servicing, warm clothing, purchase of fridge/freezers; or for wider essentials, for example broadband costs, phone costs, clothing, transport-related costs such as car repairs
- 5.8.4 Housing costs can be covered in exceptional circumstances and where existing housing schemes do not meet this exceptional need. For example, the fund cannot be used to provide mortgage support but can be used to cover historic rent arrears that have been built up prior to receipt of other benefits. As before, the fund cannot be used to cover mortgage costs.
- 5.8.5 The fund can also be used to cover reasonable administration costs, including staff costs, web page design, IT system costs and promotional activity and content to raise the profile of the scheme
- 5.8.6 A change from previous funds is that this fund may be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice, where Authorities consider this appropriate however it is clearly stated that this Fund is to provide crisis support for households, and that any advice services would be to complement this practical support.

6. Proposed allocation of the Household Support Fund April 2023 – March 2024

- 6.1 Local Authorities are required to complete a delivery plan to outline their intentions for The Fund, clearly setting out their priorities and approach for use of the Fund, and to demonstrate the ways in which they intend to allocate their funding. The delivery plan will be sent to the Department for Work and Pensions by 17 May 2023.
- 6.2 Table 4 sets out the proposed allocation of the £4.8m that Buckinghamshire will receive from the new Household Support Fund.
- 6.3 These proposals are in line with Government guidance and are modelled around local understanding of need across different categories, informed by local intelligence and previous delivery of support through the Helping Hand service.
- 6.4 Funding will only be used for schemes that are free to residents.
- 6.5 In addition to the allocations listed in Table 4, approximately £340,000 will be used to cover overhead costs in line with the government guidance. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils/1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024-household-support-fund-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england>
- 6.6 Residents may be eligible for support across multiple categories listed in Table 4, and may be eligible to receive support on multiple occasions during the period.

Table 4: Proposed Allocation of Household Support Fund April 2023 – March 2024

Indicative Allocation	% of fund	Target group	Type of Support	Delivery mechanism
£700,381	15%	Covering all target groups	All types of support	Application-based service through the Helping Hand team
£2,258,000	47%	Children/young people: Free School Meals / Early Years Support / Schools / Colleges inc. Afghan/Ukraine refugees	Food Support	Digital food voucher during school holiday periods (October, December, February, May and Easter) Up to £15 per week Summer Holiday £50 for full holiday
£400,000	8%	Covering all target groups	All types of support	Voluntary and Community organisations providing free support to residents, including Foodbanks
£500,000	10%	Covering all target groups	All types of support	Grant and/or Direct Support for Utility arrears through different schemes including Helping Hand Fund administered by Heart of Bucks.
£600,000	13%	Targeted support for priority cohorts, including Care Leavers, Pensioners, residents with disabilities, residents with caring responsibilities.	All types of support	Digital Voucher or other appropriate support
£340,000	7%	Covering all target groups	Other costs	Administration costs, including staff costs, web page design, IT system costs and promotional activity and content to raise the profile of the scheme
£4,798,381	100%	Total grant funding allocation for Buckinghamshire		

Please note that allocations above are indicative. Actual spend will vary in line with resident need and emerging pressures during 2023/24, for example if there is a shortfall in Discretionary Housing Payment during the year this may create additional demand for financial support through the Helping Hand team.

7. Summary

7.1 Buckinghamshire Council is committed to ensuring that vulnerable residents who are most in need receive support via our Helping Hand service.

7.2 The support and intervention we have provided has benefitted many thousands of residents across the County and ensured that families and vulnerable people have had access to food, water, clothing, warmth and other essential items.

7.3 The proposals detailed in this paper aim to ensure that the new allocation of the Household Support Fund is utilised in a targeted and effective manner between now and the end of March, to reduce the impact of the increased cost of living crisis, poverty and financial hardship for Buckinghamshire residents.

8. Legal and financial implications

8.1 The Secretary of State determines the authorities to which grant is to be paid and the amount of grant to be paid.

8.2 The Household Support Fund Grant indicative funding allocation for Buckinghamshire Council for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 is £4,798,381. Pursuant to section 31(3) and 31(4) of the Local Government Act 2003, the Secretary of State determines that the grant will be paid in respect of this period.

8.3 The grant is paid to the Authority to support eligible expenditure only, in line with guidance from the Department for Work and Pensions; and on the basis overall that the provision of grant funding remains subject to the Secretary of State's ongoing satisfaction that all grant usage by the Authority complies fully with the relevant conditions.

8.4 Funding is paid in arrears and following completion of a data return to the Department for Work and Pensions. The amount of grant funding Buckinghamshire receives from the allocation listed in 8.2 will be in line with the evidence provided in the data return. This approach is in line with previous grants and the Helping Hand, Business Intelligence and Finance teams will work together to complete the required returns.

