



Buckinghamshire Council

Standards and General Purposes Committee

Agenda

Date: Thursday 10 December 2020

Time: 2.00 pm

Venue: Via Video Conference: Accessible to members of the public at <https://buckinghamshire.publici.tv/core/portal/home>

Membership: J Waters (Chairman), H Mordue (Vice-Chairman), B Adams, S Adoh, M Appleyard, J Bloom, A Collingwood, C Etholen, G Harris, M Knight, S Lambert, G Moore, L Smith BEM and M Stannard

Independent Persons: A Austin, S Boyce and T Dobson

Agenda Item	Time	Page No
1	APOLOGIES	
2	MINUTES To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 October, 2020, copy attached.	3 - 12
3	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST Members to declare any interests.	
4	REVIEW OF MEMBER INDUCTION AND TRAINING ON STANDARDS OF CONDUCT To consider the attached report. Contact Officer: nick.graham@buckinghamshire.gov.uk	13 - 24
5	PROTOCOL ON THE ROLE OF THE MONITORING OFFICER To consider the attached report. Contact Officer: maria.damigos@buckinghamshire.gov.uk	25 - 30
6	REVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS To consider the attached report. Contact Officer: nick.graham@buckinghamshire.gov.uk	31 - 88

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| 7 | COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020
To consider the attached report.

Contact Officer: kate.mitchelmore@buckinghamshire.gov.uk | 89 - 116 |
| 8 | LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN REPORT - PROGRESS REPORT
To consider the attached report.

Contact Officer: simon.james@buckinghamshire.gov.uk | 117 - 124 |
| 9 | BUCKS ELECTORAL SERVICES REVIEW - MEMBERS' WORKING GROUP UPDATE
To consider the attached report.

Contact Officer: nick.graham@buckinghamshire.gov.uk | 125 - 128 |
| 10 | DELEGATION TO RETURNING OFFICER
To consider the attached report.

Contact Officer: nick.graham@buckinghamshire.gov.uk | 129 - 132 |
| 11 | CONSTITUTIONAL WORKING GROUP (UPDATE)
A verbal update to be provided.

Contact Officer: nick.graham@buckinghamshire.gov.uk | |
| 12 | WORK PROGRAMME
To consider the Committee's future work programme:

25 February 2021
1. Council's final submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on Council size numbers.

8 April 2021
1. Annual Review of Code of Conduct and Complaints Procedure
2. Standards Complaints Monitoring Report 2020/21
3. LGO Annual Report
4. Bucks Electoral Review: Member Working Group update
5. Draft Work programme for 2021/22 | |

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.
For further information please contact: Craig Saunders - craig.saunders@buckinghamshire.gov.uk



Standards and General Purposes Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 8 OCTOBER 2020 IN VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE, ACCESSIBLE TO MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AT [HTTPS://BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.PUBLICI.TV/CORE/PORTAL/HOME](https://BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.PUBLICI.TV/CORE/PORTAL/HOME), COMMENCING AT 2.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 3.30 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

J Waters (Chairman), H Mordue (Vice Chairman), S Adoh, M Appleyard, J Bloom, A Collingwood, C Etholen, G Harris, M Knight, S Lambert, L Smith BEM and M Stannard

INDEPENDENT PERSONS: S Boyce and T Dobson.

APOLOGIES: B Adams and G Moore.

1 MINUTES RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 July, 2020, be approved as a correct record.

2 CSPL REPORT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT ETHICAL STANDARDS

The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) advised the Prime Minister on ethical standards across the whole of public life in England. It monitored and reported on issues relating to the standards of conduct of all public office holders and promoted the 7 principles of public life. In 2018, the CSPL had carried out a review into the ethical framework for local authorities which included stake holder consultation.

On 2 July 2020, the Committee had considered a report relating to the CSPL review. The main findings, observations and conclusions of the CSPL had been summarised and set out in the report. It had also included the 15 best practice recommendations directed at local authorities together with details of the current position at Buckinghamshire Council in terms of compliance with these recommendations and RAG rating.

Members requested that a report come back to the Committee on the progress made in implementing the CSPL best practice recommendations (amber ratings). Appendix 1 set out each of the recommendations, position and RAG rating at the time of the report and detailed the proposed action(s) and comments/explanation. All recommendations had been included to provide an overview. Whilst recommendation 8 was considered to be complied with already,

some amendments have been made to provide clarity.

The Council's Constitution was due to be reviewed in April 2021 and this would include a review of the Code of Conduct. It was also anticipated that a Model Code of Conduct would be introduced. In view of this the proposed actions in Appendix 1 were interim measures pending a full review. The proposed actions related mainly to updating the Guidance on Dealing with Member Complaints. The proposed amendments to the Guidance to implement the relevant best practice recommendations were detailed in Appendix 2 as tracked changes, in red typeface.

The Guidance on Dealing with Member Complaints had also been approved on 2 July 2020 and the Committee had the power to update it, as appropriate. Whilst it would be preferable to have the actions and measures dealt with in the Code of Conduct itself, it was considered that the proposed changes to the Guidance were sufficient to ensure that best practice was followed until such time as the Code of Conduct was updated.

Members sought additional information and were informed:-

- (i) Appendix 1 – that the updating of the guidance on dealing with Member complaints was likely to change many of the amber RAG ratings to green.
- (ii) Appendix 1(Action 3) – that while it was mentioned that the Constitution was to be reviewed in April 2021, Members would be informed later in the agenda about the intention to put together a Constitution Member Working Group to review possible changes. It was anticipated that work could be completed as soon as possible and well in advance of the 2021 local elections.
- (iii) Appendix 1 (Action 11) – an explanation was provided of the exceptional circumstances where it might be appropriate for a Parish Clerk's standards complaint to be made to the Buckinghamshire Council rather than to the relevant Parish Council.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the progress made in implementing the best practice recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) on Local Government Ethical Standards be noted.
- (2) That the proposed actions on the recommendations, as detailed at Appendix 1, and the updating of the Guidance on Dealing with Member Complaints as proposed at Appendix 2 be approved.

3 GUIDANCE ON REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

The Committee received a report which sought approval of the criteria for considering whether to grant a dispensation, guidance for members seeking a dispensation and the application form to request a dispensation.

The Localism Act 2011 stated that a councillor or co-opted member who had a disclosable pecuniary interest (DPI) could not participate in a meeting for that item and could not vote on the item. The Council's Code of Conduct also required a member to withdraw from the meeting where they have a DPI.

If a member had a prejudicial interest the Council's Code of Conduct also required them to withdraw from the meeting, not to participate and to not vote on the item.

These statutory requirements and rules were in place to ensure members took decisions in the public interest. There were however situations when it may be appropriate for a councillor or co-opted member to still take part in the debate or take part and vote on the matter. The Localism Act 2011 set out 5 instances when a dispensation for a DPI might be granted. These were set out as part of the Criteria (see Appendix 1). One of these instances must be found to apply in order for a dispensation to be granted.

The Council's Constitution gave the Monitoring Officer and the Standards and General Purposes Committee delegated authority to grant dispensations. It was expected that for speed the majority of dispensations would be given by the Monitoring Officer. It was good practice to adopt criteria for considering dispensation requests to ensure consistency and approval of the criteria by the Committee would ensure appropriate oversight and transparency.

As each request for a dispensation should be considered on its own merits the criteria could not be exhaustive therefore the criteria was deliberately high level to allow all applicable circumstances to be taken into account. Alongside the criteria, the proposed Guidance for Members was detailed at Appendix 2 and had the following sections:

- When it might be appropriate to request a dispensation?
- What are the circumstances in which I ask for a dispensation?
- What are the circumstances in which I ask for a dispensation?
- Does the request for a dispensation have to be granted?
- Are there any circumstances when a dispensation will not be granted?
- How do I make a request for a dispensation?
- How much notice is needed to consider my request?

These sections gave more detail on the criteria and would also be used as further guidance alongside the criteria when considering requests for dispensations. The proposed application form at Appendix 3 had been drafted to ensure that requests contained all relevant information the Monitoring Officer would need to consider requests.

The Committee was informed that blanket or general dispensations could also be granted to cover all applicable members. This might apply in relation to a particular project or scheme which, due to its nature, was likely to engage a large proportion of members and therefore engage one or more of the instances required in order to grant a dispensation in the Localism Act. In such a case, the criteria and guidance were still relevant, however councillors would not have to make individual requests. Although the current delegation to the Monitoring Officer would cover granting a blanket or general dispensation, it was expected that this would normally be referred to the Committee for decision or the Chairman would be consulted before making a decision.

Members sought additional information and were informed:-

- (i) that the guidance and report set out the principles for considering whether to grant a dispensation as it was not possible to make provision for every eventuality that might occur.
- (ii) that the Criteria for Granting Dispensations (Appendix 1) explained that :
 - a dispensation would not normally be granted to a Member who had a disclosable pecuniary interest, or a prejudicial interest arising as a result of the effect of the decision on their personal financial position or that of a relative or close associate.
 - a dispensation was more likely to be granted where a prejudicial interest arose

from the financial effect the decision might have on a public body of which they were a member.

- (iii) that if a Community Board had to consider a matter that led to it becoming inquorate due to a number of Members declaring DPIs, then it would be appropriate to consider whether to grant dispensation(s) to Members.
- (iv) that where a Member at a virtual meeting declared a DPI, they would be required to withdraw from the virtual meeting while that matter was considered. The process for dealing with such instances would be managed by the Democratic Services staff.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the criteria for granting a dispensation (Appendix 1), guidance to Councillors (Appendix 2) and Application form (Appendix 3) be approved and adopted.
- (2) That authority be delegated to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chairman (or in their absence, the Vice Chairman) of the Standards and General Purposes Committee, to make minor amendments to the criteria, guidance and application.

4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT REPORT

The Council was required to bring to the attention of Members the report of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. The Standards Committee had been identified as the most appropriate forum to consider the Report and the accompanying progress update.

The Committee received a report which provided a summary of a recent Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Report, published on 24 July 2020, that had found the Council to be at fault for the way in which it provided home to school transport for 2 children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The Council was required to provide free home to school transport for children of compulsory school age.

The Ombudsman's report had concluded that the Council, in this case, did not meet its statutory duty to provide free home to school transport for children of school age who were eligible. The Council had accepted the findings of the ombudsman. The report detailed the progress made in implementing the recommendations identified in the Ombudsman's report.

Members were informed that a parent of 2 children with Education, Health and Care Plans had made a complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) in April 2019 about their home to school transport arrangements. The Council had been unable to provide suitable transport for the 2 children who were eligible for free transport due to their Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The parent had been receiving 2-way mileage to transport them herself to a school 8 miles away. The parent argued that this did not amount to free transport as her return journey home was not covered by the mileage allowance and it was unreasonable to expect her to wait at the school all day.

The parent submitted an application to the Transport Exceptions Panel to consider 4-way mileage and when the Panel declined the request, the parent progressed the matter to the Independent Appeal Panel. This Panel also declined her request. During this time there was some confusion around whether the Council could provide suitable transport, particularly for the younger child and therefore whether the parent was voluntarily transporting her children. There was also confusion about whether an assessment of needs had been conducted. Following a number of delays the Council confirmed it could not provide suitable transport for

the eldest child. At the time of the Ombudsman's report, there remained uncertainty about whether the Council could provide transport for the younger sibling.

The Ombudsman upheld the parent's complaint, and identified that 2-way mileage did not equate to free transport provision. The confusion, poor communication, delays in decision-making and errors in administering process were felt to be of no fault of the parent, and had caused unnecessary hardship, anxiety, time and trouble.

The Council had accepted all the findings in the Ombudsman's report and had taken steps to complete the recommended actions. A number of actions were required to be completed within 6 weeks of the report being published (24 July). These actions and the Council's response were fully set out in the Committee report. In summary, the actions were:-

Action 1: Reimburse the parent for the additional journeys taken from September 2018 and pay 4-way mileage going forward.

Outcome: Completed. The client transport profile had also been adjusted to process 4-way mileage for this family for the academic year 2020/21 onwards.

Action 2: Send a letter of apology to the parent with a payment of £50 per week for each week she had transported her children to school from September 2018 – 13 March 2020, in recognition of the time, trouble and anxiety caused.

Outcome: Completed.

Action 3: Assess the younger sibling to see if the Council could provide suitable transport, and pay 4-way mileage to the parent if transport could not be provided.

Outcome: Completed. The assessment had been completed on 20 July and it had been agreed that the parent would continue to transport the children to school and claim 4-way mileage. The client transport profile had been adjusted to process 4-way mileage claims.

The Ombudsman had also made a number of recommendations to be actioned within 6 months of the report being published (by 24 January 2021). Progress against these was summarised as follows:-

Action 4: Review the school transport policy and guidance to ensure that it reflected the Council's statutory duty to provide free transport and that it stated that the Council would pay the full costs of transport to parents where it is unable to provide suitable transport. Where the Council could provide suitable transport and the parent voluntarily agreed a mileage arrangement, this would cover two legs of the journey.

Outcome: Completed. The review had been completed and the Transport Improvement Board had approved the move to 4-way mileage in cases where the Council was unable to provide transport.

Action 5: Review other parents' and carers' mileage arrangements. Where the Council found it was unable to provide suitable alternative transport, and as identified in this case, the arrangement was not voluntary, it should pay the mileage costs of four legs of the journey where relevant.

Outcome: Completed. For new eligible transport applicants the offer of 4-way mileage was also now in place and the website and communications information had been updated accordingly.

Action 6: Take action to address the Council's apparent lack of suitable transport provision to ensure other children who required home to school transport were not adversely affected.

Outcome: An explanation was provided on the range of things the Council was doing to ensure

suitable transport could be provided to more children. The Transport Application and Assessment process had been reviewed and updated. The Home to School Transport Policy and associated Post 16 Transport Policy Statement had been recently viewed and a public consultation on the refreshed content was scheduled for 12 October, closing on 7 December 2020. It was anticipated that the offer of Personal Transport Budgets would further support families to secure the most appropriate transport provision for their child.

Action 7: The Council should report its progress to the relevant committee to ensure that elected members could monitor this. This report fulfilled this requirement.

Outcome: Completed.

Action 8: The Council should update its Local Offer on the Bucks Family Information Service to reflect the transport provision available.

Outcome: The Council was currently reviewing all its website content on transport provision and had updated the Council transport pages to ensure clarity: (<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools-index/school-transport/>). The Local Offer was also being reviewed to ensure all information was accessible to families. The planned consultation on our Home to School Transport Policy and associated Statement referred to above also aimed to make information clearer and more accessible for families.

Action 9: The Council should provide the Ombudsman with a report confirming the actions it has taken.

Outcome: On 22 September 2020 the Council had updated the Ombudsman with details regarding the completion of Actions 1 to 3, enclosing relevant evidence. The response had included clarification on how the Council had calculated the sums paid to the complainant (addressed in Actions 1 and 2). A final report would be provided to the Ombudsman once all the actions had been completed, in line with the timescales set out.

Members expressed concerns with Action 5 and commented that the Council could perhaps have been more proactive and considered offering a refund to all parents affected by the policy. The Committee was informed that, in line with the recommendation from the Ombudsman's report, the Council had identified all parents/carers who were in receipt of 2-way mileage payments and written to them on 19 August 2020 making an offer to pay 4-way mileage from September 2020 onwards if they wished to continue with the mileage arrangements.

The Committee requested that further information on Action 5 be reported back to the next meeting in December 2020 on the options that had been considered to assess other parents / carers mileage arrangements, including any associated risks and financial implications for the Council.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's report of 24 July 2020 be noted.
- (2) That the progress made in implementing the recommendations required by the report at recommendation (1) be noted.
- (3) That the remaining recommendations should continue to be progressed with a view to completing them by 24 January 2021. The outstanding actions being:
 - (i) To review other options that had been considered to assess other parents' and carers' mileage arrangements, including any associated risks and financial

- implications for the Council. (Action 5)
- (ii) To continue to work with providers via the Dynamic Purchasing System to ensure a broad range of client needs can be accommodated (Action 6)
 - (iii) To review and update the transport provision sections of the Local Offer (Action 8)
 - (iv) To provide a report to the Ombudsman once all the actions are completed (by 24 January 2021) (Action 9)
- (4) That a further progress report to be submitted to the Standards and General Purposes Committee on 10 December 2020, with a view to Members being able to accept and agree that they have fulfilled their requirement to monitor progress, and that any actions not yet completed will be completed in the coming months.

5 STANDARDS COMPLAINTS (UPDATE)

The Committee received a report setting out details of the number of complaints received against councillors since 1 April 2020, the nature or themes of complaints received and the outcome of those complaints. Except where a breach had been found to have taken place and a formal Decision Notice had been published no personal details would be provided.

Under the Localism Act 2011, the Council had a duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct amongst its Members and co-opted Members. As part of this duty the Council was required to have a Code of Conduct for Members which set out the standard of behaviour of Members when acting as a Member or on behalf of the Council.

The Council's Code of Conduct was at Section 2 Part H of the Constitution. Whilst Town and Parish Council could adopt the Buckinghamshire Council Code they did not have to. The Arrangements for Dealing with complaints under the Code of Conduct was at Section 3 Part H of the Constitution and applied to complaints against all councillors, including Town or Parish Councillors. Further guidance on dealing with complaints had been approved by the Committee on 2 July 2020.

In summary, the arrangements for handling complaints required an initial assessment to check whether the complaint could be considered (e.g. the complaint related to the conduct or behaviour of a councillor when acting in an official capacity) and whether it should be accepted (ie the nature of the complaint warranted it being considered further). Stage 1 of the process involved contacting the Subject Member for their response to the complaint and suggestions for resolution. If this was not accepted the complaint moved to Stage 2 when the complaint was formally considered by the Monitoring Officer or a Deputy Monitoring Officer. The Chairman/Vice-Chairman of the Committee would be informed of the complaint and could also consider the complaint together with an Independent Person. Stage 3 was implemented if the matter went to a formal investigation and could include consideration by a Sub-Committee or full Committee.

Appendix 1 detailed the cumulative total of complaints received since 1 April 2020. The Monitoring Officer had received 19 formal complaints with a further 2 carried over from legacy councils. 13 of these related to Buckinghamshire or legacy council members with 8 against Town or Parish councillors. Consultation with an independent person was due to take place to consider whether to progress in a few cases. None of the closed complaints progressed to a formal Stage 1 consideration, having either been rejected, considered not in the public interest to progress or informally resolved. Accordingly there had been no finding of a breach having occurred.

Although some of the complaints were duplicated, the main themes of the complaints related to disrespect followed up closely by disrepute and bullying. There were 3 complaints about personal interests, although 2 of these related to the same matter.

Members discussed the reporting format and information and it was agreed that future reports should provide case study examples of behaviours and how they had been dealt with. It would also be helpful to provide information on trends, for example, number of complaints that were currently at Stages 1, 2 and 3, and on the amount of time it was taking to deal with complaints.

RESOLVED –

That the report on dealing with complaints against Councillors since 1 April 2020 be noted.

6 CONSTITUTION REVIEW UPDATE

The Service Director (Legal and Democratic Services) informed Members that the terms of reference for both the Standards and General Purposes Committee and the Audit and Governance Committee included for them to recommend changes to the Council's Constitution to full Council. Any changes proposed by the Audit and Governance Committee had to be recommended via the Standards and General Purposes Committee.

A number of Member concerns relating to small / minor or procedural issues had been brought to the attention of the Service Director. In response, it had been agreed that a Constitution Member Working Group consisting of the Chairman and Vice Chairman of both the above Committees would meet to discuss and review the issues. Any proposed changes would then need to be reported back to the Committees, as appropriate, before any recommendations could be made to full Council. The first Working Group meeting would be held in October 2020.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted, including that an update on the Working Group would be reported back to the Committee in due course.

7 ELECTORAL REVIEW MEMBERS' WORKING GROUP (UPDATE)

The Committee had received a report on 2 July, 2020, explaining that with the establishment of the new unitary Council the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) had indicated that it intended to conduct an electoral review of Buckinghamshire Council. Any changes would not come into effect until the 2025 Buckinghamshire Council elections although the precise timeframe for the stages of the Review still needed to be confirmed.

The Committee had agreed that a Member Working Group (MWG) of 9 Members (to allow for cross party representation) should be established to oversee the work of officers in the preparation of the statistical and other information required by the LGBCE. The membership had now been confirmed as Councillors Waters (Chairman), Mordue, Adoh, Collingwood, Etholen, M Knight, Lambert, L Smith and Stannard.

On 4 August, 2020, the MWG had met remotely with the LGBCE and received a presentation on their approach to the Review, the process that would be followed and the timetable. A similar presentation was given to all Members on 23 September. The briefing session had attended by 90 Councillors. It had also been recorded so that those Members who were unable to attend could also view it.

The LGBCE's initial review timetable proposed a deadline for the Council to make a submission on the final Council size numbers in November 2020, and for the second part of the review looking at Warding arrangements to commence on 11 May 2021.

The MWG had expressed concerns to the LGBCE on both deadlines and asked for more time to be allowed to gather evidence and put together the first submission, and for the Warding submission to commence in June 2021 rather than May. The LGBCE had responded that it was amenable to the submission date on the final Council size numbers being deferred until the beginning of March 2021, and for the second stage of the review to commence in June 2021, to allow a period of time after the elections for things to settle.

The MWG had met on 3 occasions and received information from Officers who had started to populate the template provided by the LGBCE and that they required the Council's submission to be made on. The template and information was still at a draft stage and it was hoped that a fuller version would be reported to the Standards and General Purposes Committee's next meeting in December.

