



Budget Scrutiny
12th January 2021

Planning & Environment



Service Context – Planning & Environment

The Planning & Environment service focus on shaping and enhancing Buckinghamshire to secure the quality of life for now and the future.

Policy & Compliance

The Planning Policy team are responsible for developing and maintaining the policies which set the foundation to enable sound and robust planning decisions. A key area of work will be development of the new Buckinghamshire Local Plan for adoption in 2025. Within the same service, the planning enforcement teams investigate alleged breaches of planning control. Identified breaches of planning legislation are assessed against local and national planning polices and enforcement action taken where appropriate. In addition the service administers, monitors and enforces compliance with the payment of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) as well as financial contributions required by Section 106 planning legal agreements

Climate Change & Environment

The Climate Change Strategy is in development and will have a cross cutting impact on all Council services - particularly those with major carbon impacts. With a focus on delivering the key corporate priority of improving the environment, environmental specialisms such as ecologists, archaeologists, heritage and urban design specialists support the wider planning function to protect and enhance the integrity of the natural and historic landscape.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL

Planning & Development

The Development Management team, including Highways DM, use national and local planning policies to determine applications, dealing with around 12,000 planning applications a year. These are determined by Officers under delegated arrangements or through the 5 Area Planning Committees and Strategic Sites Committee, which have been meeting virtually due to the COVID pandemic.

The Development Management teams ensure sustainable and high quality forms of development, securing appropriate mitigation in the form of financial contributions or physical improvements through legal agreements.

The Highways DM team are responsible for overseeing the delivery of development related highway works and the adoption of new residential roads as public highway.

The Building Control function ensures compliance with regulations and enforces standards, dealing with around 2,600 building regulation applications a year and undertaking in the region of 28,000 site inspections. The Building Control team works in direct competition with the private sector and since April 2020 has maintained a market share above 70%.

Service Context – Planning & Environment

Key Priorities 21/22

- Development of the new Buckinghamshire Local Plan for adoption by 2025
- Continue to transform the Planning & Environment service in order to ensure excellent customer experience, whilst delivering £300k of savings towards Directorate-level savings target of £500k.
- Enhancing the Planning enforcement service and seeking to resolve complex cases
- Preparing for the impact of the Planning White Paper
- Implementing the Council's Climate Change Strategy (once adopted)

Key Risks 21/22

- COVID-19: uncertainty on the economic impact on numbers and size of planning applications. Application numbers have picked up to near pre-COVID levels, and we have therefore not made provision for additional budget next year to cover any income shortfalls which may arise if application numbers reduce. There is a risk, however, based on experience from previous fiscal events, that applications could drop by between 10% and 25% (c. £1m to £2.5m); a corporate contingency is being held to mitigate some of this risk should it materialise.
- Planning White Paper - The Govt announcement of reforms to the Planning system will have significant impacts on the way we run our Planning service, and we will need to adapt our service to ensure future compliance. There are potential implications for the level of able to be generated if planning application criteria is relaxed, which will need to be considered as part of future budget setting.

Qtr 2 2020-21 Financial Position

Planning & Environment	Budget £000	Y/E Out-turn £000	Forecast Variance £000	%	of which COVID £000	of which BAU £000
Expenditure	14,437	15,137	700	5%	-	700
Income	(11,142)	(7,142)	4,000	36%	4,000	-
Total	3,295	7,995	4,700	41%	4,000	700

At the end of Qtr 2 we were reporting a budget pressure of £4.7m, attributing £4m to COVID income loss and £700k to staffing cost pressures.

This position has been clarified for the budget setting process, and is more accurately attributable to:

- £2.0m inherited staffing cost pressure, of which £500k is one off agency costs in 20/21, leaving an ongoing shortfall of £1.5m which is addressed via this MTFP.
- £2.0m non-COVID inherited income shortfall, where income targets have been set historically too high, and which is address via this MTFP
- Around £700k of COVID-related income loss, which is expected to reduce by the end of the year, and we are therefore not seeking additional funding for via this MTFP.

Planning & Environment Budget 2021-22

Planning, Growth & Sustainability		2020-21			2021-22		
Directorate	Income £000	Expense £000	Net Budget	Income £000	Expense £000	Net Budget	
Economic Growth & Regeneration	(455)	3,517	3,061	(455)	2,603	2,147	
Housing & Regulatory Services	(4,516)	12,410	7,894	(3,888)	12,082	8,194	
Planning & Environment	(11,112)	14,446	3,334	(9,359)	16,908	7,549	
Property & Assets	(23,139)	18,860	(4,279)	(22,851)	19,903	(2,947)	
Special Expenses	(77)	292	215	(77)	294	217	
Strategic Transport & Infrastructure	(1,108)	3,033	1,925	(1,108)	3,533	2,425	
Grand Total	(40,408)	52,557	12,150	(37,739)	55,323	17,585	

Planning & Environment budget highlighted in yellow; shown in context of whole of Planning, Growth & Sustainability Directorate



Proposed Budget Changes 2021-22

Planning & Environment	Change £000's
Development of New Local Plan for Buckinghamshire	750
Inflation	15
Planning & Environment Service Legacy Savings Plans	(1,036)
Removal of Planning & Environment Service Legacy Savings Plans	1,036
Planning service legacy income budget shortfall	2,000
Planning service legacy staffing budget shortfall	1,450
TOTAL Change	4,215

The Local Plan is estimated to cost £3m over the next 4 years, split up into an annual budget of £750k.

We are putting £4.5m of additional funding into the Planning & Environment budgets. £3.5m of this growth will permanently plug inherited budget gaps, arising from where legacy councils used other funding sources to pay for the service (ref Qtr 2 financial position slide). An additional £1m is needed to reverse legacy savings plans which have been superseded by the move to the Unitary authority. Efficiency savings will instead be delivered by the Better Buckinghamshire service reviews over the next 4 years. Both elements of additional budget will enable the Planning & Environment service to fund its existing staffing structures and re-sets the income targets to a more realistic level, providing a steady state on which service review can progress, and future service improvements and savings can be delivered.