



Annual Scrutiny Report 2020-21



Making a difference in a challenging year

Foreword

This year, the work of the Select Committee's has been dominated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the council's services and those of our key partners. By virtue of the Coronavirus Act 2020, Select Committees have continued to meet, albeit virtually, using MS Teams. Despite the challenges, as Chairmen of the Select Committee's we are delighted to present our Annual Report for 2020/21. We would like to pay tribute to all Buckinghamshire Council officers and staff working within our partner organisations for their dedication, resilience and hard work. Our Select Committees are cross-party and non-political with the overall aim to improve services and outcomes for residents by holding decision-makers to account.

This report summarises the key pieces of work and achievements throughout the year from across all six Select Committees. We have completed a couple of formal inquiries – reviewing Community Grants and scrutiny of the Council's budget for 2021/22. In addition, feedback has been shared on the home to school transport policy, responses to formal consultations on major health changes have been submitted to the NHS and a working group was set-up to contribute to the development of the Council's Climate Strategy. A variety of significant issues have been considered and challenged at formal committee meetings, including, support for care leavers, mental health, long-term plan for rough sleepers, dental services, HS2, fly tipping, taxi and private hire licensing policy and educational standards.

Hearing the views of the public is important to the scrutiny process and we continue to receive public questions at our meetings. We would like to thank all Councillors who have participated in scrutiny this year, Cabinet for their support of scrutiny and all officers, co-opted Members, partners and public who have contributed their valuable experience and support throughout the year.



Cllr Dev Dhillon, Chairman,
Children's & Education Select
Committee



Cllr Paul Irwin, Chairman,
Communities & Localism Select
Committee



Cllr Ralph Bagge,
Chairman, Finance &
Resources Select
Committee



Cllr David Carroll, Chairman,
Growth, Infrastructure & Housing
Select Committee



Cllr Jane MacBean, Chairman,
Health & Adult Social Care Select
Committee



Cllr Steve Broadbent,
Chairman, Transport,
Environment &
Climate Change Select
Committee

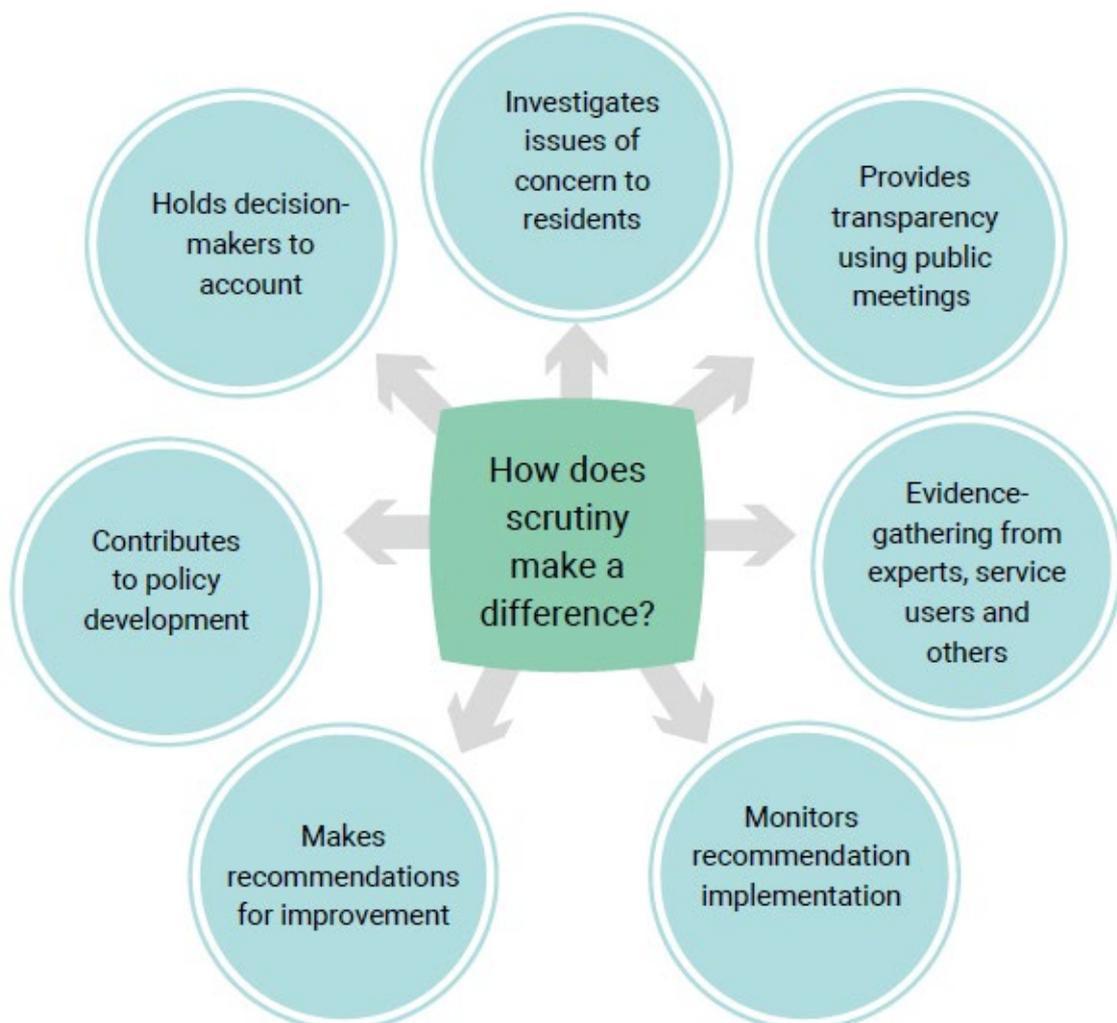
What is scrutiny?