The Standards and General Purposes Committee would need to approve the final Council size numbers submission to the LGBCE in due course and, as such, it was recommended that an additional meeting of the Committee was timetabled to be held on 25 February 2021 for this purpose.

Members were informed that it was important for the submission to be evidence based as much as possible and to this end the information provided by the Officers had focussed on statistical / factual information. However, part of the template (Section 9) related to the community involvement and leadership role of Councillors, where the LGBCE required information on how Members undertook their role, their involvement in Council work and the community, and the time commitment. This included the range of meetings attended and how Members deal with their casework.

A survey (Appendix 1) had been sent to all Members on 24 September following the all Member briefing with the LGBCE. To date, 37 Members had completed the survey.

Separately, the MWG had also been engaging with the Cabinet to help include information with the submission on what the future expectations would be for the Cabinet and the Cabinet Member role, and what other support the role might require.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the update, including the work undertaken by the Member Working Group since 2 July 2020, be noted.
- (2) That an additional meeting of the Standards and General Purposes Committee be held on 25 February 2021, to approve the Council's final submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on Council size numbers.

8 WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

The Committee considered their future work programme, which was updated during the course of the meeting.

RESOLVED –

That the future work programme be approved, as follows:

10 December 2020

1. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Report – Progress Report.
2. Protocol on the Role of the Monitoring Officer.
3. Review of Social Media Guidance for Councillors.
4. Review of Member Induction and Training on standards of conduct.
5. Electoral Review Members' Working Group (Update).
6. Constitution Working Group (Update).

25 February 2021

1. Electoral Review: Final submission of Council size numbers to the LGBCE

8 April 2021

1. Annual Review of Code of Conduct and Complaints Procedure.
2. Standards Complaints Monitoring Report 2020/21.
3. LGO Annual Report.
4. Electoral Review Members' Working Group (Update).
5. Constitution Working Group (Update).
6. Draft Work Programme for 2021/22.



Report to Standards and General Purposes Committee

Date:	10 th December 2020
Title:	Code of Conduct training
Author and/or contact officer:	Nick Graham, Service Director, Legal and Democratic & Electoral Services
Recommendations:	The Standards and General Purposes Committee is asked to note the report and any feedback from members on the code of conduct training is welcomed.

Purpose of the report

- 1.1 In April 2020, the planned Member Induction programme following the establishment of the new Buckinghamshire Council had to be revisited in light of the Covid-19 lockdown. Officers worked quickly to organise alternative training sessions which could be delivered virtually and would enable members to undertake the various training sessions at a time that was convenient for them.
- 1.2 For the Code of Conduct training, Hoey & Associates, who would have delivered the training in person, produced a two part training video – 20 mins each, with accompanying PowerPoint slides (attached at Appendix 1) and a number of scenarios for members to consider in connection with declarations of interest and member behaviour. This training was produced specifically for Buckinghamshire Council and is available for members to access in the Members areas of The Source, the Council's intranet site - <https://internal.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/members/guidance-training/training-calendar/code-of-conduct-training-for-members/>
- 1.3 The training was made available on the members pages on 4th May. By 21st October, there had been a 95% completion rate on this particular course and the webpage with the supporting information available had been viewed on 744 occasions.
- 1.4 Democratic Services are planning for Member Induction post – May 2021 election and feedback is sought from members to help inform the content of training and the overall combination of formats for the training. Whilst in person training can be

more interactive and colleagues can also learn from each other's experiences, some members, particularly those who work, found it helpful to have the online training. Also online training materials can be revisited later enabling members to refresh their knowledge.

The Code of Conduct

Paul Hoey

Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd

What we will cover

- What does the law say and why is it important?
- Buckinghamshire Council's Code - behaviours
- Registering and declaring interests

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The law

Each council must:

- Adopt its own Code based on the 7 principles of public life (Nolan principles)
- Include mandatory interests provisions
- Make arrangements to deal with allegations with Unitary handling parish cases
- Appoint at least one Independent Person ('IP')

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Complaint handling- the steps

- Assessing a complaint – does it need to be dealt with?
- Investigate or resolve in some other way?
- Has there been a breach of the Code?
- Refer to a hearing?
- Sanction?

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Role of the Independent Person

Law says

- Council must take account of views of IP on matter under investigation
- Member accused may seek views of IP

Buckinghamshire's arrangements

- IP consulted by MO at end of investigation
- IP consulted by hearing panel before deciding

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Principles of public life

- Selflessness
- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Accountability
- Openness
- Honesty
- Leadership

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Buckinghamshire Code – behaviours

- Provide leadership
- Respect others and not bully
- Respect that officers are employed by and serve the whole Council
- Respect confidentiality
- Don't bring the Council into disrepute
- Don't misuse your position
- Don't misuse resources
- Take decisions for good and substantive reasons

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Supporting documents

Code is not alone:

- Planning protocol
- Protocol on member/officer relations
- IT and resources policies
- Social media protocol

etc.

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Buckinghamshire Code – registration of interests

- Register Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs)
 - criminal offences for non-compliance
- Register personal interests

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Buckinghamshire Code – what do I register?

- DPIs are (for you and partner):
 - Your job
 - Anybody who paid your election expenses
 - Any ongoing contracts with the Council
 - Any land/property you own or rent in area
 - Any licence for more than a month to occupy land in area
 - Any property you or a business rent from the Council
 - Any securities in companies in area above certain value

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Buckinghamshire Code – what do I register?

- Additional local categories (just you):
 - Any body to which you are appointed by the Council
 - Any other body exercising functions of a public nature you're on (e.g. parish council, fire authority)
 - Any body directed to charitable purposes
 - Any body designed to influence public opinion (e.g. political party, trade union)
 - Anyone who's given you a gift or hospitality above £25 (in your role as councillor)

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Buckinghamshire Code – declaration of DPIs

- Where you have a DPI you:
 - **must not** be involved in the discussion or decision-making (criminal offence)
 - **must** withdraw from the room while the matter is being debated
- You can apply to the Monitoring Officer for a dispensation to take part where you have a DPI. (Dispensations may only be granted in circumstances set out in the Localism Act 2011).

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Buckinghamshire Code – other interests

- **Personal interests** are something which relate to or are likely to affect:
 - Any outside bodies you are a member of
 - Any person or body who employs or has appointed you
 - Any person or body who has given you a gift or hospitality above £25
 - The interests of you or a relevant person more than it affects the majority
- You need to register membership of outside bodies
- You need to declare them at the relevant meeting

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Buckinghamshire Code – other interests

- Where you have a personal interest you also have a **prejudicial interest** if a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard the interest as so significant that it is likely to prejudice your judgement of the public interest.

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Buckinghamshire Code – other interests

- You also have a **prejudicial interest** in any business before a Select Committee of the Council where—
 - that business relates to a decision made or action taken by the Cabinet or another of the Council’s committees, subcommittees, joint committees or joint sub-committees; and
 - at the time the decision was made or action was taken, you were a member of the Cabinet, committee, sub-committee, joint committee or joint subcommittee and you were present when that decision was made or action was taken

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Buckinghamshire Code – other interests

- Where you have a prejudicial interest –
 - you must declare the interest and withdraw from the meeting
 - you must not exercise executive functions in relation to that business
 - you must not seek improperly to influence a decision about that business
- Where you have a prejudicial interest you may attend a meeting but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence relating to the business, provided that the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose

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Predetermination and bias

- Underlying general principle:
 - taking public decisions means taking decisions in the public interest
 - must listen to all sides of the argument
 - must be willing to change your mind
 - must take decisions for proper reasons
- Not a gag on campaigning but a reminder of need for fairness

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Thank you

Paul Hoey

Natalie Ainscough

www.hoeyainscough.co.uk

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Report to Standards and General Purposes Committee

Date: 10 December 2020

Reference number: TBC

Title: Monitoring Officer Protocol

Author and/or contact officer: Maria Damigos Principal Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer (Aylesbury Vale team) maria.damigos@buckinghamshire.gov.uk; 07980 968875

Ward(s) affected: none specific

Recommendations: The committee is asked to:-

1. Note the draft Monitoring Officer Protocol and, subject to any comments and amendments, approve the Protocol.

Reason for decision: The Protocol is to further explain the role and functions of the Monitoring Officer and to support their overview and implementation of effective governance arrangements for Buckinghamshire Council. It supplements the roles and functions already detailed in the Council's Constitution.

Content of report

Background

- 1.1 Under s.5 Local Government and Housing Act 1989 the Council is required to appoint an officer to act as the Monitoring Officer who is responsible for reporting to the Council any matters which are unlawful, amount to maladministration or create injustice. The Monitoring Officer also has further statutory responsibilities, most notably in relation to standards and ethics.
- 1.2 Although there are many individual functions and responsibilities assigned to the Monitoring Officer both via legislation and the Constitution, they mainly centre around governance, ethics and standards which underpin the above functions.
- 1.3 As this Committee has responsibility for supporting the Monitoring Officer in discharging her role in respect of standards of conduct and behaviour and receive

reports relating to maladministration causing injustice it is considered that the Committee is the appropriate body to approve the Protocol.

Protocol

- 1.4 The Protocol is intended to support and assist the Monitoring Officer by promoting understanding and effective discharge of her responsibilities and is a reflection and summary of the current arrangements. It is considered that setting this out strengthens the exercise of the Monitoring Officer's role. The draft Protocol is set out in the Appendix to this Report.
- 1.5 The Protocol sets out operational arrangements and understandings which are intended to support working relations and the flow of information.
- 1.6 The arrangements and understandings are set out in paragraph 4 of the Protocol. A summary of the key responsibilities are contained in the table at the end of Paragraph 4.
- 1.7 It is anticipated that the Protocol is reviewed every 2 years or earlier if necessary.

Other options considered

- 1.8 None. The Protocol is not a statutory requirement and is intended to supplement and strengthen the arrangements already in place.

Legal and financial implications

- 1.9 None except as set out in the body of this report.

Corporate implications

- 1.10 Support for governance arrangements as dealt with by the Monitoring Officer as set out in the body of this report.

Consultation and communication

- 1.11 None.

Next steps and review

Background document for effective discharge of Monitoring Officer responsibilities. Comms where appropriate and review when necessary or in two years, whichever is the later.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL – PROTOCOL REGULATING THE DUTIES OF THE ROLE OF MONITORING OFFICER

1. The current responsibilities of the Monitoring Officer role rest with the Deputy Chief Executive, who undertakes to discharge their statutory responsibilities with a positive determination and in a manner that enhances the overall reputation of the Council. In doing so, he/she will also safeguard, so far as is possible, Members and Officers, whilst acting in their official capacities, from legal difficulties and/or criminal sanctions.
2. The Monitoring Officer will appoint one or more Deputy Monitoring Officers as appropriately needed who, together with the Service Director Legal and Democratic Services, will support the Monitoring Officer with his/her responsibilities.
3. In general terms the ability to discharge these duties depends on excellent working relations with colleagues and elected Members of the Council, but also on the flow of information and access to debate, particularly at early stages.
4. The following arrangements and understandings between the Monitoring Officer and colleagues and Councillors are designed to help ensure the effective discharge of the Monitoring Officer's functions:-
 - (a) the Monitoring Officer will be a member of the Council's Management Team;
 - (b) the Monitoring Officer will be given advance notice of meetings (whether formal or informal) between Chief Officers, Committee and Sub Committee Chairmen where any procedural, vires or other constitutional issues are likely to arise;
 - (c) the Monitoring Officer will have access to all meetings;
 - (d) members of Management Team (the Chief Executive and Directors) will be responsible for alerting the Monitoring Officer to all emerging issues of concern including legality, probity, vires and constitutional issues;
 - (e) the Monitoring Officer will be provided with access to all reports to Councillors;
 - (f) the Monitoring Officer is expected to develop good liaison and working relations with the Council's Auditor and the Local Government Ombudsman, (including having the authority, on behalf of the Council, to complain to the same, refer any breaches to the same or give and receive any relevant information, whether confidential or otherwise, through appropriate protocols, if necessary) and settle any compensation payments for alleged or actual maladministration found against the Council;
 - (g) the Monitoring Officer will ensure that the Head of the Paid Service and the Chief Financial Officer have up-to-date information regarding emerging issues;
 - (h) the Monitoring Officer will be expected to make or commission enquiries into allegations of misconduct by Councillors;
 - (i) the Head of the Paid Service, Chief Financial Officer and Monitoring Officer will meet regularly to consider and recommend action in connection with current governance issues and other probity matters;

(j) in carrying out any investigation the Monitoring Officer will have unqualified access to any information held by the Council and any employee who can assist in the discharge of his/her functions.

(k) the Monitoring Officer will have access to an appropriate budget (whether corporate or service based) sufficient to enable him/her to seek Counsel's opinion or take appropriate action on any matter concerning his/her functions;

(l) the Monitoring Officer will be responsible for preparing a training programme for Members of the Council on the ethical framework, for approval by the Standards Committee;

(m) the Monitoring Officer will report to the Council from time to time on the Constitution and any necessary or desirable changes following consultation, in particular with the Head of the Paid Service and the Chief Financial Officer;

(n) the Monitoring Officer may defer the making of a formal report under Section 5 of the LGHA 1989 where another investigative body is involved;

(o) the Monitoring Officer may make an annual report to the Council on the staff, accommodation and resources required to discharge his/her functions;

(p) the Monitoring Officer will appoint one or more deputies to act in his/her absence and will ensure that he/she is briefed on emerging issues;

(q) the Monitoring Officer will make arrangements to ensure good communication with the Clerks to the Town and Parish Councils for which the Council is the principal authority.

Summary of Monitoring Officer Functions

Description		Source
1.	Report on contraventions or likely contraventions of any enactment of rule of law	Section 5, 5A Local Government and Housing Act 1989
2.	Report on any maladministration or injustice where Ombudsman has carried out an investigation	Section 5, 5A Local Government and Housing Act 1989
3.	Personal appointment of Deputies and power to delegate	Section 5, Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and Section 82A Local Government Act 2000
4.	Report on resources	Section 5, Local Government and Housing Act 1989
5.	Operation and interpretation of the Constitution	Constitution
6.	Investigate misconduct in compliance with the Council's or Town or Parish Council adopted Code of Conduct (as appropriate)	Section 28 Localism Act 2011
7.	Establish and maintain registers of Members' interests and gifts and hospitality	Chapter 7 Localism Act 2011
8.	Advice to Members on the interpretation of the Code of Conduct	Chapter 7 Localism Act 2011
9.	Key role in promoting and maintaining high	Chapter 7 Localism Act 2011

	standards of conduct through support to the Standards and General Purposes Committee and Audit and Governance Committee	
10.	Maintenance of the Council's Whistle-blowing Policy	Constitution
11.	Compensation for maladministration	Section 92 Local Government Act 2000
12.	Advice on vires issues, maladministration, financial impropriety, probity and policy framework and budget issues to all Members	Department for Communities & Local Government, Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

Review of Protocol

5. This protocol shall be reviewed every two years or more frequently if necessary.

Background papers

Buckinghamshire Council Constitution:

<https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s5397/Buckinghamshire%20Council%20Constitution.pdf>



Report to Standards and General Purposes Committee

Date: 10 December 2020

Reference number: TBC

Title: REVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR COUNCILLORS

Author and/or contact officer: Nick Graham, Director of Legal & Democratic Services – nick.graham@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: none specific

Recommendations:

The Committee is asked to:

- 1. To note and review the Guidance documents approved the Shadow Executive as they relate to Councillors**
- 2. To provide any comments or suggestions for improvement on the Guidance documents**

Reason for the decision: Social Media is a key communication tool used by the Council and many Councillors; it is also used by service users and key stakeholders. It has a significant role in the reputational management of the Council and the personal reputation of Members. The Council has developed and adopted a suite of documents giving guidance to staff and Councillors which the Committee has asked to review.

Background

During the transition period, because of the importance of social media as a way of communicating with residents, a set of Social Media Standards were developed and approved alongside a suite of documents setting out the Council's approach to the use of social media, which included advice and guidance for Councillors. Copies of those Standards and the Social Media Policy, Strategy and Guide are set out in the Background papers.

The Council's general approach to social media and managing its corporate accounts is set out on the Council's public website. This includes a set of standards for conduct on social media use indicating that abuse and threatening posts will not be tolerated, together with advertising, 'trolling' and 'spam'. Residents are advised to not use social media for complaints and are directed to the complaints process.

As well as a set of Standards, the Guidance to Councillors is set out in the following the documents.

Social Media Strategy

The Strategy outlines in broad terms the aims and objectives of social media use by the Council and sets this in the wider context of the Council's Communication and Engagement Strategy. It outlines the different social media channels and encourages the use of social media by Councillors. Councillors are advised to read the Strategy alongside the Code of Conduct for Councillors and a commitment is given to training in social media. In the interest of fostering good community relations the corporate accounts will often link to Member accounts where appropriate and relevant.

Social Media Policy

The Policy applies to Staff and Councillors and sets out a significant amount of detail on social media use including detailed guidance on the use of the corporate social media accounts. This covers such topics as: advice on posting; offensive content; misuse and offences; security and privacy; videos and images.

Councillors are again reminded of the Code of Conduct and that Councillors who post content are likely to be seen as acting in their role as Councillors rather than in a private capacity. The Policy emphasises that care needs to be taken when posting content to ensure that the confidential information is not disclosed. Tips on content are also given together with a link to the Local Government Association's comprehensive set of policies on how to make the best use of social media, including 'Do's and Don'ts' referred to in the Background Papers.

Social Media Guide

The Guide is a practical introduction to social media with numerous tips and advice on how use the different social media network. There is a useful glossary of terms in addition to guidance on personal safety and security when using social media.

Training on Social Media

Media training is provided to Members as part of Induction and general development. A link to the online training is below:

[Media Law training for members \(buckinghamshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/media-law-training-for-members)

As of today, 66 Councillors have undertaken this training.

Legal Implications

The use of social media can have legal ramifications if used inappropriately or misused. Councillors can also face allegations that they have breached the Code of Conduct and can face sanctions as a consequence. Clear guidance is important in ensuring that Councillors can use social media safely and effectively.

Corporate Implications

Social media is a key communication tool used by the Council and can be key to the Council's management of its reputation. The proper and effective use of social media is an important way in which Councillors relate to their communities and electorate. The maintenance of high ethical standards applies to the use of social media as it does to all Councillor conduct.

Next Steps and Review

Councillors' comments will be used to inform any revisions or amendments to the Guidance and the development of appropriate training on Induction for new Council Members after May 2021.

Background Papers

Social Media Standards

Social Media Policy

Social Media Strategy

Social Media Guide

LGA: do's and don'ts of Social Media use

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Social Media Policy

April 2020



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1. Introduction

Social media plays a huge role in the work of Buckinghamshire Council and in the lives of many employees and customers. As a local government organisation, we can use social media channels to communicate our key messages, share relevant news, and respond to queries from our audiences.

However, social media also comes with some safety, confidentiality and reputational risks, both to our staff and to the organisation as a whole.

This policy is intended to get the most out of social media for Buckinghamshire Council while protecting our staff and our reputation, and minimising any risk. The policy should be viewed alongside the staff [Code of Conduct](#).

The majority of this document applies to Buckinghamshire Council officers but there is also a section for members, which should be read alongside the members' [Code of Conduct](#).

What is social media?

The term 'social media' refers to websites and applications that allow users to create a profile and share information, ideas and news through virtual communities (social networks).

This content most often comes in the form of text posts, photos, videos, or comments on other people's posts. Popular sites include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube.

2. Who can use our corporate social media accounts?

All staff required to use social media on behalf of Buckinghamshire Council will be offered training by the Communications team. Managers should ensure that training is provided for all staff who are required to use social media as part of their job role.

Where ownership and accountability lies

- The Communications Team is responsible for managing, publishing and monitoring content on the corporate Buckinghamshire Council social media accounts.
- Buckinghamshire Council will only post on our own social media accounts so that we are able to monitor any incoming comments and provide information and guidance where necessary. We do not respond to criticism or negative comments on community channels due to the resource implications.
- Where we want to share key messages or community events on third party or local community channels, it's preferable to ask the manager of that channel to do so. Failing this, an officer or councillor may create the post on the Council's behalf.
- Staff who use social media as part of their job must adhere to the staff [Code of Conduct](#), as they would in any work they carry out. Employees should be aware that they are representing Buckinghamshire Council and are personally responsible for any social media content they publish.

Are there any exceptions?

- To ensure consistency in our responses, access to Buckinghamshire Council social media accounts is primarily limited to the Communications Team.
- In circumstances where there is a sound business case for a project or team having a separate account, the Communications Team will consider a request for a new account. Please contact the Communications Team for the account request form.
- Before an account or page is requested, the level of engagement needed, the resources required and the timeframe all need to be agreed with the relevant senior manager.

3. How to use our corporate social media accounts

Buckinghamshire Council uses the following social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube. All of these accounts – and any future accounts representing the Council – must be used in line with this policy and the staff [Code of Conduct](#).

General

- Before uploading Buckinghamshire Council material onto a social networking site, you should make sure that you are aware of, and comfortable with, the site's own terms and conditions.
- Staff should be sensitive to the minimum age requirements on different social networking sites (this is often set at age 13).
- Keep your communications clear, positive, polite and professional.
- Make sure that any information you are posting, commenting on or sharing is accurate, reliable, not prejudiced and not 'fake news'.
- Content must never bring the Council into disrepute, for example by criticising, disagreeing or arguing with customers, colleagues or managers; making defamatory remarks about individuals or groups; posting inappropriate images or links.
- It's important that content is not open to misinterpretation. Once published, content is almost impossible to control and may be manipulated, used in different contexts and further distributed, potentially damaging our brand and reputation.
- If content is misunderstood, then clarification, and an apology if appropriate, should be published as soon as reasonably possible by the Communications team.
- Respect other people's privacy. It is illegal to publish personal data about individuals unless they have given you their permission. As Council staff you are data controllers and will be personally responsible for anything you publish.
- In the event of an emergency situation, all scheduled social media output will be frozen to allow the communication officers running the crisis response to post critical messages. This will ensure clear communication between Buckinghamshire Council and the public until the emergency is resolved, and avoid the embarrassment of posting irrelevant or insensitive content in a time of crisis.