8.5 County Councils and Unitary Authorities have a statutory duty regarding children and are generally responsible for Local Welfare Assistance. The Department for Work and Pensions is providing funding to County Councils and Unitary Authorities (including Metropolitan Councils and London Boroughs), under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, to administer the scheme and provide assistance to households most in need.

8.6 Local Authorities have discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the scope set out in guidance documentation provided by the Department for Work and Pensions. The expectation is that it should primarily be used to support households in the most need particularly those including children and pensioners who would otherwise struggle with energy bills, food, water bills, other essential household costs and housing costs in exceptional circumstances.

8.7 An initial Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and identified no negative impact from the proposals in this report.

9. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

9.1 Not applicable – Portfolio Holder consulted.

10. Communication, engagement & further consultation

10.1 Following this decision, a communications plan will be developed to continue to promote the Helping Hand service and raise awareness of support available to residents who are most in need.

11. Next steps and review

11.1 Following this decision, the Helping Hand service will coordinate use of the Household Support Fund in line with the allocations set out in Table 4.

12. Background papers

12.1 Not applicable.

13. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

13.1.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by email [democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk]



Report to Cabinet

Date:	9 May 2023
Title:	Buckinghamshire’s Rural Business Grants Fund delivery and governance approach
Cabinet Member(s):	Martin Tett
Contact officer:	Claire Phillips
Ward(s) affected:	All wards excluding built up areas such as Aylesbury, High Wycombe, Chesham, Amersham, Beaconsfield
Recommendations:	<p>To agree the programme eligibility and parameters for businesses applying for a Grant</p> <p>To include the Buckinghamshire Rural Business Grants Fund in the council’s capital programme</p> <p>To form a new funding panel to guide the review process of eligible grant applications</p> <p>To delegate the awarding of grants to Economic Growth and Regeneration Service Director, in consultation with Cabinet Member and S151 Officer</p>
Reason for decision:	<p>To agree the Councils approach to allocating the Rural England Prosperity Funding.</p> <p>To agree appropriate programme parameters are in place before launching the fund, alongside delegated decision-making for grant applications to ensure the grant funding is allocated as stipulated by Defra by March 2025.</p>

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This paper sets out details of the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) which was announced by DEFRA in September 2022.
- 1.2 The REPF is a new capital fund from Defra and is a 'top-up' to the UKSPF. It is part of the succession from the EU funded LEADER and Growth Programmes which were part of the Rural Development Programme for England and hugely successful in Buckinghamshire with over 50 businesses supported.
- 1.3 The Council submitted its Addendum to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Investment Plan in November 2022, the Investment Priorities for the funding were agreed by Informal Cabinet.
- 1.4 DEFRA have now approved our addendum and Buckinghamshire Council has been awarded £1.8m to deliver the Rural England Prosperity Fund Capital Grants programme over two financial years up to 31st March 2025.
- 1.5 This paper proposes the delivery approach and governance needed by the Council to ensure high quality delivery and value for money, that will support growth for rural businesses and support a vibrant Buckinghamshire rural economy.

2. Content of report

- 2.1 Buckinghamshire has been allocated £1.8m from the REPF, to deliver a capital grants programme. The programme will run from April 2023-March 2025, with 25% (£450k) allocated in year 1 and 75% (£1.35M) in year 2.
- 2.2 Our Investment Plan submitted to government outlined that activity would be focussed on supporting rural businesses with the following intervention selected for 100% of our funding:
 - capital grant funding for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas
- Linked to this intervention, we are expected to deliver the following outcomes which were based on the results of the previous LEADER programme as a baseline.:
 - a) Jobs created - 55
 - b) Number of new businesses created - 5
 - c) Number of businesses experiencing growth - 10
- Although not a requirement of our Investment Plan, we proposed indicative targets to be achieved using the results from the previous LEADER programme as a baseline.

- 2.3 DEFRA's approach allows Councils to design and manage schemes as they see fit, with guidance stating that due diligence will need to be carried out, ensuring beneficiaries have robust business plans demonstrating the need and viability leading to the success of a project.
- 2.4 This report sets out the parameters and eligibility, the process for applying for a grant and how applications will be reviewed and awarded funding.