Scrutiny is an important part of local democracy and provides the legal power for Councillors to look into issues of concern for residents, holding decision-makers to account for the decisions they are making.

Although scrutiny cannot make decisions, it makes recommendations for improvement to decision-makers. Within the Council, this is the Cabinet, but as scrutiny can look at services provided by other organisations, it often makes recommendations for partners.

There are also specific powers for scrutiny to hold the NHS to account within health scrutiny.

Scrutiny at Buckinghamshire Council is carried out by six Select Committees. Each Select Committee has a different area of responsibility and each examines local services across the public sector. The Committees are made up of elected Councillors who are not part of the Council's Cabinet, together with co-opted representatives from relevant local organisations.



Children's & Education Select Committee

Many children who come into the Council's care or who receive other support services are presenting with increasingly complex needs and it is vital that the Council can respond with appropriate services in a timely way. The Children's and Education Select Committee has an important role to play in scrutinising children's social care and education provision for both adults and children. These are areas that have been impacted significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic and the Committee have heard from officers and external partners about the additional challenges they have faced during 2020-21.

Topics the committee has focussed on

In the past year the Committee has considered a variety of key topics including the following:

- Covid-19 updates
- Family Support Service
- Ofsted Improvement Plan
- Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Partnership
- Educational Standards
- Support for Care Leavers

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Improvement Plan

In September 2020, the Committee considered a report on the Council's progress in improving the services and support it provides for children with special educational needs and disabilities and their families. The governance for the SEND improvement plan was provided by the SEND Board, chaired by the Director of Children's Services, which also included representatives from schools, health and other partner agencies, as well as parents of SEND children. Members were pleased to hear that there had been significant improvement in the timeliness of assessments for Education and Healthcare Plans (EHCPs) and that parents were working closely with the service in developing clear processes for preparing children for the transition to adulthood.

Children's Mental Health

In January 2021, the Committee requested an item on Children's Mental Health as members were concerned about the impact of the pandemic and specifically, time away from school and their friends during lockdown, on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people in Buckinghamshire. Dr Eleanor Rowsell and Dr Joe Clacey from Oxford Health, the provider of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in Buckinghamshire attended the meeting and gave members a valuable insight into the current trends amongst young people and the support services which were available to them during this difficult time. In addition, members heard from Debra Rutley, Aspire Schools who provided training packages and mentoring to school leaders across the county to ensure they could confidently support young people on their return to school.



Doctors fear new child mental health crisis in UK, made worse by Covid

Surge in cases expected as schools reopen and charities report 70% rise in demand for services



Press release

£79 million to boost mental health support for children and young people

Millions more children and young people will have access to significantly expanded mental health services, backed by £79 million.