Political posts

- Our social media accounts must not be used at any time for political purposes such as campaigning, or trying to influence followers towards a certain political view.
- When using our social media accounts staff should not express personal or political views. Officers work to serve the administration and its goals, whatever political party is leading, and should remain neutral and not cross over into the political arena.
- When forwarding or sharing online messages, care should be taken that it does not appear that Buckinghamshire Council is endorsing a particular opinion.

Responding to comments and enquiries

- Assign customer enquiries to the relevant teams, either to answer them directly or to provide a response for use by the communications officer.
- Keep your communications clear, positive, polite and professional at all times.
- Avoid responding when incapacitated or otherwise tired and emotional.
- Respect the comments of those we don't agree with; allowing these comments to stay in our space is part of our objective of broader community engagement.
- Even if we disagree with a comment, all comments and messages should be responded to in a measured and friendly way.
- Don't argue with someone who is argumentative – some people like to row online for the sake of it.
- Generally, conversations should be carried out in the space in which they began – for instance, if a user comments in a public space, you should not attempt to move the conversation to a private inbox. However, exceptions may be made in the interest of reducing conflict, avoiding the further posting of offensive content, or where confidential information is being exchanged.

Removing content and blocking users

You should avoid blocking other social media users where possible, as this act in itself could result in a backlash that damages our reputation. However, while we have no problem with comments that disagree with or question Buckinghamshire Council and its actions, we will not accept content that is offensive or discriminatory. [Our Social Media Standards](#) have been published on the Buckinghamshire Council website and outline the acceptable use of our social media channels. Anyone who breaches these standards may be blocked.

- In the first instance, depending on the degree of offence, any unacceptable messages should be removed and, if appropriate, a private message can be sent to explain why this has been done.
- Content should only be removed if it is offensive, defamatory or you can show that it is in breach of this policy or breaks the terms of use that we have defined and made public ([Our Social Media Standards](#)). Social media respects and requires a democratic approach.
- If the same user/group continues to post offensive messages, there is likely to be grounds to block them. You should seek the advice of the Head of Communications before doing so.

- Racism, sexism, threats of violence, and any other forms of prejudice or harassment will not be tolerated and should be reported and removed.
- If you spot any sensitive Council-related information being leaked or shared on social media, you contact the relevant service area and Buckinghamshire Council's Data Protection Officer in the first instance.

FOI requests and complaints

Be aware that people may attempt make complaints and send freedom of information (FOI) requests using social media. There are statutory timescales for the Council to provide answers, so it's important that you:

- Monitor social media for FOI requests and complaints.
- Acknowledge the person attempting to submitting the FOI request or complaint, explaining what happens next.
- Ensure that any FOI requests or complaints are fed into the correct system and logged for response via the Council's formal procedure.
- Encourage any customers making a service request (rather than corporate complaint) to report it via the correct channel, rather than Council social media channels.

Personal information and confidentiality

- Social media communications must be compliant with our privacy policy and should not breach confidentiality.
- Personal information, whether that of an employee or customer, should never be published on social media.
- If a customer chooses to put their own details in a public comment – e.g. a benefits code or phone number – you should politely advise them to remove it and continue the enquiry through private messaging if possible.
- Publishing any internal material, such as a report or minutes from a meeting which has not already been made public, would also be a breach of confidentiality.
- Staff and members should always ensure that information disclosed about the Council, partners or colleagues does not breach any confidentiality agreements.

Use of videos and images

When taking group photographs and videos for use on our social media platforms, you must adhere to the following:

- In the case of photos and videos that include groups, make it clear to those being filmed/photographed that the image/video could be used for online and offline PR purposes, providing the opportunity for those that don't want to be included to step out.
- Where photos/videos are of groups of school children, the school may have blanket consent from parents for images to be used, but this will need to be confirmed with the school contact.

- In cases where individuals are the focus of an image/video, consent forms will need to be signed. For children under 16 and those who are unable to understand consent, it will need to be given by a parent or guardian. If the group photo/video is of children, and those children are identifiable, completed consent forms will be needed.
- Consent can be withdrawn at any time.

Copyright

- When sharing images/videos or using information from a copyrighted source, you should be mindful that permissions may be legally required, as would be the case with printed materials. This can not only be dependent on the source itself but also on the copyright policy of the social media platform being used.
- Check with the copyright owner that you have permission to publish the content and offer to credit/acknowledge their copyright.
- When sharing material and media from third parties, you need to be confident that it comes from a trusted source.

Adverts and inappropriate content

Advertisements on Buckinghamshire Council social networking pages should be monitored to check that they are appropriate.

Closing an account

The closure or mothballing of an account should be carefully managed to ensure that the channel does not remain Council-branded but neglected. You should discuss the closure of an account with a senior manager before taking any action.

Misuse of social media

In certain circumstances, the misuse of social media can constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and Buckinghamshire Council. It may also cause embarrassment to us and our customers/residents.

Uploading, posting or forwarding a link to any of the following types of material on social media, whether in a professional or personal capacity, could amount to disciplinary action under the staff disciplinary policy (this list is not exhaustive):

- Pornographic material (writing, films, pictures, video clips).
- A defamatory statement about any person or organisation.
- Material which is offensive, obscene, criminal discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to the Council, its customers/residents or its staff.
- Confidential information about the Council or any of its staff or customers/residents (which staff do not have express authority to disseminate).
- Any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for the member of staff or the Council).

- Material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

Any such action will be addressed under the [Buckinghamshire Council Disciplinary Policy and Procedure](#)

How content is monitored and moderated

You should be aware that any use of social media channels (whether for work or personal purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, disciplinary action may be taken.

Where evidence of misuse is found a more detailed investigation may be undertaken in accordance with our Disciplinary Policy and Procedure. This may involve the examination and disclosure of monitoring records to those nominated to undertake the investigation and any witnesses involved in the investigation. If necessary, such information may be handed to the police in connection with a criminal investigation.

If you notice any use of social media by other staff or councillors in breach of this policy, you should report it to the Communications team.

4. Security

Passwords

If the wrong person gained access to Buckinghamshire Council's social media accounts, they could instantly contact thousands of residents with the potential to cause huge reputational damage.

The same security precautions around passwords should be applied to social media as they are to IT security in general, but with some differences and exceptions:

- Passwords should be issued by the Communications team and stored securely.
- Passwords should be changed regularly for security.
- Different, complicated passwords should be used for each account.
- Multi-factor authentication with the highest available privacy setting should be used where possible.
- Passwords should ideally be stored in a restricted folder that only authorised staff have access to.
- In the case of corporate social media, sharing passwords is unavoidable and, in contradiction to our IT Acceptable Use Policy, limited sharing is necessary.
- If it is necessary to share a password then it must be sent in an encrypted document, with the password to the document sent separately and ideally via a different channel such as WhatsApp. You should not share passwords through unencrypted messages or emails.
- Following a security breach or the departure of an employee with access, the Communications team is responsible for changing passwords and remotely logging

off all mobile devices that otherwise connect automatically. The method will vary depending on the channel.

Spam, viruses, scams and hacking

- Report accounts that appear to be bots, fake news channels, or other channels where the purpose is to spam users or spread viruses and other malicious content.
- Do not open messages or click links from accounts that you suspect may be used for such purposes. Just delete the message or report the post, and report the account to the relevant social media site.
- Avoid posting any details that might allow a hacker to guess our security questions or password.
- Do not log into Buckinghamshire Council social media accounts while using public Wi-Fi. These networks are often unsecured and our information could be stolen.
- You should also try to stay up to date on the latest scams and malware threats.

What to do if our social accounts are hacked

Being hacked is quite rare but if this does happen there are steps you should take:

- You should immediately alert the Communications team.
- Officers in the Communications team should report the breach to the relevant social media site before alerting the Service Director for Policy and Communications.
- If the account can still be accessed, the password should be changed immediately by the Communications team. A post should be sent out alerting our followers to the breach, and any posts published illicitly should be deleted.
- If the account cannot be accessed, the procedure of reporting the hack to the relevant social media site should be pursued by the Communications team.
- In instances when the hacked account cannot be accessed, the Council's other uncompromised social media channels can be used to alert the public.

5. Personal use of social media

The personal use of social media can sometimes be beneficial to organisations but there are some grey areas which have the potential to cause problems for both you and Buckinghamshire Council. This section aims to offer some clarity on this.

General

- We respect the desire to use social media for personal communication and expression, and ask you to exercise simple good judgement and common sense around how personal comments or activities online could reflect on the Council. This applies even if you are not apparently acting in an official capacity or identifying yourself as a member of staff.

- The same standards of behaviour and conduct apply online as would be expected offline. Our [Code of Conduct](#) for staff still applies.
- Employees should not engage in activities on the internet which might bring the Council into disrepute, and should not post derogatory or offensive comments on the internet
- You should be aware that through the open nature of social media sites, it is possible for third parties to collate vast amounts of information.
- The public must be able to trust the integrity of our services. Our residents need to be confident that the outside activities of our staff do not undermine Buckinghamshire Council's reputation and that decisions are not perceived to be influenced by any commercial or personal interests.
- If you are contacted by the press about posts on your personal account that relate to Buckinghamshire Council, you should speak with your senior manager and communications before responding. The Communications team must be consulted with regard to all press contact.
- Minimise security risks by using strong passwords and changing them regularly. Protect your devices with a pin to restrict access and prevent misuse.
- Be mindful that social media sites are sometimes used to distribute malicious software or code.

Interacting with Buckinghamshire Council social media accounts from your personal accounts

We encourage all staff to be ambassadors of Buckinghamshire Council and, just as we welcome you sharing stories of our events and developments in a way that supports the organisation, we also appreciate you sharing and engaging with our social media content in a positive way.

If you see comments criticising Buckinghamshire Council, please do not step in to defend the organisation. Instead, alert the Communications team so they can issue a corporate response if appropriate.

Privacy

It could cause irreparable damage to our reputation if any confidential information was to be leaked on social media. Staff must not reveal confidential information about Buckinghamshire Council, including internal policy or discussions.

- Always presume any information you put online will be shared publicly.
- Select the most secure settings for any personal social media accounts and consider removing your place of work from your account, so that you are less likely to be identified as a Buckinghamshire Council employee.
- Don't let anyone else access your social media accounts.
- Check your privacy settings so that you understand who can see what you publish and who can view your personal information. Anyone who knows your name or username can search for you online so make sure you are happy with what people will see if they do.

- Do not discuss work-related issues on social media forums – they are not necessarily private.
- LinkedIn is different from most other social media platforms as it is professionally focussed and centres on your employment. Any content you post on LinkedIn will inevitably reflect on your place of work and must be professional at all times.
- Personal blogs, websites and social media must not be used to attack or abuse colleagues. Staff members should respect the privacy and the feelings of others at all times.

Social media and politics

- You are entitled to express your own political views outside of work, but please remember to adhere to the [Code of Conduct](#) and don't bring the Council into disrepute. However, if your role is politically restricted, this will also extend to your activity on social media.
- It may be possible to see which groups and parties you follow on social media, so consider following groups and parties from across the political spectrum.

Work friends and social media

- You're free to connect with work colleagues on social media but be aware that anything on social media that goes against staff policies, such as the [Code of Conduct](#), or shows evidence that policy is not being adhered to, will be dealt with accordingly.
- Always ensure that your privacy settings are set to the highest level but be mindful that any social media posts may still be viewable by your contacts' networks.
- It may not be appropriate to share work-related content, such as photos from private staff-only events. Staff should be considerate to their colleagues, should not post information when they have been asked not to, and should remove published information immediately if asked by a colleague to do so.

Conflicts of interest

- You are free to talk about your job online unless there are specific concerns about the nature of your role. You should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with your senior manager.
- Any potential conflicts of interest regarding your use of social media should be discussed with your line manager and/or a senior manager.
- If you are offered payment to produce social media posts for a third party this could also constitute a conflict of interest and must be discussed with a senior manager.

6. Use of social media by councillors

A number of councillors have their own social media accounts with which to communicate with residents, share their own views and connect with the community proactively. This enables councillors to listen to what people are saying and engage with them on an equal

footing, focusing on two-way communications rather than simply delivering messages via press releases and newsletters.

Given the high profile of councillors in representing local communities, there are some important points that need to be considered:

- Misuse of social media may be in breach of the [Code of Conduct](#) for members.
- Social media is a very public communication channel and, as a Buckinghamshire Council member, anything you post or share can reflect on yourself and the organisation both positively and negatively. It can also be shared in seconds to a huge audience and cannot be controlled.
- Your social media content is likely to be connected to your role as a councillor and, while some councillors try to make it clear on their social media pages that their comments are their personal views, it is rarely a defence for well-known public figures. Inevitably, your personal views will be associated with your position as a councillor.
- Ask yourself whether you would say the same thing at a public meeting or to a reporter as you would post on social media. It could well amount to the same thing and, once posted, you can assume it's permanent.
- Avoid engaging with someone who is argumentative.
- Social media content should be accurate, appropriate, respectful, must not be open to misinterpretation and must not breach copyright law. Any content which fails in this is likely to damage the reputation of you and the Council and could risk breaching the [Code of Conduct](#) for members.
- You must not disclose confidential Council information, documents you only have access to as a councillor, or information which has been told to you by a resident or other party in confidence (even if you try to anonymise by removing names). Privacy must be respected.
- The best engagement comes from posts that are clear, jargon-free and give useful or interesting information for your followers. Posts also have more impact where they are accompanied by a picture or video.

7. Further information

Additional useful information on social media use for staff and councillors is published by the [Local Government Association](#).

Anyone with questions on our social media policy or in need of further clarification should contact the Service Director for Policy and Communications.



Social Media Strategy

April 2020



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Social media is a valuable tool for the public sector; with 67% of the UK population using social media, it is vital that Buckinghamshire Council has a social media presence.
- 1.2 A council's social media presence provides visibility and recognition in an online space, ensuring residents know that the council exists and what the core business is so that services are accountable to council taxpayers. It plays an important role in the way the council presents itself to internal and external stakeholders and offers opportunities for positive PR to bigger and more varied audiences.
- 1.3 Social media enables a council to communicate directly with people in the community and beyond, often instantly and for very little money.
- 1.4 Online communities are reflective of offline communities, and if this online community is supportive of and works with the council, it can help the council to achieve its objectives offline.
- 1.5 This strategy aims to determine how Buckinghamshire Council will use social media to support the overall vision and objectives of the Council.
- 1.6 It identifies the social media platforms Buckinghamshire Council will use, establishes how each channel can be used most effectively, and recommends a suitable approach to content creation and publication, as well as security and governance.
- 1.7 There are various ways for organisations to approach social media use. Some organisations might broadcast information only and rarely respond to followers (for example media companies like ITV and BBC), some use humour to build and engage with audiences (for example the Museum of English Rural Life), some have dozens of hyper-local accounts run by frontline staff (for example Metropolitan Police) and others share content that at first glance is not explicitly relevant to their brand, but helps build a following (for example Innocent Smoothies).
- 1.8 At Buckinghamshire Council, our social media strategy will focus on; community, customer service and reputation.

2. Community and localism

- 2.1 Social media will be used to inform, consult and involve local people. It supports the Council's vision of engagement with residents, partners and stakeholders that is meaningful, timely, inclusive and direct.
- 2.2 Social media will be used to provide residents with information and news about council services and direct them to the resources they need, or encourage them to participate in certain behaviours and actions. In emergency situations, social media can be used to quickly get a message out to warn and inform.
- 2.3 Social media is a valuable device for obtaining genuine feedback, especially from harder to reach audiences, and will be used by Buckinghamshire Council to enable local people to help shape proposals that will affect the services they use and deliver or the areas where they live and work. It will help us to hear the voices of those most affected and hear a balance of views.

- 2.4 Social media makes it easy for the council to be accessible to many people; the 67% of the population who use social media can contact the council and get involved in their local community by using the smartphone in their pocket.
- 2.5 Social media use at Buckinghamshire Council will embed the Council in the online community and offer an opportunity for local people to get involved digitally.

3. Customer service

- 3.1 Social media can be used as another customer service channel, providing an additional way for residents to contact the Council, in a way which is convenient for them and likely to be more efficient than traditional channels.
- 3.2 Social media at Buckinghamshire Council will have a strong customer focus, helping to make services accessible and offering residents a choice of engaging with the Council online.
- 3.3 Residents already contact organisations online with service requests, whether it's an agreed or advertised method of customer service or not, so it's important that Buckinghamshire Council is equipped to handle these enquiries.

4. Reputation

- 4.1 Residents are already talking about the Council on social media, therefore it is imperative to seize the opportunity and join the conversation. Buckinghamshire Council will participate in 'social listening'; using social media to gather feedback and opinions from our residents and stakeholders and identify and respond to issues and concerns.
- 4.2 Social media will be used to enhance the Council's image and reputation by sharing positive news stories. This will position the Council as an industry leader and employer of choice, and support the Council's five-year ambition to win the best council award.
- 4.3 A council's social media presence offers employees a way to identify with the organisation online and become online 'brand ambassadors', further enhancing the reputation of the council and its position within the community, and nurturing the image of the council as a desirable place to work; attracting the best candidates for employment, which will ultimately improve the effectiveness of the council in delivering excellent services.
- 4.4 The key to all of the above is having a large, engaged social media following which links into an even bigger network. A council may only have 100 Twitter followers, but if each of those followers is influential in the local area, and have for example 5,000 followers each, they could potentially share the council's message to over 500,000 people between them.
- 4.5 This strategy sits under the Communications Strategy for Buckinghamshire Council. Details about the operational tactics for social media use at the Council follow in the social media policies and guide (appendices iii and iv).

5. Social media aims:

- To support the overall communications objectives of Buckinghamshire Council
- To embed Buckinghamshire Council in online communities
- To enable effective, timely, two-way engagement with residents

- To give local communities greater influence, empowering residents to get involved in the council and their community in a way that's convenient for them
- To support localism within Buckinghamshire
- To provide excellent customer service via social media channels
- To promote the council as an industry leader and employer of choice
- To promote Buckinghamshire as a great place to live, work and visit, and a county of which everyone is proud to be a part
- To champion the county's voice on local and national issues
- To position the council as a forward-thinking, dynamic and digitally focused local authority
- To make best use of resources by effectively utilising the relatively inexpensive communication tool of social media
- To demonstrate public support for our partners, developing relationships and encouraging collaboration.

6. Social media objectives:

- The social media strategy objectives will support Buckinghamshire Council's business objectives and overall communications objectives. Therefore these will be added to this strategy once they have been set by Buckinghamshire Council. The strategy and objectives will be reviewed and updated annually to ensure it continues to support Buckinghamshire Council's objectives, and to incorporate any new social media platforms or emerging trends.
- Retain audiences. District followers are dual followers (identified) so aim for year one is to maintain this number and there is a risk of losing them through confusion. Already growing at 100 a month, would like to retain current figure and maintain growth rate of 100 a month. Year 2 will be focused on growth Grow engaged audiences for Buckinghamshire Council social media accounts; this will be measured qualitatively and quantitatively (see notes on evaluation). The quantitative objective is to achieve a combined total of 40,000 followers across all the main corporate social media channels by December 2020.*
- Embed Buckinghamshire Council in the local online communities; this will be measured by engagement rates, and this will vary depending on the objective of each campaign / post – each campaign will have to set objectives with engagement rates with Twitter posts achieving an average engagement rate of 3%, rising to 5% for video posts.** CHANGE THIS
- Acknowledge all customer service enquiries within one working day.

* 40,000 is approximately double of the number of social media followers of Bucks County Council across all social media channels in 2019.

**Average engagement rate for a Facebook post in the UK is 3.82%, rising to 6.96% for video posts.

7. Audience research and channels summary

- 7.1 There are several different social media platforms popular in the UK, each with different functions and attracting different user demographics.
- 7.2 Evidence from the district and county councils' social media accounts and experience of the communications teams has helped to inform this research.
- 7.3 Buckinghamshire Council will use a selection of the social media platforms available; those most used by our communities, most appropriate to our purpose and most effective for our communication needs. Directing our resources to the channels most-used by the resident groups we are trying to communicate with rather than attempting to have a presence on all social media platforms regardless of their effectiveness or relevance to the Council is the recommended strategy. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and Nextdoor are thought to cover all of our target audiences who use social media, with significant overlap.
- 7.4 To use social media effectively to deliver communications objectives, consideration must be given to the audience we are trying to reach and which channel would be most appropriate. The best time of day to post and the language and style to use also differs depending on the audience. Best practice for content creation for each platform features in the social media guide (appendix iv). Posting appropriate content for the demographic using the social media platform will also help to grow followers and reach, rather than risking losing followers who don't like or are unfamiliar with the style of content.
- 7.5 The demographic of each social media platform is expected to age within the platform; the so-called 'generational shift'. Behaviours suggest people won't change to a different type of social media as they get older, but the social media will adapt with its ageing demographic. Newer trends will host younger audiences. Buckinghamshire Council will review our use of channels and their audiences annually in order to keep abreast of social media trends and evolution.
- 7.6 Social media is designed to be a two-way conversation, so although producing proactive content is important, it's also vital that we listen to residents on social media and respond to them. Not only service requests, but having conversations, answering general questions and showing support for and interest in things which are happening in our residents' lives and the wider community are all essential. Social media should not just be a broadcast channel; for Buckinghamshire Council it isn't 'follow us' on social media, it's 'talk to us'.
- 7.7 Content will be tailored appropriately for each different social media channel. However, the overall tone, language and style will be consistent across all channels and reflect the Council's values and aims and overall image. Consistency across the channels is important so that residents, stakeholders and wider audiences can recognise the Council no matter which platform they interact with us on; whether it's over the phone in customer service or via an Instagram comment.
- 7.8 Regular training will be provided by the Communications Team to all members of staff who use social media on behalf of the Council, including the customer services team.