Parameters, eligibility and programme details for the fund

- 2.5 To help inform the parameters of the programme and design how the Bucks Rural Business Grants Fund should be delivered, the Council has been working collaboratively with the Bucks Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF), who both have experience of delivering EU rural funding in the Rural Development Programme for England and LEADER programmes in the past.
- 2.6 There are a number of Government requirements that the Council must follow to administer the REPF funding:
- a) Areas that the programme covers are rural areas, with built-up areas such as High Wycombe, Aylesbury, Chesham, Amersham, Beaconsfield and some of the surrounding villages not eligible for the funding.
 - b) Businesses must be classified as a micro to small enterprise (0-50 employees) and a turnover or balance sheet less than or equal to €10 million in-line with DEFRA's requirements.
 - c) Projects being supported through REPF cannot have received funding through another DEFRA scheme and the Council will need to ensure that projects are not being double funded.
- 2.7 The following parameters for allocation of the capital grant fund are proposed and designed in collaboration with BBF and the LEP:
- a) Grant amounts offered will range from £2,500-£300,000. Applicants will need to inform the Council whether they are in receipt of any state aid within the last 3 rolling years, to ensure they are not over the limit.
 - b) Grants will initially be offered at a 40% rate with businesses needing to match fund the remaining 60%; if demand is low due to the grant not being adequate then we can consider raising the percentage.

- Grants to businesses will be awarded through the Minimal Financial Assistance concept under the Subsidy Control regime, which will limit the maximum funding from all public sources to £315,000 over a rolling 3 year period with the Council's maximum grant award being £300,000.
- 2.8 Detail on the proposed eligibility and parameters can be found in Appendix A.
- 2.9 It is recommended that the grant application process is a rolling call for projects, with specific dates published for when applications will be considered by a funding panel.
- 2.10 First year funding will need to be awarded and paid to businesses that have completed projects by 31st March 2024, second year funding will need to be paid to businesses that have completed projects by 31st March 2025 so the deadline for full applications will be December 2024 to ensure enough time is available for projects to be completed and claim for funding.
- 2.11 If the Council has not allocated all funding by December 2024, then projects can still be accepted but will be on a case-by-case basis to ensure they can complete within the limited timeframe up until 31st March 2025.
- 2.12 The Council will provide two funding routes; one for smaller grants of £25,000 or less and one for grants greater than £25,000. The smaller grants application process will be a lighter touch approach, but still with due diligence checks on applicants.

Process for applying for funding

- 2.13 An initial Expression of Interest (EOI) form will help filter out applications and build a pipeline of interested businesses.
- 2.14 Businesses will be made aware of the eligibility criteria and parameters of the programme from the outset, with details to be published on the Council's website and explained to applicants when being supported by Buckinghamshire Business First.
- 2.15 Buckinghamshire Business First, who have vast experience and expertise in administering similar funds will support us in sifting EOIs. This sifting process will help us receive only eligible applicants. Buckinghamshire Business First will be able to offer other forms of support to businesses that are not eligible for REPF.
- 2.16 Applicants will need to complete an EOI outlining details of their business, what they want the grant for and how much they are applying for. This EOI will then be assessed and if eligible, applicants will be sent a Full Application.

- 2.17 Applicants will have 3 months to complete a Full Application, but during that time can request longer if the project is more complicated. Support and detailed guidance will be available from the Council and Buckinghamshire Business First to ensure good quality applications are received. A full list of the supporting documents to be requested for a full application can be found in Appendix B and will be made available to applicants during the application process.
- 2.18 When an application is completed and submitted by the applicant, Buckinghamshire Business First will review and assess the application to make sure it is eligible and has all the information requested to go forward to a Funding Panel.
- 2.19 The process for applying for a Grant will need to be robust and stand up to scrutiny from any external parties and the applicant if the decision is not the outcome they expected.

Project Assessment, Funding Panel & Decision Making

- 2.20 A new funding panel to review eligible projects will be formed consisting of two Cabinet Members, two rural businesses and the Local Enterprise Partnership. This will provide member opportunity to engage in the process, along with rural business representatives.
- 2.21 A detailed summary of eligible projects will be provided to the funding panel highlighting merits and potential drawbacks, allowing them to either recommend or reject an application. The Funding Panel will be able to make recommendations for funding, but final decisions and sign-off will be from those with the delegated decision-making authority.
- 2.22 It is recommended that the award of grant funding will be made by the Economic Growth and Regeneration Service Director in consultation with Cabinet Member and S151 Officer.
- 2.23 Once a project has been approved, a Grant Agreement will be drawn up. Applicants will be monitored on outputs and outcomes in line with their Grant Agreement. It is understood that outputs such as jobs created may not be realised until 6-12 months after the grant is awarded due to the business needing to grow because of the grant. This will mean the Council will need to receive monitoring reports from businesses up to 12 months after the award.
- 2.24 Monitoring and site visits will be conducted with applicants to ensure the Council's funding is being utilised effectively and further promote the programme to other interested businesses.

- 2.25 Guidance for applicants wishing to apply for grant funding will be available, to help them understand what is needed and expected from them through the application process. The guidance will detail how applications will be assessed and scored, so that they can build a compelling grant application.
- 2.26 We recommend that decisions from the funding panel are final and no appeals allowed. However, businesses would not be excluded from applying again for a different project.