Communities & Localism Select Committee

This Select Committee has had a great deal to consider this past year with important policies being developed in addition to the constantly changing impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on local communities and Council services. Committee members have worked together to constructively challenge a number of key areas. The work of the Committee spans the portfolios of Communities and Public Health (Public Health falls in the remit of the Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee), Culture, Regulatory Services and Sports and Leisure.

Key issues looked at during 2020-21

In addition to receiving regular Covid-19 updates from Cabinet Members, the Committee considered and challenged key areas covering:

- Buckinghamshire Council Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Policy;
- Safer Buckinghamshire Plan
- Voluntary and Community Strategy
- Town and Parish Council Charter
- Domestic Violence and Abuse
- Culture, Sport and Leisure updates
- Community Boards

Achievements this year

The Committee has provided an input into the following topics:

- The now adopted Buckinghamshire Council Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Policy
- Development of the Town and Parish Charter
- The 2020-23 Safer Buckinghamshire Plan
- Reviewed the first eight months of Community Boards
- The impact the pandemic has had on domestic abuse in Buckinghamshire

Over the past year the Committee has seen evidence of an excellent community spirit and it is evident that there has been an excellent coming together of local communities and it is apparent just how important and unique the voluntary and community sector is in Buckinghamshire. Recognising the importance of building strong Community Boards and maintaining a robust voluntary and community strategy, the Committee has been keen to explore ways to expand upon the already great partnership work happening within Buckinghamshire.

Bucks Free Press

NEWS

18th August 2020

Over £1 million distributed to Bucks charities since pandemic began

The Bucks Herald

Aylesbury Vale Charities benefit from Coronavirus Community Support Fund

A number of local charities have benefited from grants totalling £124,280 for the Buckingham constituency to help with the impact of Covid-19 as part of the Government's £200m Coronavirus Community Support Fund.

Inquiry into the effectiveness of community organisation grants during the Covid-19 pandemic

At the onset of the pandemic local people were really engaged in participating in a community response. Many organised themselves into groups or partnered with established organisations to provide assistance and support to their neighbours. In the absence of Community Boards being established, a Councillor Crisis fund was initiated, utilising £250,000 of public health money allocated to the Community Boards, with a further £50,000 received from the Rothschild Foundation. Whilst recognising that the funding process had to be set-up quickly, the Inquiry Group wanted to highlight lessons learnt to provide recommendations on the management of community grants for any future pandemic ensuring that:-

- there are no gaps or duplicate services;
- that resources are being used effectively and efficiently providing value for money for all residents through good partnership working;
- benefits are provided which may have a long term impact on communities.



From 8 December 2020 to 18 January 2021, the Inquiry Group held a number evidence gathering sessions with key stakeholders including local charities, community groups, Local Support Hub officers, Community Board Chairmen and heard about the approach in other local authorities and made **7 recommendations** for Cabinet to consider.

Cabinet welcomed the Inquiry Group's time and efforts and provided a response to each recommendation. Outcomes of the Inquiry has resulted in and assisted in the following:

- The Council Chairman agreeing to hold a one-minute clap at the start of the April Full Council meeting in appreciation of the great efforts of local heroes in the voluntary sector.
- A review of voluntary sector grant funding in 2021.
- An Employer Supported Volunteering Policy.
- A refreshed governance and funding protocol for Community Boards.
- Development of a toolkit for Community Boards to support them in developing local solutions to tackle social isolation in their communities, building on the COVID experience
- Commitment to working with independent foodbanks.

"We are incredibly passionate about what we have done. I have done a number of inquiries in my eight years as Councillor and by a long way this is the most people I have interviewed. People were keen to come forward and it made you very proud to come from Buckinghamshire, the work that has taken place is really quite amazing." Cllr Paul Irwin, Chairman of Communities and Localism Select Committee

"We wanted to explore whether there was equal access to funds for all community groups, large and small, new and those which are established. We wanted to make sure the approach to funding was consistent, aligned with the public health assessment situation and addressed a clear need of community and we believe all of those things did happen." Cllr Peter Cooper, Member of the Inquiry Group

Finance & Resources Select Committee

This Committee considers the Council's overall financial strategy, as well as the portfolios of Property and Assets and Resources. The work programme is often driven by the findings of the annual Budget Scrutiny process.