Overview of social media channels and intended use

	 Facebook	 Instagram	 Twitter	 LinkedIn	 YouTube	 Nextdoor
Purpose for Council	Community presence, share news and information, promote events and services, alerts	'Brand awareness' showcase of council and council involvement in community	Brand awareness and loyalty, sharing news and events, live/quick updates on urgent topics	Recruitment, celebrating professional success and promoting business activities	'Shop window', to share council news and info and video library	Engagement with residents, hyper-localised content
Audience	35-65 year olds, predominantly female	18-44 years old 60% female	25-54 year olds, 54% female	25-55 year olds, 60% male, professionals and jobseekers	13-35 year olds 50/50 male and female	45+ years old, not on other social media, community minded
Style	Friendly, informal, fun, reassuring and informative	Friendly, informal, slang, fun	Friendly, informal, accessible language, emojis, authoritative when necessary	Formal but not stuffy, sleek, professional	Fun, informal, current	More formal but still friendly, clear and concise
Main type of content	Video, photos, text, short and snappy, engaging	Photos, videos of scenes and events around Bucks, behind the scenes at council	Visual assets such as images, videos, GIFs	Job ads, business news, events	Video only; how-to videos, informative, entertainment	Clear, engaging posts, with video and photos
Best time to post	Any time but peaks early mornings, 3/4pm, evenings	Early morning or evenings, every day	During the week, early mornings and evenings peak times	Monday – Thursday, daytime and evenings	Evenings and weekends, but consistent times	Any time due to longevity of posts

8. Facebook

- 8.1 Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the UK and is an important one for Buckinghamshire Council.
- 8.2 The primary vision and purpose of Facebook is community, which aligns with one of Buckinghamshire Council's strategic priorities; 'fostering healthy, vibrant and resilient communities that people contribute to and enjoy'.
- 8.3 Facebook is Buckinghamshire's main online community, and Buckinghamshire Council will become part of that online community.
- 8.4 This will be achieved through engaging in conversation with residents, answering questions and giving information and advice.
- 8.5 Facebook will also be used to support the Council's localism agenda. Tens of thousands of Buckinghamshire residents are part of Facebook local community groups. Rather than trying to create our own new community groups from scratch, we will use the active community groups that already exist, and share our posts in these groups. We will build relationships with the administrators of these groups so they can share our information with a ready-made, engaged audience. Where the group settings allow, we will directly interact with the groups as Buckinghamshire Council. This will enable the Council to share local news and information and engage with smaller communities.
- 8.6 We will not sit separately from the local Facebook community; we want to be at the heart of it, joining in with the conversations that are already happening and making meaningful contributions to the existing online local communities.
- 8.7 Monitoring local groups and pages is resource-intensive and it is accepted that it is not possible to see or respond to every comment and conversation in these local groups. This should not be seen as a problem or a deterrent to attempting to engage at all.
- 8.8 Via Facebook, the Council will strive to be part of the conversation, but not an all-seeing 'Big Brother' figure. It is recognised that residents can share their opinions on Facebook without the Council replying to everything.
- 8.9 Buckinghamshire Council's main Facebook page will be used to share the majority of content, with smaller groups or event pages linked to the page considered occasionally for specific needs.
- 8.10 The corporate page will share localised content by using hashtags for the location such as #Aylesbury and #Beaconsfield, and targeted geographical ads, as well as relying on Facebook algorithms to deliver relevant content to Facebook users based on their location.
- 8.11 Targeted paid-for Facebook posts can also be used to capture a specific geographical area or residents with particular interests.
- 8.12 Video is an effective means of communicating on Facebook and should always have subtitles as most people browse social media on a mobile device with the sound off. Live streaming, live polls and Q&As all promote interactivity. Content will be a mixture of light-hearted, fun but informative posts, and more serious updates.

9. Twitter

- 9.1 Twitter is about breaking news, up to the minute information and a steady stream of updates.
- 9.2 Positive news stories about Buckinghamshire Council and local residents, information about local events and things to do, weather, road, transport and emergency updates are all important to share on Twitter.
- 9.3 Residents are not the only people likely to follow the council on Twitter; local news outlets, businesses and stakeholders are likely to follow the council on Twitter too.
- 9.4 It's a very effective platform for quick conversations with the community.
- 9.5 Twitter is also a great way of showing support and involvement for seasonal, religious and topical calendar events or campaigns, and sharing updates on important projects and developments.
- 9.6 Twitter is a particularly effective way of building digital relationships with partners, which enhances offline relationships. Achieving the best outcomes for our communities requires joined-up thinking and working collaboratively with our partners is critical to this.
- 9.7 We will share and engage with tweets from partners including health and care organisations, emergency services, the voluntary and community sector, armed forces community, housing providers, educational establishments, businesses, town and parish councils and local MPs. Coordinated social media campaigns with these partners can be an effective way of tackling key issues and driving change.
- 9.8 Building a captive audience on Twitter requires active participation in the Twitter community, sharing relevant content from partners and joining in with appropriate trends.
- 9.9 Twitter is particularly important as a customer services channel as the majority of enquiries will come through this platform, and Twitter users can expect prompt, professional and helpful responses from Buckinghamshire Council.

10. Instagram

- 10.1 Instagram is the most popular social media channel for millennials (people aged 22 – 39), and although it's usually fun and light-hearted, there is room for more serious content and calls to action too.
- 10.2 For Buckinghamshire Council, Instagram provides an opportunity to use high quality photos and videos to connect with a younger audience, encourage community participation and responsible citizenship. Instagram will be used to generate interest in local democracy, targeting the next generation of voters.
- 10.3 Instagram will also be used for place branding and marketing, fostering a sense of pride in the community, and promoting Buckinghamshire as a great place to live, work and visit.
- 10.4 Suitable content would be sights and scenes from around the county, promotion of local events and things to do, good news stories from the council and community, highlighting seasonal, religious and topical calendar events, and updates on major planning or building developments.
- 10.5 Instagram is a great place to visually showcase some of the amazing things the council is involved in, however it's important to avoid trying to push services/or content which could

be irrelevant to that audience. Instagram is a place for beautiful, striking imagery, and not usually for direct sales unless you know your audience want to buy the product/service.

- 10.6 Bucks County Council's HR team used Instagram as a recruitment tool and this will continue as Buckinghamshire Council.

11. LinkedIn

- 11.1 LinkedIn is a platform for showcasing the council as a leading organisation and employer. It is a way for staff and councillors to network with each other and with stakeholders and professionals across industries in Buckinghamshire and beyond.
- 11.2 The best type of content is job adverts, business and council news, event promotions and election news.
- 11.3 The Communications Team will have oversight of the account, but the HR team will be responsible for the day-to-day management of the page, including administering job advertisements on the site.
- 11.4 Staff and Members are encouraged to write blog posts and share articles on their own LinkedIn pages, which can then be shared on the Buckinghamshire Council corporate page to encourage conversation, promote the Council as an industry leader and desirable employer and build a network of local authority professionals.

12. YouTube

- 12.1 YouTube is the biggest social media platform in the UK. Its audience is a younger demographic, so effective use of this channel offers a way to communicate and engage with this younger audience.
- 12.2 However, content has to be tailored appropriately. The best type of content on YouTube is comedy, how-to videos, pop culture and entertainment.
- 12.3 Not all council subject matter will lend itself to a YouTube video, but with a bit of creativity and willing councillors and officers, many topics can be transformed into YouTube videos for this audience.
- 12.4 YouTube can also be used as a depository for videos produced for other social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter.
- 12.5 It will not be the focus for Buckinghamshire Council's social media activity but should be considered as a suitable channel for some more youth-focused campaigns and messages.

13. Nextdoor

- 13.1 Nextdoor is a hyper-local social media network with an older demographic than other channels.
- 13.2 Residents who use Nextdoor want to hear about things that affect them in their neighbourhood such as information about waste services, roadworks, consultations, planning or building developments and libraries.
- 13.3 Good news stories, local events and initiatives are also well-received, including information about anything that generally could impact quality of life and safety.

14. Snapchat and other social media channels

- 14.1 Snapchat is incredibly popular with younger people, but does not lend itself to effective use by public sector organisations. This is because users (90% of whom are aged 13-24), don't typically follow authority organisations on Snapchat; it's a fun social media for sharing photos and videos with their friends.
- 14.2 Communicating with this age group would be more appropriate through schools' networks and youth workers or other social media channels.
- 14.3 However, one-off uses like geo-filters for events can be an effective means of engaging with this audience occasionally.
- 14.4 Social media is always evolving and new channels are created all the time.
- 14.5 The Communications Team will monitor new channels and update the strategy accordingly and staff across the Council are encouraged to have an input and share their ideas too.

15. Customer service enquiries via social media channels

- 15.1 Buckinghamshire Council will have a strong customer focus, and services will be accessible to everyone. Social media provides another way for residents to contact the Council with service enquiries. Whilst some people value talking to someone face to face, many people like to access information or services online.
- 15.2 Using social media monitoring tools, customer enquiries can be assigned to the relevant teams, either to answer them directly or to provide a response for use by the communications officer. Enquiries should be dealt with promptly and with the same high standards as staff would apply to enquiries received via any other channel.
- 15.3 Customer services staff with access to social media will be provided with regular training by the Communications Team.

16. Members' use of social media

- 16.1 Members are encouraged to establish and manage their own social media accounts. This helps members to engage with residents and be open, transparent and democratically accountable to them.
- 16.2 Members will be offered social media training organised by the Communications Team and given the social media policy and guide for reference.
- 16.3 To foster a sense of community, Buckinghamshire Council corporate accounts may share or engage with posts from Members on social media.
- 16.4 Members are responsible for their own social media accounts and must adhere to the Members' Code of Conduct at all times. This is covered in more detail in the social media policy (appendix iii)

17. Staff use of social media

- 17.1 All staff are encouraged to be ambassadors of Buckinghamshire Council and, just as we welcome staff sharing stories of events and developments in a way that supports the organisation, we also appreciate staff sharing and engaging with the council's social media content in a positive way.
- 17.2 Staff are not expected to defend the organisation on social media if they see comments criticising the council and instead should alert the Communications Team so they so they can issue a corporate response if appropriate. Staff use of social media is covered in more detail in the staff social media policy (appendix iii)

18. Branding

- 18.1 The new social media accounts will feature Buckinghamshire Council branding. The correct logos, headers and cover photos, as well as contact information must be in place before a channel is launched.

19. Social media software

- 19.1 Social media will be managed by the Communications Team via a social media management system. The preferred option is CrowdControlHQ which was used by Buckinghamshire County Council.
- 19.2 Monitoring tools available include individual social media platform analytics for example Facebook pixel, Google analytics and social media monitoring software.

20. Evaluation

- 20.1 There are many ways to measure social media activity, but producing meaningful evaluation is more challenging. For example, the number of followers on a Twitter account alone doesn't tell you how many of these followers live in the county, or how many of them read your tweets.
- 20.2 The engagement on a Facebook post could be extremely high, but all the comments could be negative about the council. Even looking at sentiment doesn't necessarily provide an accurate picture; a message about the death of a councillor could result in hundreds of comments with 'negative' sentiment, but this is because they are comments from people giving their condolences and sharing their sorrow, and doesn't mean this is a 'negative' engagement.
- 20.3 Therefore, the best way to evaluate social media activity at the council is to use a combination of key performance indicators, making use of the data and analytics available, but with a human interpretation of this information, combining both quantitative and qualitative success measures.
- 20.4 Social media activity will be measured and evaluated on a monthly basis with a report produced for each social media account. A highlights report will be shared with the rest of the organisation in order to encourage staff participation in social media and inspire staff to become brand ambassadors.
- 20.5 The evaluation will inform future social media activity, with adjustments being made to improve our approach and ensure we are achieving our objectives.

21. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- Number of followers; this will be particularly important during the first year of the Council, but does not tell the whole story
- Engagement: Shares, views, comments
- Sentiment
- Customer service enquiries handled
- Subsequent press coverage
- Website visits / link clicks

21.1 Each channel may have its own additional KPIs, as will different campaigns and event promotions.

22. Equality and accessibility / inclusion

22.1 Buckinghamshire Council is committed to advancing equality of opportunity, fostering good relations, and eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation through its roles as an employer, service provider, commissioner of services, educator, partner and community leader, and this will be reflected in the Council's social media use.

22.2 Via our social media channels we will positively promote equality and diversity within our workforce and across the services we are responsible for.

22.3 We will ensure our social media content is accessible and inclusive; this means using subtitles and audio, appropriate language and imagery.

22.4 We recognise, respect and celebrate the fact that our staff and the people we serve are all different, whether this is in our ethnic background, family setting, gender, religion and belief or other factors. We believe that diversity can drive innovation, a culture of fairness and respect and equality of opportunity for all.

22.5 We will use our social media channels to promote diversity and equality in everything we do to improve the quality of life of everyone living in, working in and visiting Buckinghamshire.

23. Policy and governance

23.1 The Communications Team will manage a database of passwords and social media users. All social media users will be required to participate in regular training.

23.2 All social media accounts will have 'rules of conduct' in place for followers and an escalation policy, along with standard responses to FAQs and a content calendar to include events, awareness days and campaigns.

23.3 The process for crisis communications will be covered in the Council's Emergency Plan, but as a general rule, in the event of a crisis, all scheduled non-essential social media messages will be postponed and the lead communications or media officer running the crisis response will direct the messages that need to be issued on social media.

- 23.4 The Communications Team manages the Council's social media presence in its entirety, but recognising that there are some accounts for specific business cases or services which will be run on a day-to-day basis by 'frontline' staff.
- 23.5 Although there are other channels for specific business cases, in general service area or team accounts will be limited and the corporate accounts, with their wider reach, will be used. This is to control the corporate message and branding and to avoid inundating the public with new social media accounts. Lack of joined up messaging across all service areas in the council will result in misinformation and confusion amongst stakeholders and undermine sense of ownership.
- 23.6 Content creation and management of social media channels is time-consuming, so publishing all content on the main council channels will be the most effective use of time and resources for maximum impact.
- 23.7 Service areas can request their own social media account from the Communications Team and will need to fill in a business case request before this is approved (see appendix ii).
- 23.8 Opening a new social media account might be appropriate if there will be a return for the significant time invested in social media. More often than not, using the corporate accounts which are well-resourced and have an existing audience is the best tactic. The communications manager will make the final decision on approving the opening of new accounts.
- 23.9 See appendix iii for staff and Member social media policies.

24. Conclusion

- 24.1 Social media can be a valuable tool for delivering Buckinghamshire Council's objectives, enhancing the reputation of the council, embedding it in the community and offering excellent customer service.
- 24.2 We know from monitoring that residents are already talking about the existing councils on social media channels; therefore it is imperative to seize the opportunity and join the conversation as the new Buckinghamshire Council.
- 24.3 Strategic use of social media will ensure good engagement with residents, better customer service and wider sharing of information on services most important to customers.
- 24.4 To do this effectively, social media must be well researched, well planned, regularly monitored and closely evaluated.
- 24.5 Buckinghamshire Council's vision and values will be reflected in the approach to social media, including the style and tone of social media content.
- 24.6 Our social media focus is on being part of an online community that enables local people to easily engage with the council and get involved, on enhancing our reputation as an employer, a service provider and a county, and on providing excellent customer service.
- 24.7 The strategy will evolve with the objectives for the Buckinghamshire Council and the overall communications strategy.

Appendix i

Social media handles for new council - reserved

Instagram

@BuckinghamshireCouncil

@BucksCouncil

Twitter

@BucksCouncil

Facebook

Handle: @BucksCouncil

Page name: Buckinghamshire Council

Page ID: 2070328539677218

Appendix ii

Request for a new social media account

Name

Job role

Team / department

Line manager

Head of Service

What social media account/s are you requesting?

What will be the aim of the account/s?

What are the account's objectives?

Please indicate why the Buckinghamshire Council corporate social media accounts would not meet your needs

What is your content plan for the first six months of the account/s? Please give details such as campaigns, events, key messages, photos and videos.

What is your plan for gaining followers and how many do you aim to have after a year?

Who will be responsible for managing the accounts?

How many hours a week will each person named above commit to managing the accounts?

Suggested username / handle for the account:

I understand that if a social media account is approved I will be required to:

- Attend a social media training workshop with the Communications Team
- Submit a weekly evaluation report of the account to the Communications Team
- Conduct a quarterly review of the account and use it to update and improve your content plan
- Share passwords and user details with the Communications Team
- Take responsibility for security and governance of the account/s, including changing the password regularly, reporting safeguarding issues and monitoring the account

Signature

Line manager's signature

Date

Appendix iii

Buckinghamshire Council Social Media Policy

Appendix iv

Buckinghamshire Council Social Media Guide



Social Media Guide



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Introduction

This guide will provide an introduction to social media with advice and tips on how best to use it to benefit you and your community.

It will provide a brief overview of the main social media platforms, and a more in-depth look at how to use Facebook and Twitter.

If you would like any advice or help with setting up a social media account, speak to the Communications Team.



Facebook

What is it?

Facebook is the best known social network with more than 1.44 billion monthly active users worldwide and over 31 million in the UK alone.

Who uses it?

The majority of the UK population; 60% of people in the UK have a Facebook account. In the UK, 49% of Facebook users are male and 51% are female.

The biggest user group is aged 25 to 34, followed by ages 35 to 44, but the growing user groups are aged 45 to 54 and aged 55 to 64. Latest research shows younger people are using Facebook less, with almost 1 million 12 to 24 year olds leaving the site in the past year.



Best types of posts

- opinions
- jokes
- news
- polls
- photos and videos
- links to articles
- sharing other accounts' posts
- ... anything goes

This year (2018) it's estimated there will be 6.4 million over 55 year olds regularly using Facebook.



www.facebook.com/buckinghamshirecouncil

Page name:

Buckinghamshire Council

Handle: @BucksCouncil



Twitter

What is it?

Twitter is a micro-blogging site for people to communicate through the exchange of quick, frequent messages. People post tweets, which may contain photos, videos, links, and text. These messages are posted to your profile, sent to your followers, and are searchable on Twitter and through search engines.

Who uses it?

Twitter users are predominantly male and mostly 18 – 29 year olds. 53% of Twitter users never post any updates. There are 317 million unique monthly users in the UK.



Best types of posts

Tweets with images receive 18% more clicks than tweets without images. Images that include links are 86% more likely to be retweeted.



147



Tweet



@BucksCouncil



Instagram

What is it?

Instagram is a photo and video-sharing social media network that allows users to share content either publicly or privately to pre-approved followers.

Who uses it?

There's a 50/50 split in terms of gender and 90% of Instagram users are under the age of 35.



@BucksCouncil



Best types of posts

It's all about images on Instagram, but you don't have to be a professional photographer. Any interesting or striking images, graphics or inspirational quotes work well and light-hearted content tends to be most popular. Use hashtags to increase the number of people who see and like your posts.



Snapchat

What is it?

A video and photo sharing application. Content disappears from the application either immediately or after 24 hours.

Who uses it?

Snapchat users tend to be younger people; more than half of UK Snapchat users are under 35, while 71% of British Snapchat users are under the age of 45. The core user base is women; 55% of British adults who access the app are female.



Best types of posts

Fun, light-hearted images and videos, often using novelty filters.



YouTube

What is it?

A video blogging site. YouTube has 1 billion unique monthly users and as of November 2016, YouTube surpassed Facebook as the social network with the farthest reach in the UK. Every minute, 2 million videos are viewed. In the US, YouTube reaches a bigger audience than some television networks.

Who uses it?

Users are predominantly male rather than female. The age range is 18 to 49.

▶ Best types of posts

Videos...about absolutely anything. From music videos to funny clips, staged and directed or raw and unedited, short or long, covering any topic.



LinkedIn

What is it?

A professional network for business connections.

Who uses it?

Businesses, professionals, employers, employees and job-seekers. Users are fairly evenly split in terms of gender but there are slightly more men than women. LinkedIn users are typically slightly less likely to use other social networks.



Best types of posts

Longer-reads with graphics and photos – but videos work less well. Focus on work-related, professional content rather than personal.



Glossary of terms

These are some terms and phrases you'll come across if you use social media.

Platform or channel – this is another name for a social media site.

Content, post or update – this is something you've written or a picture or video that you've added to your profile or page.

Follower – this is someone who has opted to get updates from you.

Follow – this is when you choose to get updates from somebody else's social media.

GIF – A GIF is a format of image but nowadays, animated GIFs are one of the most common image formats online. You can find GIFs to use on websites such as Giphy.

Hashtag – this is a way of connecting your content to a topic and making it easy for people to find it even if they don't follow you. For example **#Buckinghamshire #community** or **#localgovernment**. It can also be a useful way to quickly see what people are saying about that topic.

Like on Facebook – this is done by clicking a 'like' button on Facebook which is the thumbs up image usually found under a post, a picture or a video. You are telling people that you like or agree with what you've read, seen or watched.