3. Other options considered

- 3.1 The recommended approach has been developed with the support of BBF and the LEP, who both have experience of running similar programmes successfully. REPF is seen as an evolution of LEADER, in the design process for REPF we took the necessary parts of the application process and reduced the bureaucracy by removing elements that were no longer relevant.
- 3.2 Funding has been awarded directly to the Council and it is the Council's responsibility to run and manage the programme, and to meet the objectives of the REPF funding pot. By ensuring we have a robust and transparent approach to decision making on successful grant applications, the Council will be able to ensure it allocates its REPF by the required deadline from Defra.
- 3.3 The funding can only be used towards capital grants, which means that the Council can only provide funding to businesses for investment in capital assets.
- 3.4 A number of options were considered from grant amount, types of businesses applying to how the applications are assessed and considered, but with the support of BBF and the LEP we were able to design and recommend a robust and credible outline for how REPF should be delivered.

4. Legal and financial implications

- 4.1 Buckinghamshire Council is the accountable body responsible for overseeing delivery of the programme and distribution of grant funding to businesses in accordance with corporate policies and standards.
- 4.2 Funding allocations have been set by DEFRA with 25% (£450k) allocated in year 1 and 75% (£1.35M) in year 2. It is the Council's responsibility to ensure all funding is allocated or DEFRA will claim back the funding.
- 4.3 It is recommended that the Bucks Rural Business Grants Fund be added to the council's capital programme.

- 4.4 Funding will be allocated to the Council at the beginning of the financial year, so we will not have to forward fund and reclaim the grant.
- 4.5 To reduce risk to the Council, Businesses that are awarded funding will be expected to claim in arrears - they will need to use their own funds to deliver the project once they have been given a Grant Agreement and then claim back the funding from the Council. This will allow the Council to know the money has been spent on the project and not allow for businesses to sit on funding that has been awarded or use it for other purposes.
- 4.6 The Council will need to be aware that capital grant funding carries risk and that not all businesses awarded funding will succeed and may fail. The processes and design of the grant programme being proposed in this paper will help minimise this risk, by supporting businesses through the process and ensuring they have a sound business plan and robust business case.
- 4.7 The Council will carry out thorough due diligence on applicants including but not limited to Director checks and financial assessments, and that the businesses have the cash to cashflow the project and match funding is in place. This will help reduce the risk of fraud and of providing funding to failing businesses. These checks will be carried out prior to the shortlisting for the Funding Panel, with applications that do not pass the tests clearly being requested to provide further information or rejected.
- 4.8 The robustness of the project financials in the applications will be checked by Buckinghamshire Business First and the Council.
- 4.9 The grant agreement will make it clear that any risk of overspends on projects must be borne by the applicant.
- 4.10 A finance officer will also sit as an observer on the Funding Panel to help support discussions on the decision-making process.
- 4.11 S151 Officer will be involved in the decision-making process for project applications.

5. Corporate implications

- 5.1 No implications have been identified for property or HR at this stage. The following corporate implications have been identified:
 - a) Climate change – the Bucks Rural Business Growth Fund is focussed on providing Grant Funding to support business growth, and in some cases projects may focus on carbon reduction.
 - b) Sustainability - the Bucks Rural Business Growth Fund is focussed on providing Grant Funding to support business growth, however in some cases projects may focus on improving environmental sustainability.

Additionally, business cases will be required to set out how their projects are sustainable.

- c) Equality - An equalities screening assessment has been undertaken and it is considered that no inequalities or adverse impacts will arise from this fund. We can ask applicants of the fund to consider the equalities impacts of their projects.
- d) Data - A Data Protection Impact Assessment will be undertaken
- e) Value for money will be a key assessment criteria when reviewing submitted grant applications.

6. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

- 6.1 This is part of the UKSPF County-wide investment plan for Buckinghamshire, and there has been oversight of the investment plan intervention through the Buckinghamshire Growth Board. Going forward, there will be engagement with Members and Community Boards to ensure their support to promote this fund to their local business communities.

7. Communication, engagement & further consultation

- 7.1 We recommend that the REPF programme is branded and marketed as the Bucks Rural Business Grants Programme, so that businesses and applicants can easily understand the nature of the programme.
- 7.2 Local stakeholders have been engaged through the design and development of the programme. This, and further communication offline, has provided opportunity for stakeholders to express their views and offer evidence to help shape the programme and offer insight from similar programmes.
- 7.3 A communications plan will be developed to maximise coverage of the programme – including engaging with business support organisations and rural business organisations and the Rural Forum to promote the programme.

8. Next steps and review

- 8.1 Following approval of the recommendations and approach set out in this paper, the grants programme will launch in early May.