Like on Twitter – this is the action when you click the 'heart' button on Twitter. It allows you to refer back to a particular tweet later. Other people can see what you've 'liked' too.

Meme – Memes tend to be static images that make a humorous topical or pop culture reference.

Share – by sharing, you allow your followers to see something you've seen and think is worth them seeing too.

Retweet or RT – this is the act of sharing something you've seen to your Twitter followers.

Stream or timeline – this is the list of updates that you receive from people you follow.

Selfie – a picture of yourself taken by yourself, or if it's a group shot, taken by one of the other subjects in the picture.



General social media tips

- Be human
- Show your personality
- Talk about where you are and what you're doing and share interesting stories
- Post regularly – weekly updates of your activities as a councillor, updates on policies and actions of interest to your community are a good place to start
- Posting about issues which you would like feedback on and notices of events and public meetings are also good
- Make it easy for people to find you online by mentioning your location frequently which will then be picked up in searches
- You may also want to include your social media details in your email signature
- Avoid posting when incapacitated or otherwise tired and emotional
- Don't argue with someone who is argumentative; some people like to row online for the sake of it
- Respect other people's privacy – don't share things online without their permission
- Don't feel you have to answer all times of the day
- It's a two-way conversation so don't just broadcast messages
- Respond to comments and have conversations with people – but be aware that everyone can see the conversation

- Check all posts for spelling, grammar and typos. Look up Donald Trump's 'covfefe' gaffe for inspiration.
- Keep your communications clear, positive, polite and professional
- Share photos, videos and other media as appropriate. Posts with media content tend to work better than words alone as people respond well to photos and videos
- Consider whether to have separate personal and professional accounts but be aware that the lines can be blurred and unless your personal account is private, it's unlikely to be thought of as separate
- Everything online is potentially permanent – even if you delete a post immediately, someone could have taken a screen shot
- Watch and learn from other councillors who are using social media
- Enjoy it!



Personal safety and security

Check your privacy settings so that you understand who can see what you publish and who can view your personal information.

Be aware that anyone who knows your name or username can search for you online so make sure you are happy with what people can see when they find you. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter all offer clear advice on their sites.

Minimise security risks by using strong passwords for social media accounts and changing them regularly. Protect your devices with a pin to restrict access and prevent misuse. Be mindful that some social media sites are sometimes used to distribute malicious software or code.

Don't let anyone else access your social media accounts.

If you have your location settings switched on for your phone or computer, be aware that posting on social media will mean anyone in the world can see where you are. You might prefer to save photos and publish them online later rather than 'live' if you don't want to broadcast your whereabouts.

You may wish to state that your account is not monitored 24/7, so that people don't expect an instant response from you and anyone seeking urgent help can be signposted elsewhere.

Trolls - Trolling is a form of bullying where people abuse and aggressively poke fun at an individual or an organisation. The likelihood is that this won't happen, but if it does the best response is to ignore them. The internet phrase is 'do not feed the troll.' Trolls love attention and they hate being ignored. So ignore them.

Spam / viruses - Being hacked is quite rare and there are ways you can protect yourself. As with email, if you are sent a link and it looks suspect don't open it. Just delete it. Change your password on a regular basis and don't tick the 'remember me' box when you are using a public computer.

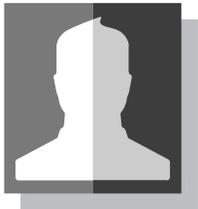
Law

See the Buckinghamshire Council Social Media Policy for more information about how to avoid getting into trouble with the law when using social media.



Facebook tips

There are numerous ways you can use Facebook in your role as a Member – chose what works best for you.



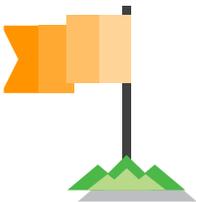
A Facebook account

You will need an account in order to use Facebook. This is your own profile with your name and details. Go to Facebook.com and click 'sign up' to start.

Anyone can see what you post, even people not signed up to Facebook, until you change the privacy settings.

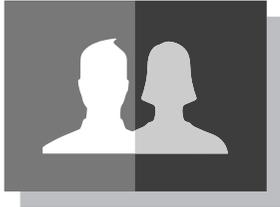
When you change your privacy settings you can control who can see what on your account.

People will request to be your Facebook friend and if you accept them, they will be able to see your restricted content and you will be able to see theirs.



A Facebook Page

A page is for a business, organisation or individual who wants to connect more widely across Facebook. Anyone can see what you post on a page and people can 'like' and then follow what you post.



A Facebook Group

A place where like-minded people can meet and chat, for example a community group for village residents or an action group for members of a campaign. If you set one up you can make a group open or closed and decide who becomes a member.

You can set up a Facebook account and then create pages and groups. Or you may prefer just to use your account and not have a page or group.

Videos work well on Facebook, especially live videos. People spend three times longer watching a live video than they do a recorded video.

You can edit Facebook posts as many times as you want.

The 'lifespan' of a typical Facebook post is less than three hours. This means you will get the majority of your reaction to the post within the first three hours.

For regular use of your Facebook page, posting three or four times a week is a good level to aim for, but do whatever feels best for you. You might find that you want to post a couple of times a day, or less often.

Twitter tips

Get started by setting up an account – visit [Twitter.com](https://twitter.com) and click 'sign up'. Twitter will take you through a step by step guide to the process.

Make sure you upload a profile picture – accounts with no photo tend to look like spam or untrustworthy.

Start by following people; friends, celebrities, news sources and anyone whose tweets you enjoy. When you follow people on Twitter, their tweets instantly show up in your timeline.

Similarly, your tweets will show up in the timelines of people who follow you.

Tweets have a limit of 280 characters. If you want to post more than one Tweet and link them together, you can do this by 'replying' to your original tweet. This will then show up as a 'thread'.

You can't edit Tweets. If you make a mistake, you can either delete it and re-post, or admit your mistake.

Your tweets have a higher chance of being retweeted if you ask for them to be, by writing 'please retweet' or 'please share'.

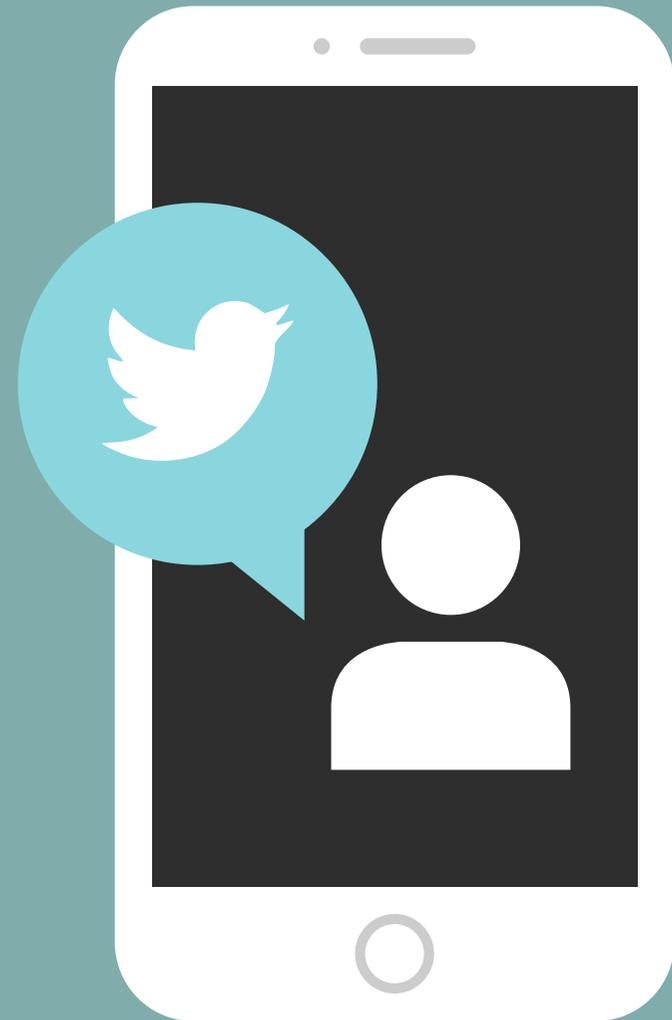
To start a conversation with another person or organisation, use their Twitter name or handle – such as @BucksCouncil.

You can include the handle anywhere in the tweet. If you start a tweet with the Twitter handle, only the account or accounts you are addressing will normally see the tweet in their timeline, but it will still be public.

Share interesting and relevant tweets you may have seen. For example, posts from a local charity or news that is relevant to your followers.

A hashtag is a word or phrase that starts with the # symbol. It can be a way to connect you to a conversation around an issue, place or event being discussed online. When you click on a hashtag it allows you to search all tweets that are contributing to the discussion.

It's not entirely necessary to use a 'hashtag' any more, as Twitter automatically picks up words and phrases and groups them together. However, it's still the best way to join a conversation and many people use them for style.



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Social media use (accessible on 'The Source' on the BC website)

Buckinghamshire Council uses social media to share news and information with residents and interact with the online community. We have Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts which are run by the Communications Team, and other service area accounts which are managed by department staff, for example Community Safety and Libraries.

Our social media pages are monitored between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday, excluding Bank Holidays. We try and reply to every message we receive but, due to high volumes, this is not always possible. Our responses to replies, comments and direct messages depend on the individual service. Even if we do not reply, we are listening and will act on or pass on your comments as appropriate. In most cases, it will be better to contact the service directly via our website.

During emergencies and times of disruption we'll post messages outside of our normal hours, but we may not be able to reply to individual queries.

Any retweets, follows, or likes are not an endorsement of a service, individual or organisation. We do not take responsibility for any content on pages or profiles we have shared.

Standards for conduct on social media

Our social media accounts are managed by real people. We strive to be helpful and understand your frustrations. Please be respectful. Abuse will not be tolerated.

We reserve the right to remove, without notice, any disruptive, offensive or abusive posts. We also reserve the right to block a user if their interactions are offensive.

This could include:

- abusive language, or swearing
- messages that are offensive, libellous, sexually orientated or racially offensive, unlawful, profane, threatening or obscene
- promotions or advertisements of products or services
- spam (the same message posted many times, otherwise known as 'spamming', persistent negative and/or abusive tweeting in which the aim is to provoke a response)
- controversial, irrelevant and off topic messages otherwise known as 'trolling'

In the event of unacceptable behaviour we will endeavour to first issue a written warning, but we reserve the right to take action without notice. If unacceptable behaviour continues or is extreme the user will be blocked from interacting with us on social media. After one month the owner of the account can appeal the decision to block.

Complaints

Social media is not the appropriate avenue for raising an official complaint with Buckinghamshire Council. Please see our [complaints information](#), or contact the service direct.

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Social media dos and don'ts

This policy has been developed following a survey of over 120 local government councillors and officers up and down the country. Their valuable feedback should help you to get the most from social media.

This policy is intended to open the door to social media use in your local authority rather than block it. This policy is also intended to be a template for any local authority to use through a short list of common sense 'Do's and don'ts'. Do feel free to add to them.

Social media guidelines can be as simple or as complicated as you want to make them. Many organisations have their guidelines down to just a single page. Some have reduced their guidelines down further to just five or six golden rules. And some have gone even further and covered them with one single sentence.

If you stick to this one simple rule you won't go too far wrong: don't post any message on social media that you wouldn't happily say in a public meeting.

LGA policy template: do's and don'ts at a glance

Do

- **talk** to residents, staff and others. And do answer their questions (quickly and honestly)
- **trust** your teams and staff to use social media
- **be responsible** at all times
- **be respectful** at all times, too
- **innovate** – different approaches work for different people
- have a **personality** – corporate speak or just issuing press releases won't work well on social media
- **share** other people's helpful content and links
- **credit** other people's work, ideas and links
- **listen** (social media is designed to be a two-way channel, just like any good conversation)

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/communications-support/digital-councils/social-media/get-started/dos-and-donts>

- **ask** your own questions. Seek feedback from your residents (but make sure you share the results with them)
- have a **rota** where appropriate – share the load and you'll get more from your accounts
- adhere to your existing **HR policies** – you don't need a separate HR policy especially for social media
- **talk** to your communications team – they are there to help you
- **learn** from others – there is rich learning of good practice social media use across local government via organisations such as the LGA, **comms2point0** and Improvement and Efficiency West Midlands (**IEWM**).
- and more than anything, do use social media in the spirit in which it was intended – to **engage, openly and honestly**.

Don't

- **broadcast** or talk at people. Your residents will soon spot broadcasts and respond accordingly
- **block** social media – social media is not a risk, blocking its use is a risk
- try to **cover up** mistakes, be honest and you'll get more respect for it in the long run
- build accounts and just hope people will come – sometimes it is best to go to the places where your audiences are already having conversations
- **assume** that social media will look after itself – you will need to invest time, enthusiasm and energy to make it work. And don't leave your accounts unattended for long spells
- post content which will **embarrass** your council or yourself
- **ignore** legal advice, it's there to help you
- think that a **disclaimer** in your bio will save you from potential legal action, it won't
- expect your staff to make do with **old technology** which can be a barrier to effective working
- **share your passwords** with anyone other than your communications leads
- forget that **social media is 24/7** – just because you leave at 5.00 pm doesn't mean the world stops or that residents won't be active. If your account is only staffed 9-5 then you should say so on your profile.



Report to Standards and General Purposes Committee

Date: 10 December 2020

Reference number: TBC

Title: Compliments and Complaints Annual Report for 2019/20.

Author and/or contact officer: Kate Mitchelmore, Corporate Complaints Manager,
kate.mitchelmore@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: All

Recommendations: The committee is asked to:-

1. Note the contents of the Compliments and Complaints Annual Report for 2019/20.

Reason for decision: To allow the committee to maintain an overview of the number and nature of the compliments and complaints received by the five legacy Councils for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Purpose of the report

1.1 This report covers the reporting period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 and is the last annual report for Buckinghamshire County Council, Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe District Councils who came together on 1 April 2020 to form the new Buckinghamshire Council.

1.2 Whilst the report covers all five former councils the information available primarily relates to the former Buckinghamshire County Council with some additional high level information from the former Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe District Councils.

1.3 The new Buckinghamshire Council welcomes feedback: compliments, comments and complaints from customers and procedures are now in place to ensure all compliments and complaints received for the new council can be captured, responded to and reported on in the future. This will also ensure that the Council can demonstrate that it listens to the experiences of its customers, positive or negative, to bring about improvements in services.

1.4 Attached to this covering report is the Compliments and Complaints Annual Report for 2019/20 for the 5 former councils.

Other options considered

1.5 Report for noting only.

Legal and financial implications

1.6 None.

Corporate implications

1.7 Having an effective compliments, comments and complaints is necessary to ensure that the Council can respond to resident issues, learn from things that have gone wrong and demonstrate that it listens to the experiences of its customers, positive or negative, to bring about improvements in services.

Consultation and communication

1.8 Report for noting only.

Next steps and review

1.9 None.

Background papers

N/A



Compliments & Complaints Annual Report 2019/20

Buckinghamshire Council

**This report concentrates on information collected by
Buckinghamshire County Council**

It also contains some high level information from

Aylesbury Vale District Council

Chiltern District Council

Wycombe District Council

&

South Bucks District Council

Author: Kate Mitchelmore

Date: 22 October 2020

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Overview

This report covers the reporting period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 and is the last annual report for Buckinghamshire County Council, Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe District Councils who came together on 1 April 2020 to form the new Buckinghamshire Council.

This report covers compliments and complaints received and recorded for this period, although due to reporting procedures only contains high level information collected by the former district councils, with more detailed information available on the former county council.

The new Buckinghamshire Council welcomes feedback: compliments, comments and complaints from customers and procedures are now in place to ensure all compliments and complaints received for the new council can be reported in the future. This will also ensure that the Council can demonstrate that it listens to the experiences of its customers, positive or negative, to bring about improvements in services.

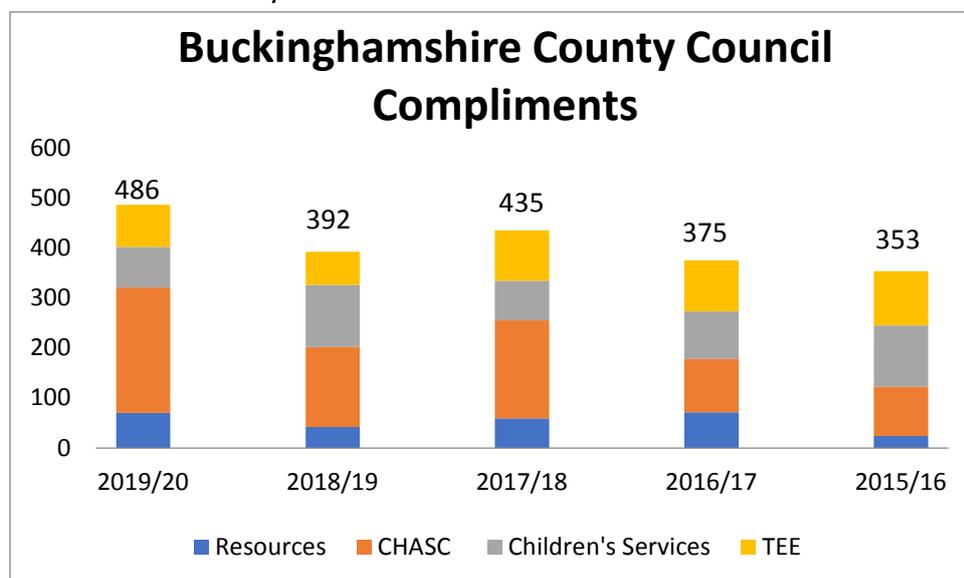
The information in the following sections only covers the information from the former county council. The high level summary of complaints for the former district councils is reported separately on page 15.

Highlights for 2019/20

- Compliments received by the former county council has increased by 38% over a 5 year period
- There was also an increase in the number of stage 1 corporate complaints for the former county council although the average response times remained the same
- During this year we saw a 42% reduction in the number of children's statutory complaints received

Compliments

As shown below the number of compliments recorded for the former county council increased from last year.



Statutory Framework

The council has a statutory duty to investigate Adult and Children's Social Care complaints under The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009.

There is also a requirement on us by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to operate a corporate complaints procedure to cover other areas of council services such as school admissions, special educational needs, libraries and highways.

What is a complaint?

Any expression of dissatisfaction about a council service (whether that service is provided directly by the council or by a contractor or partner) that requires a response.¹

There is a close link between service requests and complaints. As a council we record first time contacts as service requests, rather than complaints, and services are encouraged to adopt local resolution to work with the customer to resolve the issue. Where this hasn't happened, then invariably the customer will come back to us to make a complaint.

The council receives a lot of correspondence from customers who are generally unhappy but are not necessarily making a complaint. These could be someone chasing the progress of a claim, reporting a defect on the roads or simply trying to complain about a service we

¹ From the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's *Guidance on running a complaints system*

are not responsible for, like a bin collection. During 2019/20 the former county council received 1,054 other 'general enquiries'. These were not classified as complaints and were redirected to the most appropriate place to deal with the issue.

Purpose of the Complaints Procedure

The purpose of any complaints procedures is to ensure that:

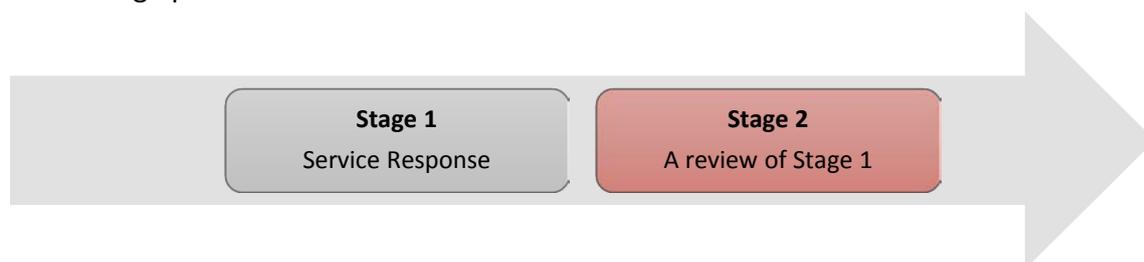
- The views and experiences of people who use services are heard to ensure the organisation remains focused on the customer
- The organisation learns from complaints and seeks improvements to service provision and working practices
- There is a simple and effective way of raising a complaint
- Complaints are dealt with fairly and consistently
- The complainant receives a comprehensive response within the agreed timescales
- It encourages an open and transparent environment that people trust and engage with

Complaint procedures

The former county council had three processes. The process followed for an individual complaint is largely dependent on the subject of that complaint. As a general rule, complaints specifically regarding child and adult social care issues will be referred to the statutory procedures respectively, whereas other service issues, process/procedural issues and decision making issues will be more appropriate for the corporate procedure.

Corporate Complaints Procedure

A two stage process:

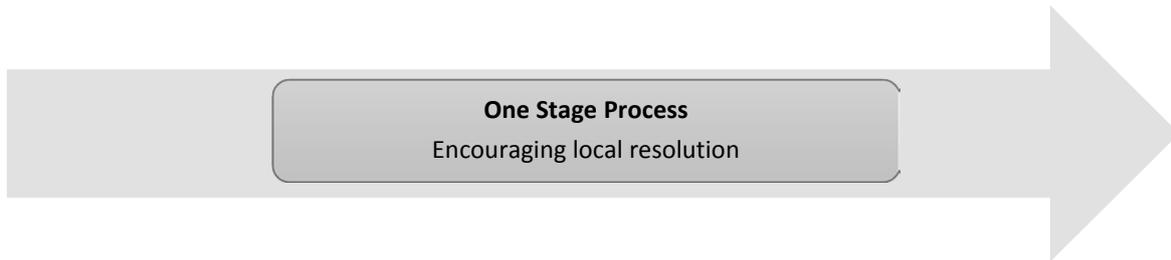


- **Stage 1** – the staff delivering the service aim to respond to the complaint within 20 calendar days. If it is going to take longer, the complainant is kept informed.
- **Stage 2** – A review of the Stage 1 response carried out on behalf of the Monitoring Officer, with an aim of completing within 20 calendar days. If it is going to take longer, the complainant is kept informed.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is the final route of redress for the complainant.