9. Background papers

- 9.1 none

10. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

- 10.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report, please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider, please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by email to democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

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Appendix A – Eligibility and parameters of the REPF programme

Item/Topic	Recommendation
Areas covered by the programme	<p>Areas have been defined as rural areas and exclude High Wycombe, Aylesbury, Chesham, Amersham, Beaconsfield and some of the surrounding villages that are classified as built-up areas and densely populated.. As of 30th Jan 23 Defra released new guidance on areas that can be covered, which can be found using Magic Maps.</p> <p>Magic Map Application (defra.gov.uk)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Select Administrative geographies - Other Administrative Boundaries - Rural England Prosperity Fund <p>Geography will then be shown on the interactive map</p>
Unable to support projects that have received DEFRA funding from other schemes	Ensure that applicants applying are not applying for funds towards a project already DEFRA funded to avoid duplication and double funding.
Size of grants available	We recommend that the programme offers grants of £2,500-£300,000
% of grant intervention offered	We recommend that a grant rate of 40% is offered
Minimal Financial Assistance – Subsidy Control	Grants are limited to £300,000 under the Subsidy Control regime allocation of £315,000, this support cannot be exceeded over a 3 year rolling period
Business size	The fund can only support micro to small enterprises as set out by DEFRA, definitions for which can be found here from the .Gov website
Grant application deadlines	<p>We recommend that the grant application is kept as an open application process, but with published dates of when applications will be considered.</p> <p>A funding panel could meet every 6-8 weeks.</p> <p>Consider time period for assessment and leave flexible</p>
Expressions of interest	To help filter out applications, we recommend that an expression of interest be completed.

Deadline for full applications	We recommend that a deadline is given to applicants when they are invited to complete a full application from expression of interest stage.
2 applications – small and large grants	We recommend 2 types of grant applications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - small grants – less than £25,000 - large grants - £25,000-£300,000
Application process	We recommend that an application process similar to the legacy LEADER programme be implemented.
Funding panel	<p>Officers will undertake a thorough review of applications and write up an assessment of what is received.</p> <p>These assessments will be presented to the funding panel and a summary document produced highlighting the impact of the project and whether a project should receive funding.</p> <p>The funding panel will comprise of 5 people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 x Cabinet Members • 2 x Rural business representatives • Local Enterprise Partnership <p>The panel's recommendations are then passed to a Service Director, S151 Officer and Cabinet Member for decision and sign-off according to the financial scheme of delegation.</p>
Guidance and support	We recommend that support is available to applicants when applying for a grant.
Framework for assessing applications	We recommend that a framework is developed to allow a consistent approach to assessing grant applications. This will need to reflect the detail of the outputs, outcomes and impacts needed from the programme and also look at any additionality.
Final date for grant approvals	We recommend that the Council publicises the final date for applications are December 2024.
Retention of Grant funded assets	Businesses will be expected to retain items funded by the grant for up to 7 years. This will be written into any grant agreements issued to businesses.

Appendix B – Full Application Checklist

Business plan	A business plan
Financial standing of the business	<p>Existing businesses to submit previous 2 years full accounts</p> <p>New businesses/start-ups to obtain an opening statement from an accountant, signing off cashflow forecast of the applicant.</p> <p>Self-employed applicants may not produce formal business accounts but will have tax returns that can be assessed.</p>
Cashflow forecast	A detailed and realistic cashflow forecast of the business for the next 2 years
Proof of funding	Applicant will need to provide proof of funding to be able to bankroll the project. This can be with either a bank statement or a letter from the bank confirming funds by way of overdraft or loan facility. Evidence will need to be in the name of the business.
<p>Appropriate consents and permissions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copy of full planning permission or • Tenancy agreement information • Environmental consents • Listed building consents • Any other licences or consents required for the project 	Tenancy information must include the sections from the tenancy agreement containing the property address, tenant, landlord, signatures and for fixed term agreements, the tenancy term.
Summary of impact – what outputs and outcomes will be achieved	Outputs and outcomes and impact of the project will help with the assessment of value for money, such as jobs created, increase in turnover etc.

	Value of contract	Minimum procedure
Quotes in-line with DLUHC guidance	£0 - £2,499	Direct award
	£2,500 - £24,999	3 written quotes or prices sought from relevant suppliers of goods, works and / or services
	Over £25,000	Formal tender process for building works and 3 quotes for off the shelf items
If applicable, proof of irrecoverable VAT on eligible costs	You will need to provide evidence of the VAT status of the business that confirms that you are not VAT registered or are making exempt supplies (confirmation letter from a professionally qualified independent accountant)	
Additional evidence of support for the project	For example, this will be letters of support or forward orders from existing/potential customers and trade industry organisations where their support is linked and of benefit to the project.	
Evidence of need and demand for the project and unmet demand	Feasibility studies, market research, marketing plan or publicity plan	
Equality and/or Diversity Policy		



Report to Cabinet

Date: 9 May 2023

Title: Buckinghamshire Shareholder Committee Annual Report 2022-23

Relevant councillor(s): John Chilver, Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Shareholder Committee

Author/contact officer: Richard Ambrose Richard.ambrose@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
Leslie Ashton leslie.ashton@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: Not ward specific

Recommendations: Cabinet are asked to note the 2022-23 Annual Report of the Buckinghamshire Shareholder Committee and the work it has undertaken to date.

Reason for decision: As a sub-committee of Cabinet, it is good practice for the Shareholder Committee to report annually to Cabinet on the work it has undertaken over the previous financial year.

Executive summary

- 1.1 The role of the Committee is to ensure that the Council's companies and limited liability partnerships act in the interests of the Council as shareholder and that best practice is being adhered to in delivering statutory arrangements. In doing so, the Committee contributes to the proper governance of the Council's subsidiaries. This added level of governance is more important than ever, following a number of other local authorities experiencing difficulties. Understanding the risks associated with wholly or jointly owned companies is a key task of the Committee.
- 1.2 This is the first year of the Shareholder Committee and producing an annual report to reflect the work and outcomes achieved by the Committee over the past year is considered good practice.
- 1.3 Members of the Shareholder Committee are not directors, and do not have any direct involvement, in any of the subsidiary bodies.

Background

- 1.4 The creation of the Shareholder Committee was agreed by Cabinet in March 2022 to carry out the delegated shareholder responsibilities of the Council. The Shareholder Committee forms part of the overall governance arrangements for Buckinghamshire Council in relation to companies and other legal entities which are wholly or partly owned or controlled by the Council (including where such control comes about indirectly, such as via a loan agreement). Buckinghamshire Council has a number of mainly property based subsidiary companies and limited liability partnerships in place.
- 1.5 The Committee has met four times during the 2022-23 period as well as attending a training session, along with Company Directors, setting out the roles and responsibilities that their roles entail and the key risk areas that they are required to be aware of. The Committee has focused on and undertaken a number of key pieces of work. This includes reviewing business plans and the financial positions of each company/joint venture as well as producing Conflicts of Interest guidance for Members and Officers and undertaking a review of Directors to ensure consistency and resilience across companies/joint ventures.
- 1.6 In addition to maintaining an oversight of key risks and governance issues, the Committee's priorities for 2023-24 include creating a pool of trained potential future directors, strengthening risk management arrangements of the companies and reviewing best practice / learning from other local authority companies.
- 1.7 The 2022-23 Annual report is attached at Appendix 1.

Other options considered

- 1.8 Not applicable

Legal and financial implications

- 1.9 None specific, although understanding the financial position of each company has been a key part of the Committee's focus.

Corporate implications

- 1.10 None. The formation of the Shareholder Committee was consistent with guidance issued by recognised bodies such as CIPFA and the best practice advice in the Local Authorities Companies Review Guidance led by Max Caller, Strategic Adviser and Lead Inspector for HM Government.

Consultation and communication

1.11 The annual report was presented to the Shareholder Committee in its draft form on 28 March 2023. Comments and feedback from the Shareholder Committee have been incorporated in to the final version of the annual report which is attached at Appendix 1.

Next steps and review

1.12 The Forward Plan of work for 2023-24 is currently being formalised, this work will include, amongst other things, a review of company risk registers, receiving 2022-23 financial statements, and reviewing 2024-25 Business Plans. The Committee has a minimum of four meetings planned for the ensuing Municipal Year and will produce a further Annual Report for Cabinet in May 2024, escalating anything as appropriate in the meantime.

Background papers

[Buckinghamshire Shareholder Committee Papers](#)

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Buckinghamshire Shareholder Committee Annual Report 2022/23

Date: 28 March 2023

Foreword

As Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Shareholder Committee, I am pleased to present our inaugural annual report to Cabinet. I would like to give thanks to my fellow Cabinet colleagues, who are Members of the Committee, for their valuable input and effective questioning of our subsidiary bodies as well as to the supporting officers and those representatives from the respective company/joint venture who have attended meetings and answered our many challenging questions and requests for information.

On behalf of the Cabinet, the Committee carries out the shareholder responsibilities of the Council. In doing so it strengthens the proper governance of the Council's subsidiaries, which became particularly pertinent in light of issues arising at other local authorities. Amongst a range of responsibilities, the Committee safeguards the Council's interests by providing effective oversight of each subsidiary, particularly in respect of their finances and other high risk areas; the Committee ensures that policies and boundaries established by the Council are adhered to; and that whilst the Committee has no direct operational input, due diligence is undertaken on each company to ensure liabilities are known and accounted for.