Adults Statutory Social Care Complaints - Listening, Responding, Improving

A one stage process:

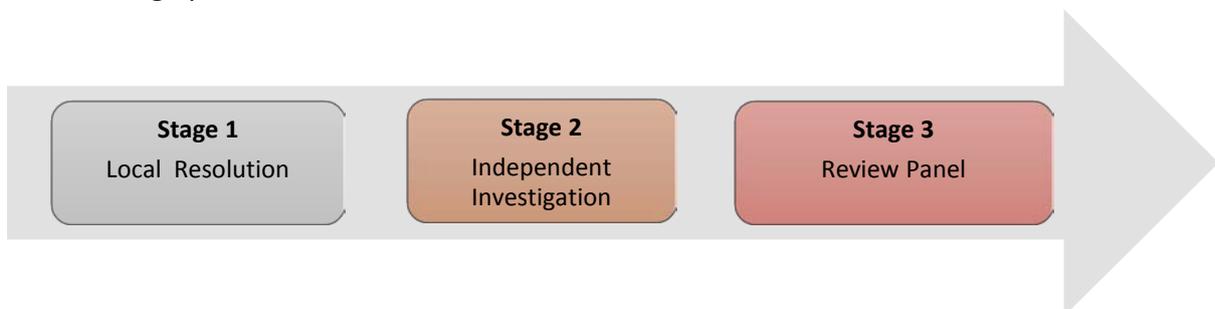


- A one stage process that encourages local resolution to resolve issues. The pre-complaint stage is called the Concern Stage, during which, if agreed with the complainant, the service area has 48 hours to resolve issues informally. The complaints process usually begins once the Concern Stage has been exhausted. Whilst the statutory timescale allows up to six months to issue a final response to the complaint, the Council has set a local standard of 28 calendar days during which time the majority of complaints are expected to be resolved.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is the final route of redress for the complainant.

Children's Statutory Social Complaints Procedure – Hearing the Customer's View

A three stage process:



- **Stage 1 Local Resolution** - the staff delivering the service are given the opportunity to address the complaint, providing a full response within 10 working days (this can be extended to 20 working days in exceptional circumstances such as complex complaints).
- **Stage 2 Independent Investigation** - an Independent Officer (IO) and an Independent Person (IP) will investigate the complaint and the IO will prepare a report for the Service Director, who will send a formal response to the complainant based upon that independent report. The investigation should be completed within 25 working days of receipt of the signed complaints statement (this can be extended to a maximum of 65 working days in certain circumstances such as complex complaints).

- **Stage 3 Review Panel** - comprising an independent chair and two other independent people who consider the adequacy of the Stage 2 complaint investigation. The Panel should meet within 30 working days of the request being made, its recommendations should be recorded within 5 working days of the meeting and the Executive Director must respond to complainants within 15 working days of the date when the Review Panel made their recommendations.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is the final route of redress for the complainant. Although it should be noted, that should the complainant and the Local Authority agree, Stage 3 can be skipped and the complainant can approach the Ombudsman after Stage 2.

Use of advocates for Children Act complaints

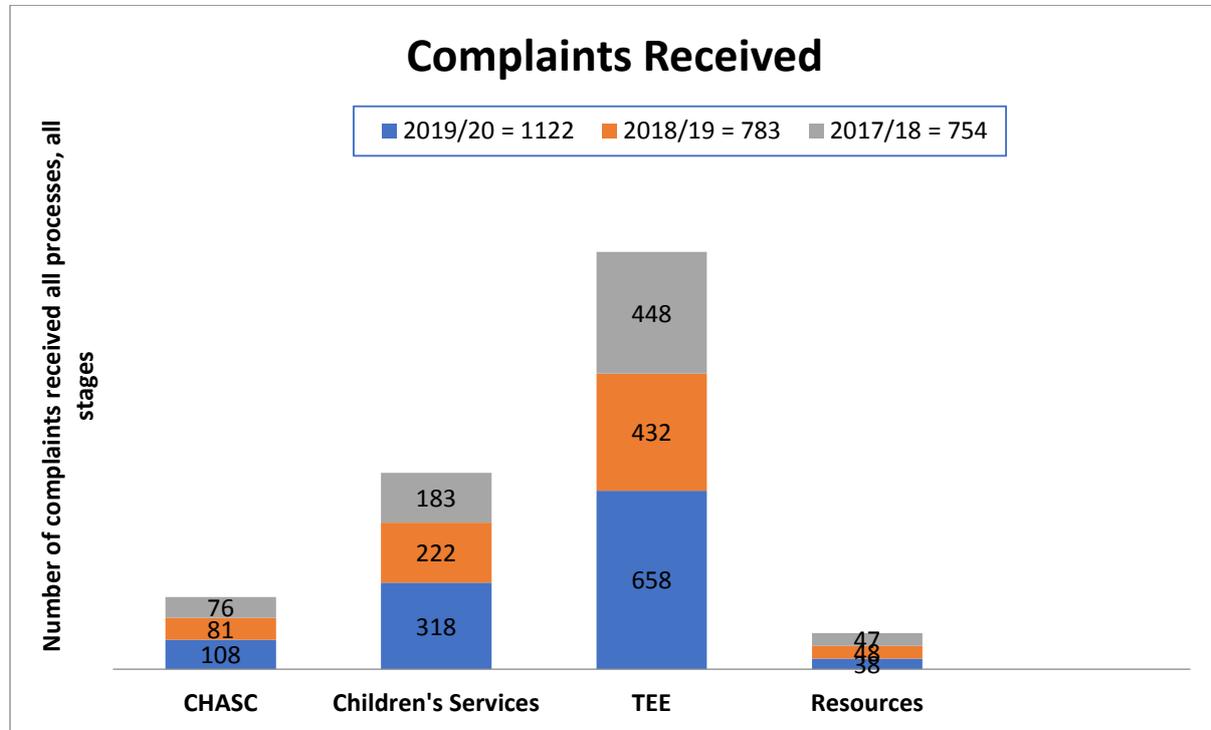
In accordance with national guidance, the former county council had made arrangements for the provision of advocacy services for children and young people who wish to make representations under the relevant sections of the Children Act 1989. During the reporting period, the contract for this was with the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) for the provision of advocacy services for children in care. This will be carried through to the new council and the arrangement will remain the same.

The advocacy service must ensure that independent advocates provide appropriate help to children and young people, taking into account their age, means of communication, language, sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, health or disability.

The advocates provided by NYAS are volunteers who have received the appropriate training in working with children and young people. They are from a variety of backgrounds and care is taken in achieving a good match between advocate and child to take into account the needs of the child.

Executive Summary of Complaints 2019/20

Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, the former county council received a total of 1122 complaints across all three complaints procedures, this compares with 783 in the previous reporting period.

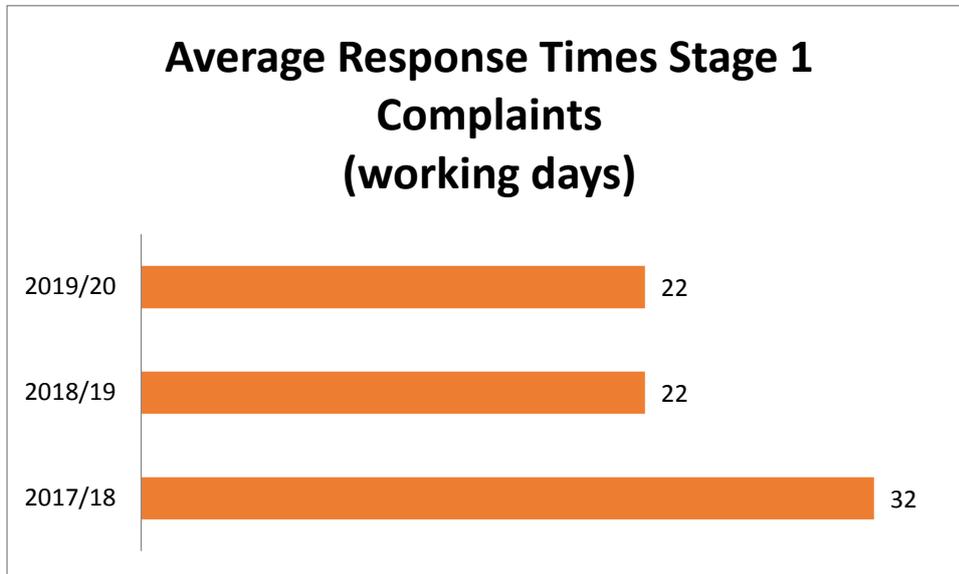


The following is a breakdown of the previous graph for reporting year 2019/20 and provides data for 2018/19 as a comparison in brackets.

- 902 (568) complaints were received at Stage 1 of the corporate procedure and 101 (64) were received at Stage 2 of that procedure.
- Within the statutory children services procedure, there were 44 (76) dealt with at Stage 1, with 7 (14) being escalated to Stage 2 and 1 (0) Stage 3 Review Panel.
- 67 (61) complaints were dealt with under the adult social care statutory complaints procedure.

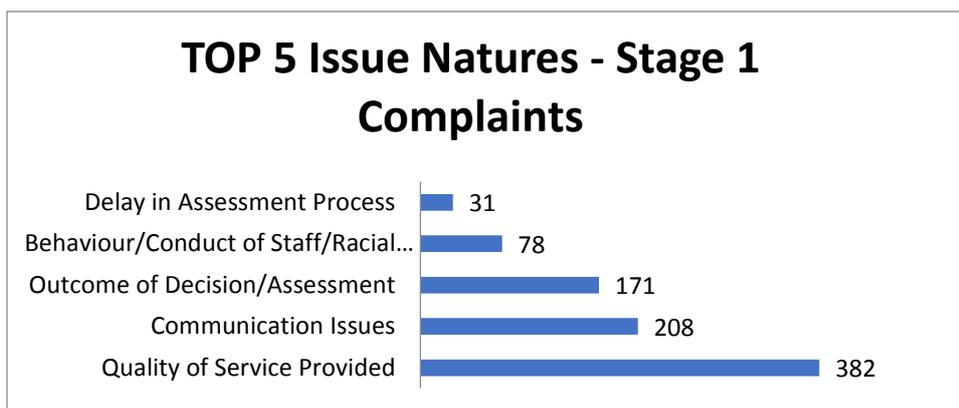
Response times - Corporate Complaints stage 1

The target for responding to Stage 1 corporate complaints is 20 working days. However, we aim to provide a response within 10 working days. The graph below shows a comparison of the average response times for the last 3 years.



Issue natures of complaints – Corporate Complaints Stage 1

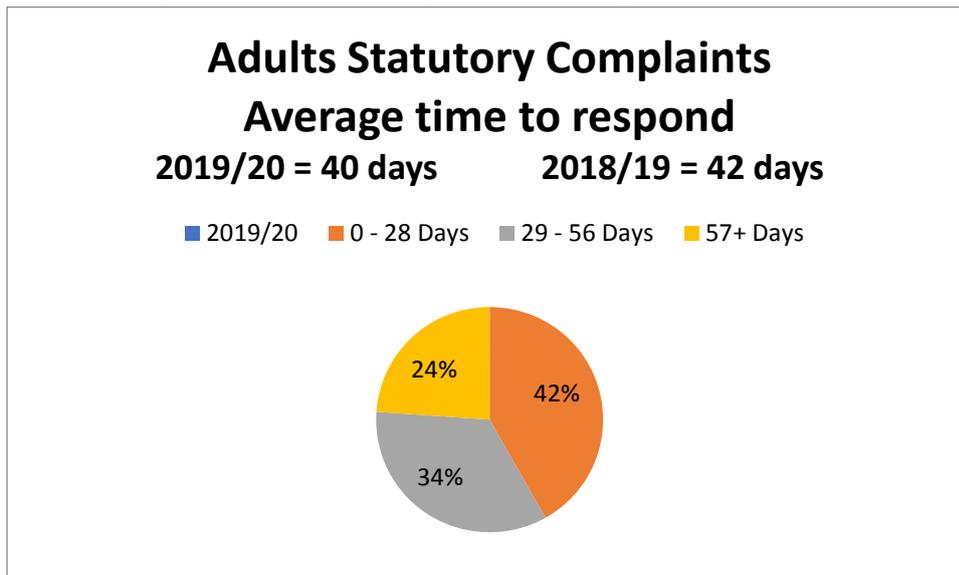
The graph below shows the top 5 reasons for corporate stage 1 complaints. Included in this amount are 117 complaints that had more than one issue nature.



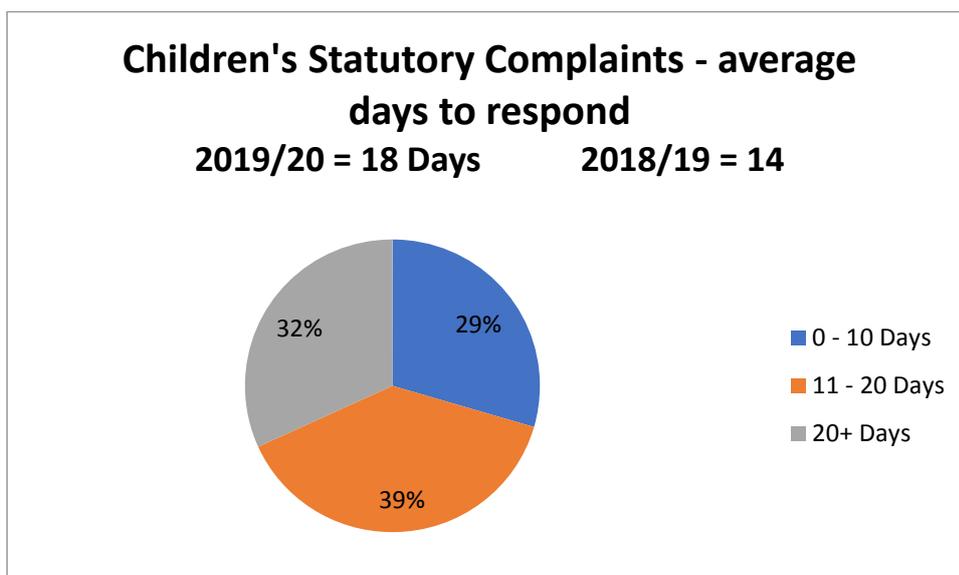
Response times - Statutory Complaints

As explained above, the two statutory complaints procedures are completely different, although they are based on the same basic principles.

The adult statutory complaints process was changed in 2009 and is centred on the idea of local resolution. The timeframe for resolution is six months to allow a reasonable amount of time to work together with the customer. Our internal target of 28 calendar days is there for the complaints that are not quite so complex to deal with.



The children's statutory process has three stages and although local resolution is encouraged, each stage has its own timeframes. For these reasons, it is not appropriate to compare time taken between the adults and children's statutory processes.

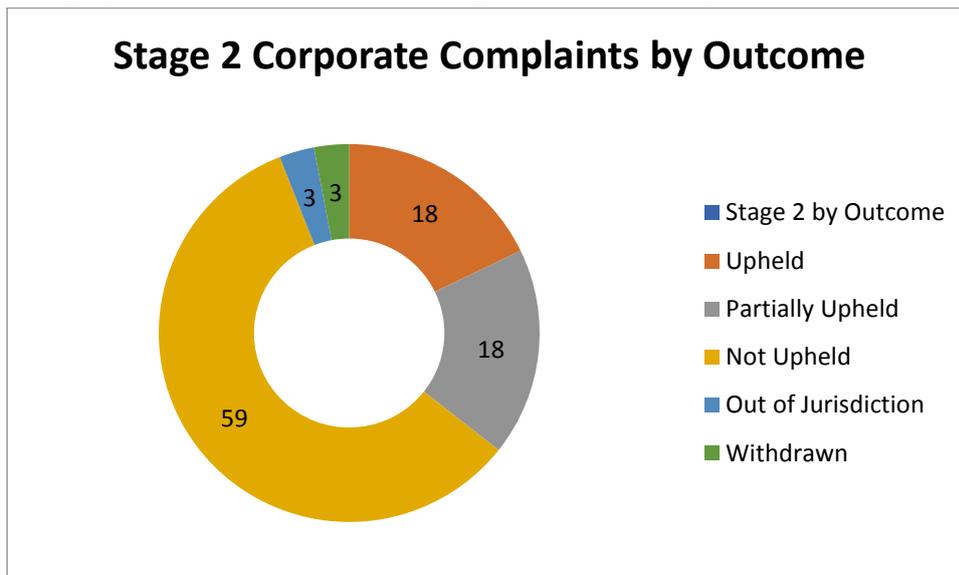


Stage 2 Corporate Complaints – Escalations

The following breakdown for also provides data for 2018/19 as a comparison (in brackets).

- 902 (568) Complaints were recorded at Stage 1
 - 9.3% (11.3%) of this number were escalated to Stage 2
- 101 (64) Complaints were recorded at Stage 2 (the final stage):
 - 7 (4) of these Stage 2 complaints went directly to the final stage as per the correct procedure for complaints relating to requests for information made under the Data Protection Act, Freedom of Information Act and Environmental Information Regulations
 - 9 (2) of these Stage 2 complaints were escalated directly to the final stage due to their seriousness or previous correspondence indicating this to be appropriate
 - 85 (58) of these Stage 2 complaints were escalated directly from Stage 1

The graph below shows the 101 Stage 2 complaints by outcome



As outlined above, of the 101 Stage 2 (final stage) complaints, 85 were escalated from the previous stage of the process. Therefore, these complaints had a previous decision (normally 'Not Upheld') which was reviewed. The analysis of those decisions (see table below) shows that 58% of reviewed decisions remained 'Not Upheld', whereas 36% of reviewed decisions were upheld (either in whole or in part).

The following breakdown for the reporting year shows the outcome of cases escalated from stage 1 and provides data for 2018/19 as a comparison.

Reviewed complaint decision	2019/20	2018/19	% 2019/20	% 2018/19
Not Upheld	50	41	59	71
Partially Upheld	16	10	19	17
Upheld	16	2	19	3.5
Withdrawn	2	2	2	3.5
Outside Jurisdiction	1	3	1	5
Total	85	58	100%	100%

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

Each local authority is sent an Annual Review Letter from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO). A copy of the letter is included as an appendix to this report. A total of 72 complaints about the former county council were determined by the LG&SCO for 2019/20:

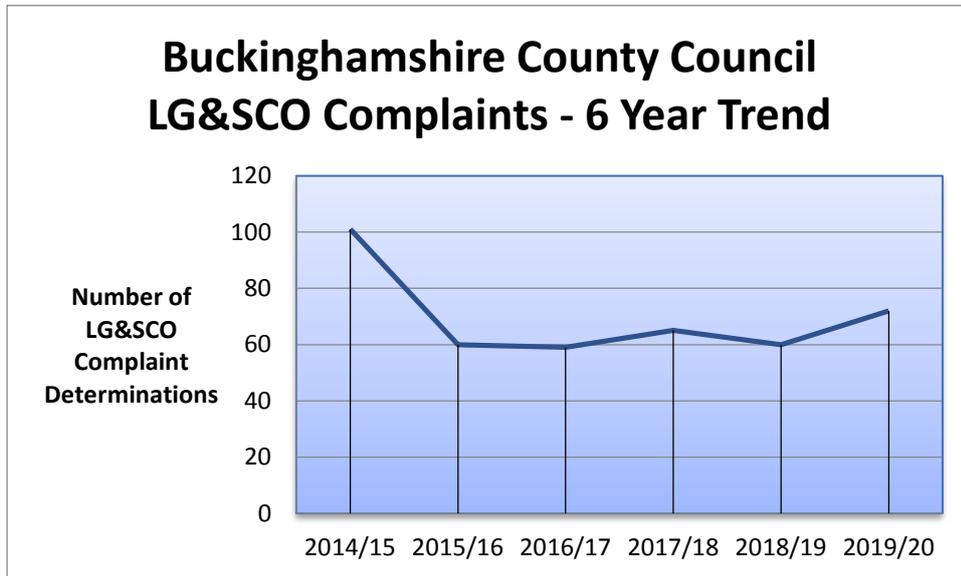
LGO &SCO Category	Number of LG&SCO Complaints 2019/20	Number of LG&SCO Complaints 2018/19
• Education & Children's Services	28	23
• Adult Care Services	23	17
• Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	2	1
• Highways & Transport	13	15
• No category allocated	1	0
• Corporate and Other Services	3	4
• Planning & Development	2	0
• Total number of LG&SCO complaints	72	60

The following table shows the LG&SCO's classification decisions. It should be noted that where the ombudsman has upheld the complaint we may also have come to that conclusion in our process so this doesn't reflect overturned decisions.