This report summarises the main issues which have been reviewed and challenged throughout the year. The Buckinghamshire Shareholder Committee met for the first time in July 2022. Since then the Committee has approved its remit and Terms of Reference, attended a training day along with Company Directors, approved Conflicts of Interest Guidance, which was necessary to ensure that our members and officers understand ethical governance and how to avoid the appearance or reality of conflicted interests. We also reviewed Director appointments and the make-up of Boards to ensure consistency and appropriate skillsets, and reviewed each subsidiaries Business Plans for the forthcoming year along with their respective financial positions.

Councillor John Chilver

Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Shareholder Committee

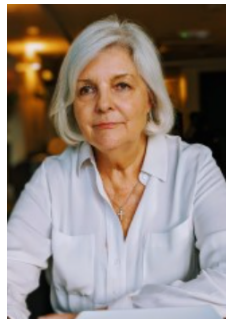
Committee Members



Councillor John Chilver,
Chairman of the
Shareholder Committee
& Cabinet Member for
Accessible Housing and
Resources



**Councillor Steve
Broadbent**, Cabinet
Member for Transport



**Councillor Anita
Cranmer**, Cabinet
Member for Education
and Children's Services



**Councillor Peter
Strachan**, Cabinet
Member for Planning
and Regeneration

Introduction and Background

The Shareholder Committee has a formal delegation from Cabinet to fulfil the Council’s responsibilities as the shareholder in relation to companies and other legal entities which are wholly or partly owned or controlled by the Council (including where such control comes about indirectly, such as via a loan agreement). In doing so, the Committee forms part of the overall company governance arrangements for Buckinghamshire Council. The Council has a number of mainly property based subsidiary companies and limited liability partnerships in place. The Committee focuses on Aylesbury Vale Estates, a joint venture with Akeman Asset Management, Consilio Property Limited, and Buckinghamshire Advantage, which was originally the operational arm of the Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

Members of the Shareholder Committee are not directors, and do not have any direct involvement, in any of the subsidiary bodies. The Committee aims to ensure that the Council’s companies and limited liability partnerships act in the interests of the Council as shareholder, receive assurance that best practice is being adhered to in delivering statutory arrangements and that investment returns and/or what the businesses offer will help to ensure that the Council continues to deliver quality services to our residents.

Audit reports coming out of other local authority arrangements relating to wholly or partly owned companies stressed the need to ensure that sufficient checks and balances are in place and in particular that risks are appropriately managed, that there is an effective scrutiny function and that challenge of political priorities by both members and officers is seen as a positive. This provides an important message that all councils establishing commercial entities should be alive to what is referred to as “institutional blindness”. The Council also recognised that external auditors, such as Grant Thornton, had issued public interest reports where local authority companies had performed poorly and governance arrangements were found to be inadequate.

The formation of the Shareholder Committee was consistent with guidance issued by recognised bodies such as CIPFA and the best practice advice in the Local Authorities Company Review Guidance (2021) led by Max Caller, Strategic Adviser and Lead Inspector for HM Government.



Areas the Committee has focussed on in 2022-23

The Shareholder Committee met four times during the 2022-23 period following Cabinet approval of its creation in March 2022. In addition to this, the Committee attended a training day alongside Company Directors. At its first meeting, the governance arrangements of each subsidiary was considered, along with the shareholder/member agreements and the existing business plans. The early tasks along with approving the [Committee's Terms of Reference](#), were to agree timing and methodology for the review of business plans and financial positions, with a particular focus on loan structures, terms and interest rates. It also became apparent that there needed to be clear guidance around officer and member conflicts of interest when appointing to director/board member roles. Further, a review of Directors was also necessary to ensure a level of consistency within each of the companies.

Training

The Committee recommended training be provided to all subsidiary directors and relevant Cabinet Members. The Committee Members also attended the training session which an external provider successfully delivered in September 2022. The training supported Members and Officers in understanding all responsibilities that their roles entail and the key risk areas that they are required to be aware of.

On the back of this, Shareholder Agreements and Articles of Association were reviewed to ensure they fit with best practice and no inconsistencies were found.

Conflicts of Interest Guidance

Conflicts of Interest Guidance

Guidance for members and officers – council companies and joint ventures

This is a practical guide for officers and councillors who may have a role in connection with the Council's trading companies and joint ventures. It helps them – and the Council itself - to recognise the interests involved and to avoid a conflict between them.

The guidance sets out:

- A. Why this guidance matters
- B. Recognising the different roles
- C. Avoiding the problem – the appointment of directors
- D. Recognising the interests involved
- E. Behaviours, codes of conduct and responsibilities
- F. Handling conflicts of interest

Annex – further information

A. Why this guidance matters

Being a director of a local authority-controlled company requires officers and elected members appointed to those roles to operate in a completely different legal and philosophical framework to that they are used to inside their local authority. It can lead to real conflicts between the duty owed to the company and the interests of your council.

It can also lead to conflicts of interest on a personal level which makes holding some roles in a local authority unviable whilst continuing as a director. It is necessary to make different assumptions about how things operate and what issues you need to have demonstrated you took into account, and what had no influence.

Too often, this is not understood until problems arise, resulting in reputational and financial damage and in some cases, external intervention directly impacting on your authority.

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It can also lead to conflicts of interest on a personal level which makes holding some roles in a local authority unviable whilst continuing as a director. It is necessary to make different assumptions about how things operate and what issues you need to have demonstrated you took into account, and what had no

influence. Too often, this is not understood until problems arise, resulting in reputational and financial damage and in some cases, external intervention directly impacting on your authority.

As such, the Committee approved the [conflicts of interest guidance](#) which has been circulated to each Director of the subsidiary companies and:

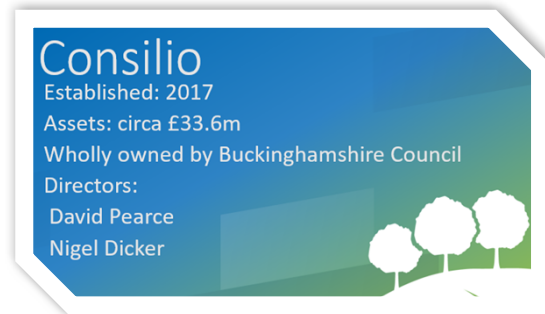
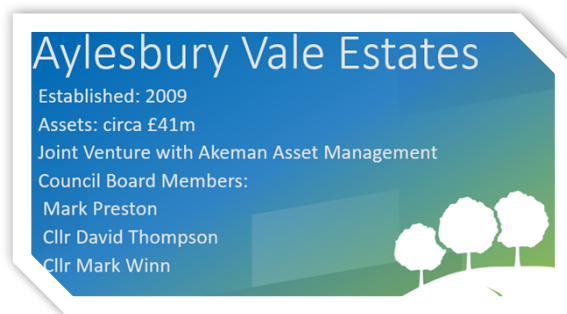
- recognises the various roles involved and the differences across each role
- provides clear guidance for the Council in appointing directors including appointments being related to the relevant position in the council, rather than an individual
- outlines how to recognise potential conflicts and how to handle them
- notes the behaviours, codes and responsibilities that need to be adhered to.

Review of Directors

Linked to the conflicts of interest guidance, is the review of directors, in respect of which the Committee has made a number of recommendations. This review has been important to ensure that officers and members appointed to such roles possess the appropriate skillset and are not conflicted by their 'day job' or Cabinet responsibilities. It is also required to ensure

that there is consistency across the companies and that there is at least one officer and one member on the respective Boards.

Further, the creation of a pool of potential officers and members suitable to undertake such roles provides greater resilience in the event of a Director/Board Member resigning from their role. Moving forwards, in line with the Terms of Reference, new appointments will be made through the Shareholder Committee.



Appointments as at February 2023

Business Plans and Statements of Accounts

In addition to challenging each company/joint venture on performance against their existing Business Plans, the Committee has dedicated time in each of its last two meetings of the 2022-23 year to review the Business Plans for the upcoming financial year and challenged Directors/Board Members on the respective companies' intentions for the forthcoming years. Discussions have been held with Directors/Board Members of Aylesbury Vale Estates, Consilio Property Limited and Buckinghamshire Advantage.



Through discussions and reports provided, the Committee has a solid understanding of the loan structures, terms and repayments for each company/joint venture, making suggestions

as to ways the respective company's leadership could approach their open loans. The Committee has also ensured it has knowledge of occupancy levels and tenancy issues of different sites owned by the respective companies.

Whilst it is for the Board and Directors to set the path they wish the businesses take, the Committee has provided input and feedback on future plans, whether it be Consilio considering becoming a registered housing provider, or the Council working in partnership with Aylesbury Vale Estates on future developments.

The year to come and 2023-24 priorities

Overall, it has been a positive first year for the Shareholder Committee and this work will be built on in the coming year, with the Committee continuing to ensure satisfactory governance arrangements, performance and effective risk management. It is expected to be another busy, challenging year for each of the companies who have to navigate their way through the current economic climate and deliver on their varying business plan priorities.

The Committee's priorities for 2023-24 include creating a pool of trained potential future directors, strengthening risk management arrangements of the companies and reviewing best practice / learning from other local authority companies.

The Committee, acting as Shareholders, will continue to ensure that the Council's interests are safeguarded and ultimately best value is achieved for residents and businesses of Buckinghamshire.

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