2019/20 Decision Classification	No. of Complaints 2019/20 (2018/19 in brackets)		Comments
Upheld	8	(9)	Fault found by LGO.(NB The fault may have already been previously satisfactorily remedied by the Council.)
Not Upheld	3	(5)	No fault found by LGO.
Advice given	0	(1)	No record of these complaints – we assume advice given to complainant by the LGO without reference to the Council.
Closed after initial enquiries	25	(22)	Initial information supplied by the complainant and/or the Council results in the LGO deciding not to investigate these complaints (for a variety of reasons, such as that the matter falls outside of the LGO's statutory jurisdiction, or there was insufficient maladministration and/or injustice found).
Incomplete/Invalid	5	(3)	No record of these complaints as not communicated to the Council – we can only assume that all these complaints were not progressed with LGO.
Referred back for local resolution	31	(20)	The Council is not aware of all of these cases, however we can assume that some were where the LGO told the complainant to contact the Council, but the complainant chose not to pursue the matter. In other cases, the LGO asked us to put the complaint through the relevant complaint procedure.

Total	72	(60)	

The number of LG&SCO complaints has increased slightly during this year. The previous table shows which services the increases relate to.



Complaints Information for Buckinghamshire District Councils 2019/20

Below is a table showing the breakdown of stage 1 and stage 2 complaints and compliments for the former district councils. The information provided for Chiltern and South Bucks Councils was not broken down individually as that data was collected together on the same system.

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Compliments
Aylesbury Vale DC	603	96	132
Chiltern and South Bucks DC	244	6	100
Wycombe DC	315	17	118
Total	1162	119	350

The following table provides some information on LG & SCO decisions for the four district councils, Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe. It is comparable to the table on page 13 for the former county council. The totals at the bottom of the table come from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman as recorded by them

	Aylesbury Vale DC	Chiltern DC	South Bucks DC	Wycombe DC
Upheld	5	2	2	3
Not Upheld	1	1	1	0
Advice Given	1	0	0	0
Closed After Initial Enquiries	21	6	3	5
Incomplete/Invalid	0	1	0	0
Referred back for local resolution	7	8	10	11
Total	35	18	16	19

Benchmarking with other Authorities

The table below shows compliments and complaints recorded by four other unitary councils to enable a comparison

	Complaints	Compliments	Enquiries	Population
Wiltshire 2019/20	498 (all processes)	0 (not recorded)	916	500,024
Durham	Approx. 227 per month	76 per month	56 per month	530,094
Bristol	Approx. 980 per month	N/A	N/A	463,377
Cornwall (2019/20)	966	1,548	1,285	569,578

The following table shows the number of upheld decisions by the ombudsman based solely on detailed investigations carried out. A satisfactory remedy by the Council is where the authority has already remedied the complaint and the ombudsman agrees the remedy.

	Detailed Investigations (recorded by LG&SCO)	Upheld	Satisfactory remedy by Council
Wiltshire	31	19 (51%)	5%
Durham	36	21 (58%)	14%

Bristol	33	20 (61%)	10%
Cornwall	56	33 (59%)	6%

This table shows the totals for the ombudsman’s investigations for the former districts and county council. These differ from the previous LG&SCO decisions tables as it only refers to detailed investigations that he has carried out whereas the previous tables refer to any investigation even if it was closed with no or little action. The total for the five councils is at the bottom in order to give a comparison with the benchmarking information in the previous table. You can see from this that the combined satisfactory remedy rate for the five former councils compares favourably with the other authorities we have benchmarked against.

	Detailed Investigations (recorded by LG&SCO)	Upheld	Satisfactory remedy by Council
Buckinghamshire CC	11	8 (73%)	100%
Aylesbury Vale District Council	6	5 (83%)	100%
Wycombe District Council	3	3 (100%)	100%
South Bucks District Council	3	2 (67%)	100%
Chiltern District Council	3	2 (67%)	0%
Totals	26	20 (77%)	88%

Annual Review of the Feedback and Complaints Procedure

There is a new complaints procedure for Buckinghamshire Council which was agreed by the Monitoring Officer as part of the transition process to the new unitary council. This new policy has been in force since 1 April 2020 and is currently being used for all corporate complaints across Buckinghamshire Council. All the previous complaints procedures for Buckinghamshire County Council, Aylesbury Vale District Council, Chiltern District Council, South Bucks District Council and Wycombe District Council are no longer valid.

Vexatious and Persistent Complainants Policy

There is a new policy for dealing with vexatious and persistent complainants for Buckinghamshire Council. This was also agreed by the Monitoring Officer as part of the transition process to the new unitary council and has been in force since 1 April 2020. As is with the complaints policy all procedures for previous councils are no longer valid. The information below, however covers the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 and so is under the Buckinghamshire County Council Vexatious and Persistent Complainants Policy.

For 2019/20, only one complainant was added to the register of vexatious and persistent complainants. This person was removed from the register after it was superseded by restriction put in place by Thames Valley Police.

MP Enquiries

MP Enquiries are managed centrally within the Compliments & Complaints Team. For 2019/20 228 MP Enquiries were managed through the process with an average response time of 23 days.

Compliments, Comments and Complaints (CCC) – Buckinghamshire Council

Since 1 April 2020 when the district councils and the county council joined together to become Buckinghamshire Council there has been a joint CCC Team to manage the processes under the new corporate complaints policy as well as MP Enquiries and Statutory Complaints for Children's and Adult's Social Care. This has brought together all compliments, comments and complaints as well as MP Enquiries that would have been handled by the previous councils. The reporting system, Respond, has been updated to enable the provision of reporting for all areas of the new council.

Formal Stage 1

Complaints Received

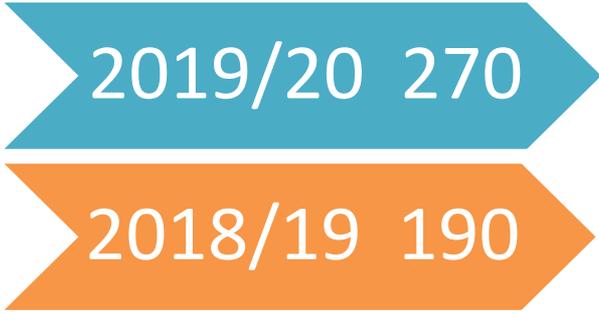


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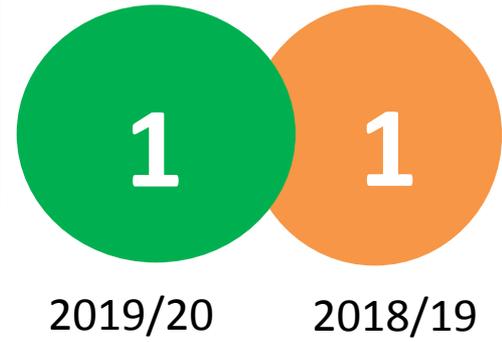
This represents an increase of



Stage 1 complaints comparison for 2018/19



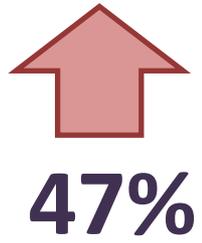
Statutory Stage 3 Panels



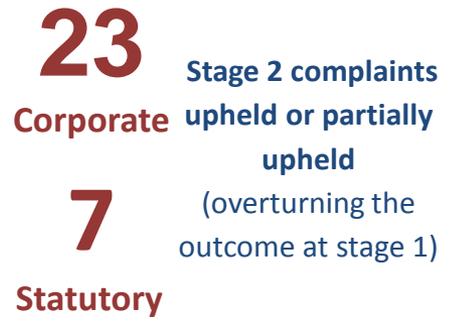
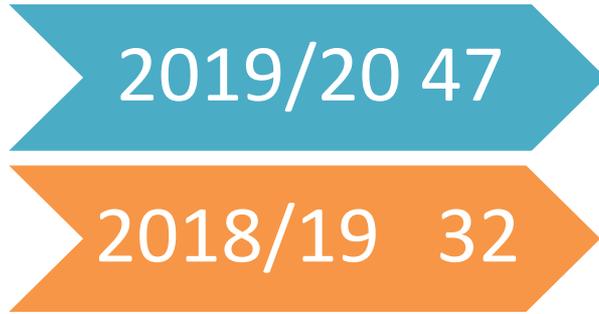
Complaints escalated to Stage 2



This represents an increase of



Stage 2 complaints comparison for 2018/19



The reasons for complainants expressing dissatisfaction after a stage 1 complaint can vary. Primarily this has been due the complainant suggesting that the Stage 1 response did not adequately address the issues of complaint and/or where they were left feeling as though the complaint had not been taken seriously. However, it is also fair to say that there have been occasions where escalation was inevitable irrespective of the effort put in at Stage 1 due to a break down in trust.

Children's Services

Annual Customer Feedback 2/2

Appendix 1 – Annual Children's Services Summary 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020

Stage 1 Complaints where the Council is at fault or partially at fault

Stage 1 Complaints where the Council is not at fault

Average complaint response time

Compliments Received



14% withdrawn, out of jurisdiction or no comment made

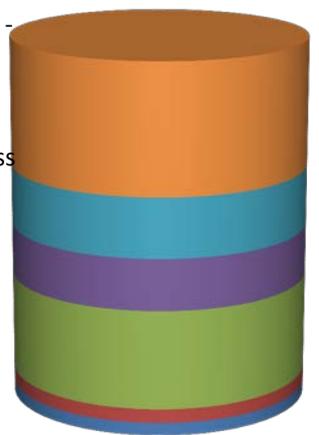


2018/19 - 60

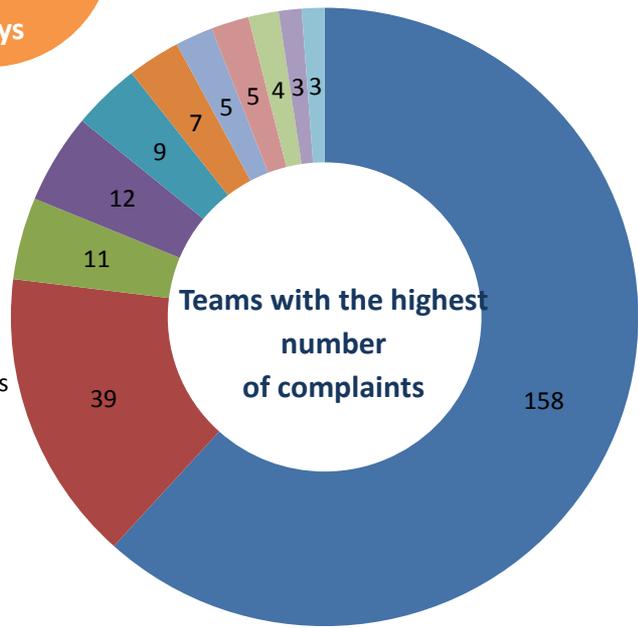
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Top 6 Issue Natures

- Quality of Service Provided - 93
- Outcome of a decision/assessment - 43
- Delay in Assessment Process - 37
- Communication Issues - 71
- Breach of confidentiality - 10
- Staff Conduct - 9



- SEND
- Admissions
- Help & Protection Wycombe 1 & 2
- Care (North & South)
- Help & Protection Aylesbury 1 & 2
- CWD (North & South)
- Assessment Chiltern & South Bucks
- Help & Protection Chilterns
- Assessment Wycombe
- Education Team
- Child Protection Service



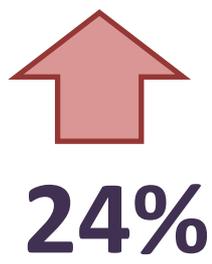
Annual Customer Feedback 1/2

Annual CHASC Summary 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020

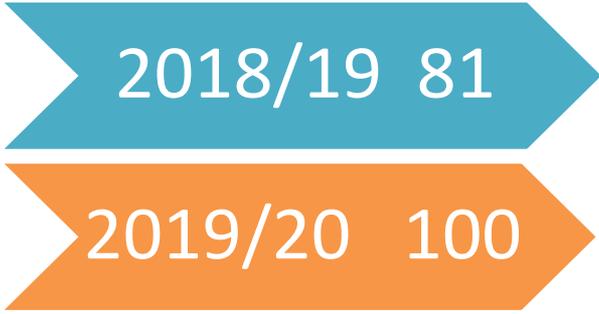
Formal Stage 1 Complaints Received



This represents a
increase of



Stage 1 complaints comparison for 2017/18



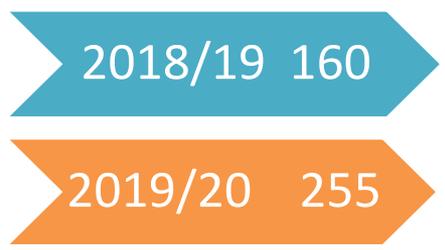
Compliments Received



This represents an
increase of



Compliments comparison for 2018/19



Number of concerns received and dealt with within 48 hours



For statutory complaints the pre complaint stage is called the Concern Stage and it is a process that encourages local resolution to resolve issues.

Of the 67 Statutory Complaints, 18 were escalated from concerns.

Communities, Health & Social Care (CHASC)

Annual Customer Feedback 2/2

Annual CHASC Summary 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020

Complaints where the Council is at fault or partially at fault



Complaints where the Council is not at fault



12% withdrawn or no comment made

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Corporate average complaint response time

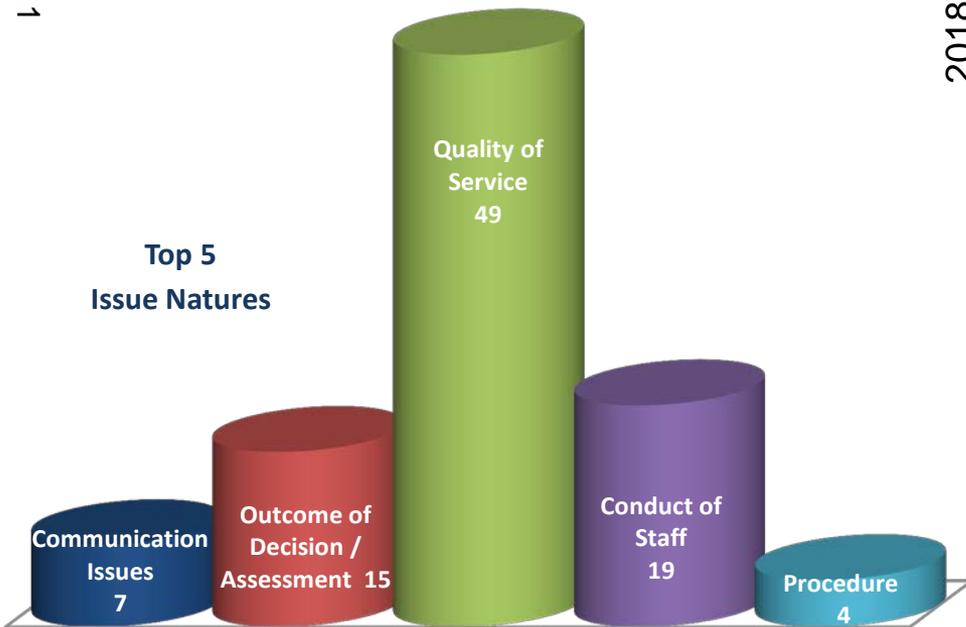


Statutory average complaint response time

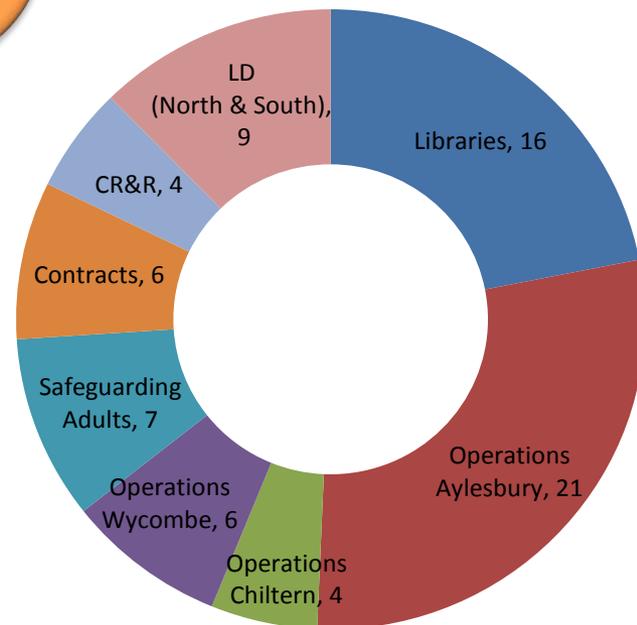


Adults Statutory Complaints Response Timescale = 6 Months

Top 5 Issue Natures



Teams with the highest number of complaints



Annual Customer Feedback 1/2

Annual Resources Summary 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020

Formal Stage 1 Complaints Received

36

*This represents a
decrease of*



8%

Stage 1 complaints comparison with 2018/19

2019/20 36

2018/19 39

Average complaint response time

23

Days

2019/20

Compliments Received

72

*This represents an
increase of*



71%

Compliments comparison with 2018/19

2019/20 72

2018/19 42

19

Days

2018/19

Annual Customer Feedback 2/2

Annual Resources Summary 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019

Complaints where the Council is at fault or partially at fault

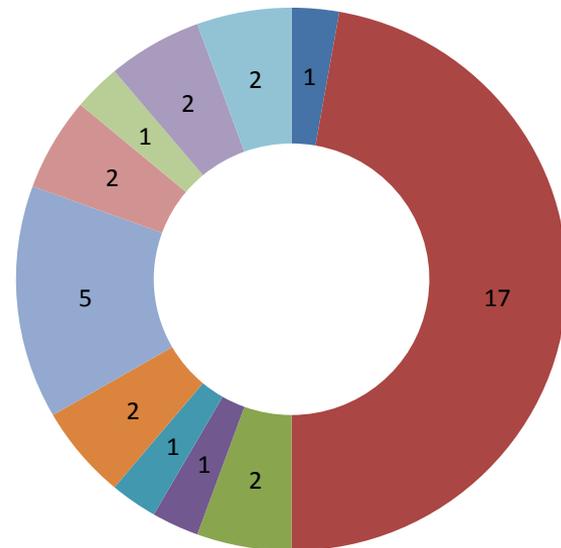


15% withdrawn or no comment made

Complaints where the Council is not at fault

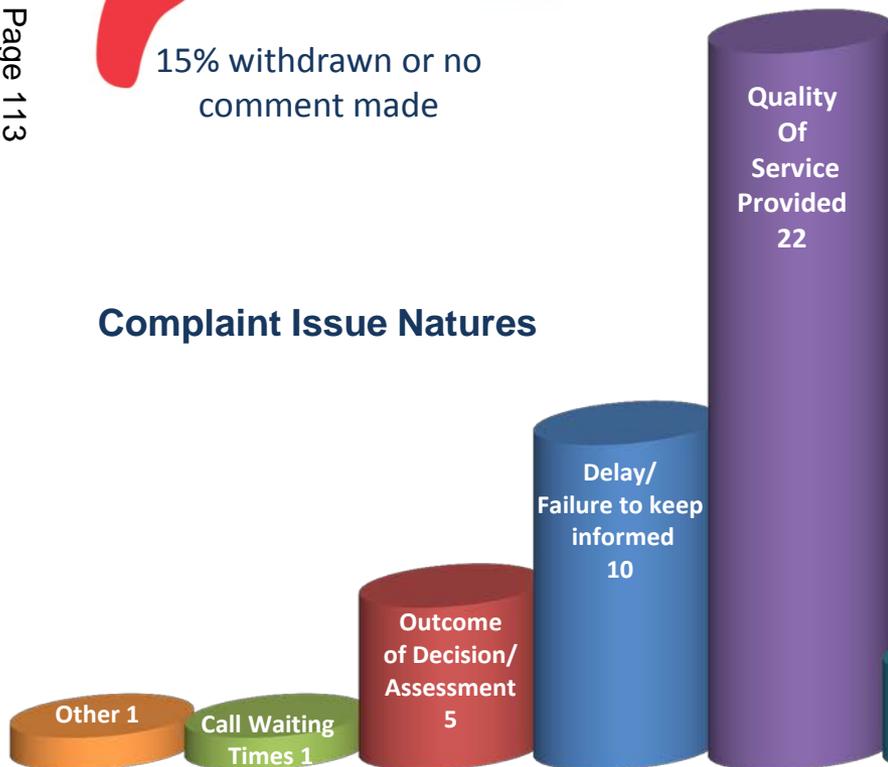


Breakdown by Service



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Complaint Issue Natures



- Accounts Receivable
- Blue Badge
- Business Assurance
- Business Transformation
- Communications
- Corporate Governance & Complaints
- Customer Service Centre
- Corporate Business Support
- HR & OD
- Pensions & Investments
- Property & Assets

Annual Customer Feedback 1/2

Annual TEE Summary 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020

Formal Stage 1 Complaints Received

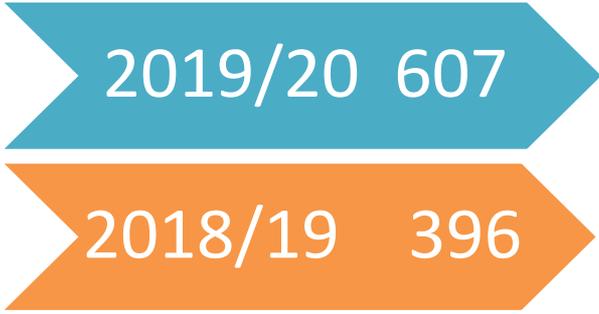


*This represents
an increase of*



53%

Stage 1 complaints comparison with 2018/19



Average complaint response time



2019/20

Compliments Received

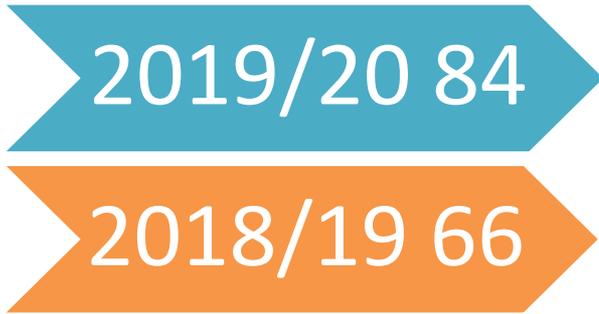


*This represents
an increase of*



27%

Compliments comparison with 2018/19



2018/19



Transport, Economy & Environment (TEE)

Annual Customer Feedback 2/2

Annual TEE Summary 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020

Complaints where the Council is at fault or partially at fault

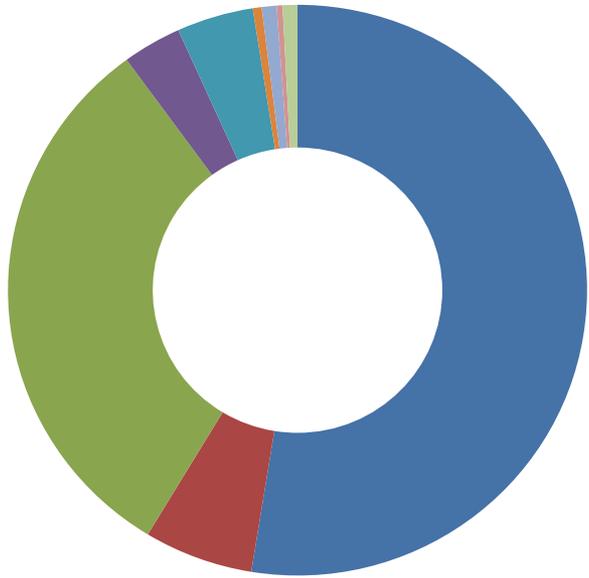


Complaints where the Council is not at fault



9% withdrawn, out of jurisdiction, no comment made or escalated to stage 2

Teams with the highest number of complaints



- TfB - 319
- Household Recycling Centres/Env Services - 37
- Integrated Transport - 190
- Country Parks/Rights of Way - 20
- Development Management - 26
- Growth & Strategy - 3
- Planning & Environment - 5
- Transport Strategy - 2
- Regeneration & Infrastructure - 5

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Top 6 Issue Natures



Proportion of Complaints for Transport for Buckinghamshire

2016/17	46%
2017/18	73%
2018/19	76%
2019/20	53%

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Report to the Standards Committee

Date:	10 December 2020
Reference number:	n/a
Title:	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Report, 24 July 2020: Home to School Transport Progress Report
Relevant councillor(s):	Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cllr David Martin.
Author and/or contact officer:	Lucy Pike
Ward(s) affected:	None specific

Recommendations:

- 1. To note the further progress in implementing the recommendations required by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Report of 24 July 2020.**

Reason for decision: The Standards Committee has been identified as the most appropriate forum to consider the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Report and progress updates. The Council is required to provide free home to school transport for children of compulsory school age. The actions being taken are to fulfil this requirement based on the Ombudsman's findings.

Executive summary

- 1.1 This paper provides a further update on progress made against the recommendations identified in the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Report, published on 24 July 2020 that found the Council to be at fault for the way in which it provided home to school transport for 2 children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The Committee requested an additional update following the report considered on 8 October 2020.

Content of report

- 1.2 A parent of 2 children with Education, Health and Care Plans made a complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) in April 2019 about their

home to school transport arrangements. The Council was unable to provide suitable transport for the 2 children who were eligible for free transport due to their Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The parent was receiving 2-way mileage to transport them herself to a school 8 miles away. The parent argued that this did not amount to free transport as her return journey home was not covered by the mileage allowance and it was unreasonable to expect her to wait at the school all day.

- 1.3 The parent submitted an application to the Transport Exceptions Panel to consider 4-way mileage and when the Panel declined the request, the parent progressed to the Independent Appeal Panel. This Panel also declined her request. During this time there was some confusion around whether the Council could provide suitable transport, particularly for the younger child and therefore whether the parent was voluntarily transporting her children. There was also confusion about whether an assessment of needs had been conducted. Following a number of delays the Council confirmed it could not provide suitable transport for the eldest child. At the time of the Ombudsman's report, there remained uncertainty about whether the Council could provide transport for the younger sibling.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) Decision

- 1.4 The Ombudsman upheld the parent's complaint, identifying that 2-way mileage does not equate to free transport provision. The confusion, poor communication, delays in decision-making and errors in administering process were felt to be of no fault of the parent, and had caused unnecessary hardship, anxiety, time and trouble.
- 1.5 The Council has accepted all the findings in the Ombudsman's report and have taken steps to complete the recommended actions.
- 1.6 On the 8 October the Committee were provided with a progress update. This report provides a further update on the actions that remained outstanding at that time, and provides more information on those families similarly affected. The Council has until 24 January to complete all actions.

Actions

- 1.7 The Committee is referred to the report prepared for 08 October 2020. The Committee will note that all actions pertaining specifically to the complainant had been completed by that date (actions 1 – 3). The Ombudsman has confirmed satisfactory completion of these actions. The outstanding actions at the date of the last report were actions 6, 8 and 9. These are addressed below.
- 1.8 **Action 6: Take action to address the Council's apparent lack of suitable transport provision to ensure other children who require home to school transport are not adversely affected. Completed**

The Council has completed a review of its commissioning arrangements for transport for children with complex needs and disabilities, as part of a wider comprehensive transformation programme underway to improve the Council's transport services provided.

In February 2020 the Council launched a Client Transport Improvement Programme with dedicated transformation resource, and cross-council governance under a Board chaired monthly by the Corporate Director for Communities, and attended by senior officers across the organisation.

This is a three year transformation journey for the service with the objective to achieve excellence in the customer experience and provision of effective and efficient services.

As part of the transformation journey, hearing the voices and improving the customer experience of SEND parents and children is critical, and learning from complaints.

Work already completed following a detailed review includes:

- Reviewing the existing potential providers registered on the Dynamic Purchasing System, which is the Council's e-procurement system. Through this work a targeted promotions campaign has taken place to encourage new potential suppliers to register and to be able to bid for work to cater for a broader range of specialist needs.
- Planning for the retendering of all SEND contracts with modifications to the specification requirements, to drive up quality.
- Reviewing and updating the Transport Application and Assessment process to ensure the most up to date and relevant details are captured. This will enable better informed decision making on procuring suitable transport provision for each child.
- Restructuring transport services, leading to the appointment of 2 dedicated Transport Assessment Officers as part of the SEND Transport Operations Team to ensure more timely assessments are completed.
- Reviewing and updating the Home to School Transport Policy and associated Post 16 Transport Policy Statement. A public consultation on the refreshed content is currently live (since 12 October), closing on 7 December 2020. A key part of this proposed Policy and associated Statement is an improved offer relating to the use of Personal Transport Budgets. These enable parents/carers to exercise greater control, flexibility and choice about how their child travels to school/education. It is anticipated that the offer of Personal Transport Budgets will further support families to secure the most appropriate transport provision for their child. A project to establish and

promote the use of Personal Transport budgets is underway and will be completed by the end of January 2021 with a view to Personal Transport Budgets being available from February 2021.

Following the review work completed there is ongoing transformation activity which will take place as part of the Council's wider Client Transport Improvement Programme. Embedding changes systems, staffing, new offerings and culture takes time and we are committed to driving forward the transformation programme at pace whilst continuing to adapt and deliver our services in the pandemic.

A few of the headline areas of further improvements underway are:

- The retendering exercise on all SEND contracts. This activity will take place throughout 2021. It was originally scheduled to take place in 2020, however in light of the need to provide continuity of service provision in the pandemic and government guidance the tendering exercise has been re-phased to 2021.
- New systems for data sharing between the Integrated SEND Service in Children's Services and Transport Services have been procured and will be introduced by Autumn 2021. A key benefit from the new data system procured is that it will enable seamless record sharing, which in turn will speed up the internal processes within the Council to ensure quicker assessments and transport arranged.
- A new portal introduced for SEND transport applications for parents to complete as part of the new software system which will enable an automated workflow process for quicker and more effective communications.

Action 8: The Council should update its Local Offer on the Bucks Family Information Service to reflect the transport provision available

In October we reported that the Council were reviewing all its website content on transport provision and had updated the Council transport pages to ensure clarity: (<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools-index/school-transport/>).

The Local Offer website content is currently undergoing a complete overhaul as part of a project to design a new microsite for the Buckinghamshire Family Information Service (BFIS). This work incorporates specific content on home to school transport. The work is at an advanced stage and is anticipated to go live in mid-December as a MVP (minimum viable product). The Local Offer website content will be added to and enhanced over time and regularly reviewed to ensure the information for families stays current and relevant.

The new BFIS microsite and Local Offer webpage content is being designed using direct, simple language where possible, so that all users can understand the content

and also that the content is accessible for visually impaired users using screen readers. The content is also being designed to work well on mobile screens, which is how many users view content

Action 9: The Council should provide the Ombudsman with a report confirming the actions it has taken.

In October we reported that the Council had updated the Ombudsman on 22nd September 2020 with details regarding the completion of actions, enclosing the relevant evidence of such. Included in that response was clarification as to how the Council had calculated the sums paid to the complainant.

A further update was provided to the Ombudsman on 20 November 2020 on the Council's actions in satisfaction of the Ombudsman's recommendations

A final report will be provide to the Ombudsman in January 2020, in line with the timescales set out in the Report.

Additional information on families affected

- 1.9 In addition to the outstanding actions, the Committee on the last occasion raised additional questions in relation to completion of **Action 5**.
- 1.10 The Council were required to review other parents' and carers' mileage arrangements and where it was found that the Council were unable to provide suitable alternative transport, and, as identified in this case, the arrangement is not voluntary, it should pay the mileage costs of 4 legs of the journey where relevant. This action was completed and the outcome was shared with the Committee in October.
- 1.11 This review has been undertaken and the Council identified all parents/carers who were in receipt of 2-way mileage payments. The review identified 117 other families who were receiving 2 way mileage. The Council were unable to identify whether arrangements were entered into voluntarily by families or whether they were put in place as suitable transport could not be procured.
- 1.12 As part of the overall review of home to school transport, taking into account the recommendations of the Ombudsman together with the work being undertaken, as set out above, to develop an improved Personal Transport Budget offer, the decision was taken to pay all parents and carers who are transporting their children 4-way mileage in circumstances where their children are entitled to receive free home to school transport.
- 1.13 This change has already been actioned and the website update to reflect this. In addition, further clarification is provided in the amendments to the draft Home to School Transport Policy which is currently out for consultation, which make it clear that irrespective of the reasons, parents and carers who transport their children,

when they are entitled to free home to school transport, will receive 4 way mileage payments. This goes further than the recommendation of the Ombudsman, which only recommended increasing the mileage payments to those parents and carers who were not voluntarily transporting their children to school. This decision made it unnecessary to carry out a more detailed exercise to try to identify only those parents where the arrangement was not voluntary.

- 1.14 For new eligible transport applicants the offer of 4-way mileage was put in place and the website and communications information was updated accordingly. 204 families are currently in receipt of 4-way mileage.
- 1.15 In relation to the existing 117 claimants, who, at the time of the Ombudsman's report were receiving 2-way mileage, the Local Authority wrote to them on 19 August 2020 to advise that from September 2020 mileage payments would increase to 4-way mileage.
- 1.16 The Local Authority has published the Report of the Ombudsman, as it is required to do. Public notices were published in the Bucks Free Press and the Bucks Herald from 9 October 2020 to 8 November 2020. Any parent or carer who considers their circumstances are similar to those set out in the Report can contact the Local Authority and each complaint will be considered on the individual circumstances of the case. To date, 1 parent has come forward and this is being dealt with accordingly. Parents and carers may at any time seek reassessment of their child's transport provision if they wish to do so.
- 1.17 As part of the Local Authority's co-operation with the Ombudsman, an interim update was provided on 20 November 2020, ahead of the formal 6 month update which is due to be provided in January 2021. The update to the Ombudsman set out the matters contained in this report and how the Local Authority had actioned the recommendations. The Ombudsman has been invited to comment and provide any further guidance they consider is required to ensure the Local Authority has addressed the spirit and intention of the recommendations. The Local Authority will, of course, take into consideration any further guidance the Ombudsman provides.

Joint working across Education and Transport services

- 1.15 Joint working has increased over the last 12 months and there are many examples of good practice across the directorates. These include:
 - Jointly hosting a parent engagement session to seek feedback from families on SEND transport provision.
 - Collaboration on developing the draft Home to School Transport Policy and associated Post 16 Policy statement, which is currently being consulted upon.

- Joint working to enable children’s return to school during and following the COVID lockdown, ensuring the appropriate transport provision was in place for those pupils that need it, and schools were informed.
- Collaboration on the development of the infrastructure to award Personal Transport Budgets to ensure roles and responsibilities are clear, and the processes developed are streamlined and easy to implement by transport colleagues.
- Regular School Transport Liaison meetings are held that include representatives from the school network groups at primary, secondary and special school level, alongside the Director for Education and the Director for Transport.
- Collaboration at all levels on the key work streams contained within the Transport Improvement Programme under the leadership of Cllr Anita Cranmer and Cllr David Martin.

Other options considered

1.16 n/a.

Legal and financial implications

- 1.17 At the time of the last report, a total of £7088.66 has been paid to the family concerned. An additional £200 was subsequently paid following a discrepancy regarding the number of weeks the family had transported their children to school. The Council’s school attendance records did not match the families recollection of school attendance, however, the additional payment was made as a good will gesture.
- 1.18 The Council is also required to pay the family £50 per week going forwards in addition to the 4 way mileage claim, until such a point as the Council is able to provide a suitable alternative transport arrangement that meets the needs of the children, or the family advise they would prefer to transport themselves or are happy to do so. A process to make this additional payment is now in place and has been confirmed with the parent by letter (dated 17 Nov 2020).

Corporate implications

1.19 n/a

Consultation and communication

- 1.20 Cabinet member briefings have been held with Cllr Anita Cranmer and Cllr David Martin to discuss the Ombudsman’s findings and recommendations.

Next steps and review

- 1.21 The actions described in Section 1.7 will continue to be progressed and an update will be shared with the ombudsman on their conclusion.
- 1.22 The overarching Home to School Transport Policy and associated Statement will be refreshed following consideration of the feedback from the public consultation (12 October – 7 Dec 2020). The revised Policy and Statement will be presented to Cabinet for approval on 30 March 2020 and will apply to children attending school from September 2021 onwards. The learning from the ombudsman’s findings have informed the draft Policy.

Background papers

- 1.23 LGO Report
Letter sent to families re: 4 way mileage



Report to Standards and General Purposes Committee

Date: 10 December 2020

Title: Local Government Boundary Commission for England – Update on Electoral Review of Buckinghamshire Council

Author and/or contact officer: Nick Graham, Service Director – Legal and Democratic

Ward(s) affected: All

Recommendations:

The Committee is asked: -

To note the update, including the work undertaken by the Member Working Group since 8 October 2020.

Reason for decision: To ensure that work is progressing satisfactorily to prepare the necessary statistical and other information, and other arrangements are in place, for the Council's final submission to be made to the LGBCE by the start of March 2021.

Background

- 1.1. The Committee received a report on 2 July, 2020, explaining that with the establishment of the new unitary Council the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) had indicated that it intended to conduct an electoral review of Buckinghamshire Council.
- 1.2. The LGBCE have indicated that any changes would not come into effect until the 2025 Buckinghamshire Council elections but the precise timeframe for the stages of the Review still needed to be confirmed.
- 1.3. The Committee agreed that a Member Working Group (MWG) of 9 Members (to allow for cross party representation) would be established to oversee the work of officers in the preparation of the statistical and other information required by the LGBCE. The membership has now been established as Councillors Waters (Chairman), Mordue, Adoh, Collingwood, Etholen, M Knight, Lambert, L Smith and Stannard.

- 1.4. Following consultation with the LGBCE, the initially proposed review timetable has been revised and is as follows:
- January 2021 – Deadline for submission of draft Council size number proposals
 - 25/2/2021 – Standards and General Purposes Committee – to approve the final Council size numbers submission to the LGBCE.
 - 1 March 2021 – Deadline for submission of final Council size number proposals.
 - March-April 2021 – LGBCE agree Council size (i.e. number of Councillors) to be elected to the Buckinghamshire Council in 2025.
 - June 2021 – Commence second part of review looking at Warding arrangements for the Buckinghamshire Council.
 - Early-Mid 2022 – Review concluded, LGBCE publish final recommendations on the Warding arrangements.
- 1.5 It is the LGBCE's intention for the review as a whole to be completed fairly early in the term of the new Council, allowing plenty of time for both preparing for subsequent elections based on the new wording scheme and any consequential community governance arrangements that the Council might wish to introduce in time for that election.
- 1.6 The MWG has met on 5 occasions since July and has received information from Officers who have populated the LGBCE's Council size numbers template with statistical / factual information such as the Council's profile (geography, demographics, population and forecast population growth, deprivation and housing costs, electorate forecasts), and on 3 broad aspects relating to the role of Councillors:
- Strategic Leadership.
 - Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships).
 - Community Leadership
- 1.7 It is important that the submission is evidence based as much as possible and to this end all Members were invited to complete a survey during September-October 2020 to gain an insight into how they undertook their role, their involvement in Council work and the community, and the time commitment. In total, 103 (53%) of Councillors responded to the survey.
- 1.8 With regard to time commitment, Members were asked an additional survey question to verify to what extent they felt that an average of approximately 16 hours per week carrying out their community leadership role, responding to casework, attending meetings (including Council/Committee, community, Town and Parish Council) and supporting residents was an accurate reflection of their experience. The responses indicated that:
- 10% - spend less than 16 hours per week for their Councillor work.
 - 40% - spend, on average, about 16 hours per week for their Council work.
 - 50% – spent more than 16 hours per week for their Councillor work.

- 1.9 Alongside the statistical / factual information in the Council size numbers template, the MWG has been putting together an Options Paper to clearly explain what the Council believes is the correct number of Councillors to represent the Buckinghamshire Council from 2025 onwards. The Options Paper will be considered by the MWG on Monday 7 December and, due to the timing of this meeting, then circulated to Committee Members with a supplementary agenda.

Other Options considered

- 2.1 None, the Standards & General Purpose Committee has agreed that the Members Working Group will be involved in the development of the proposals designed to facilitate the Review.

Legal and financial implications

- 3.1 The proposed electoral review is a statutory process instigated by the LGBCE and driven by their timetable and requirements. The Council has no choice but to support and provide a significant amount of information for the review to ensure that the outcomes are in the best interests of the people of Buckinghamshire.
- 3.2 The governance arrangements the Council puts in place to enable it to respond to the review and discharge its responsibilities is a matter for the Council.
- 3.3 There are some resource implications relating to officer time to prepare the necessary statistical and other information and develop and implement a communication and engagement strategy. An Officer Working Group has been established, led by the Service Director (Legal and Democratic Services) which is undertaking the work to provide the necessary information to the MWG.

Corporate implications

- 4.1 The Electoral review will impact on all Councillors and all communities within Buckinghamshire. To maximise participation for Councillors, residents and all relevant stakeholder group it will be important to ensure a thorough consultation exercise is undertaken.

Next steps and review

- 5.1 The Member Working Group would continue to meet over the coming months. The Standards and General Purposes on 25 February 2021 would be asked to approve the final Council size numbers submission to the LGBCE

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Report to Standards and General Purposes Committee

Date: 10 December 2020

Reference number: TBC

Title: DELEGATION TO RETURNING OFFICER

Author and/or contact officer: Nick Graham – Service Director Legal and Democratic Services
nick.graham@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Ward(s) affected: none specific

Recommendations: The committee is asked to:-

1. Give authority to the Service Director Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with political group leaders, to make any change to a polling place that may be required.

Reason for decision: To ensure changes to a polling place can take place at short notice in the event that a polling place is no longer available.

Content of report

Background

- 1.1 Local authorities are responsible for designating polling districts for elections. Within polling districts the local authority is also responsible for designating a polling place. A polling place can be a single building or a wider area.
- 1.2 Polling stations are within polling places. The Returning Officer is able to designate and change polling stations. The Service Director Legal and Democratic Services has been designated as the Council's Returning Officer.
- 1.3 Responsibility for electoral arrangements is within this committee's terms of reference.
- 1.4 The next elections are set for May 2021.

Authority

- 1.5 Although there are statutory requirements to make polling places available there are circumstances when a change to the polling arrangements may still be required at short notice, for example fire, lack of availability. Due to current uncertainties with the pandemic there is also concern regarding covid restrictions and requirements as regards both availability and inadequate facilities. Committee approval would be required for any change.
- 1.6 Due to the timescales it is recommended that the Committee grants authority to the Service Director Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with political group leaders, to make any change to a polling place that may be required to negate the need for any special meetings to be called at very short notice.
- 1.7 Relevant Ward Members would also be consulted on any such change in advance and all Members would be informed.
- 1.8 The authority would not affect the statutory requirement to undertake the 4 yearly review of polling places which would come through the Council's decision making process in the normal way and be subject to full consultation.

Other options considered

- 1.9 Calling a special meeting, however this may still cause some delay which could affect communications to electors on voting arrangements and multiple meetings may be required if there was more than one change. Use of the urgency provisions which was discounted as a separate process would also be required if there was more than one change proposed.

Legal and financial implications

- 1.10 None except as set out in the body of this report.

Corporate implications

- 1.11 Ensures appropriate electoral arrangements can be made in a timely manner.

Consultation and communication

- 1.12 None.

Next steps and review

None.

Background papers

Buckinghamshire Council Constitution:

<https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s5397/Buckinghamshire%20Council%20Constitution.pdf>

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