Key areas of work during 2020/21

- Staffing including the ongoing work around the return of Staff to the office environment and future ways of working
- Property Register and Council Estate
- Aylesbury Vale Estates and Consilio's respective Business Plans
- Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy arrangements
- Progress made on the previous year's Budget Scrutiny recommendations

Future work programme

A variety of areas that have significantly been affected by Covid-19 including:

- Wellbeing of staff;
- Impact of remote working;
- Property rental income loss;
- Pandemic effect on business plans;
- Review overall impact of Covid-19 on the Council budget.

Budget Scrutiny Inquiry

This year's Inquiry was undertaken in January and is a major focus of the Select Committee's annual Work Programme. Meetings were held on 11th, 12th and 14th January 2021 and the Leader of the Council, each Cabinet Member, Corporate Directors and Service Directors were questioned on their draft budget proposals. This year the Inquiry Group was presented with the task of challenging a one-year budget rather than the usual four-year budget due to the exceptional circumstances of the ongoing pandemic. Meetings were webcast and questions from the public received via email and social media were also asked by the Chairman.

Following the Inquiry, the Committee met to discuss, consider and develop their key findings and recommendations. The Inquiry report contained **14 recommendations**. As a result, changes were made to the final Budget which included:

- An additional £3m general contingency related to covid-19 / economic uncertainties.
- An additional £800,000 contingency related to property rental income.
- A £2m one off investment in highways drainage.
- A budget of £100,000 to support the Cultural Strategy.



"I would like to acknowledge the Leader and Cabinet for taking on board our recommendations and amending the budget so effectively to better meet residents' needs in 2021/22."

Cllr Ralph Bagge (Full Council on 24 February), Chairman of Finance & Resources Select Committee

"It is the budget scrutiny process done on a good team-like, cross party basis that actually makes the budget we produce very much better and indeed a role model prescribed by the LGA nationally as the way budgets should be done."

Cllr Martin Tett (Full Council on 24 February) Leader of Buckinghamshire Council

Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee

This Select Committee considers the portfolio areas of; Planning and Enforcement, Housing and Homelessness, and Town Centre Regeneration. The Committee has received regular updates from the Leader of the Council throughout the year with regards to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Committee has also received regular updates from representatives from Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF) and the Buckinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) on local economic recovery.

Key issues of focus over 2020/21

- Covid-19 and Local Economic Recovery
- Housing Allocations
 - Attended by the Executive director of Development at the Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust (VAHT).
- Long Term Plan for Rough Sleepers
 - The Committee has also monitored the impact of the pandemic on rough sleepers and the 'Everyone In' campaign.
- Local Plan for Buckinghamshire
- Temporary Accommodation
 - Members reviewed the newly built modular accommodation which has been developed in High Wycombe.
- Future High Street Fund
 - The Committee provided feedback on projects proposed across three strategic aims and locations in High Wycombe.
- The local authority planning process and the Local Enforcement Plan
- Opportunities for Cyclists and Pedestrians (joint consideration at the Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee on 11 March 2021)

Local Economic Recovery

Since the start of the pandemic, Committee Members have been concerned about the impact of Covid-19 on the local economy and were keen to hear what support packages and grants were available for local businesses and the plans for recovery post-Covid. At its January meeting, Members heard from the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration, the partnership manager at LEP and the managing director from Bucks Business First. As part of the update, Members heard that under the MHCLG Future High Street funds programme, High Wycombe had been allocated funding based on projects pre-Covid, but the pandemic was accelerating trends which the bid sought to address.



Bucks Free Press

1st February

Aylesbury: Rough sleepers set to get housing support



By Ollie Sirrell | [@olliesirrelldr](https://twitter.com/olliesirrelldr)
Local Democracy Reporter



Buckinghamshire Council are moving forward with their scheme to rehouse rough sleepers.

Temporary Accommodation

The Committee has also reviewed the council's statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation. Members were pleased to hear that 95 mainly former rough sleepers had been accommodated due to the pandemic. In January 2021, there were five known rough sleepers in Buckinghamshire, all of whom had been offered accommodation. Committee Members are planning to visit the temporary accommodation facility being built in High Wycombe.

Health & Adult Social Care Select Committee

The Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee holds health and social care decision-makers to account and acts as a critical friend to the health and social care sector. Part of the Select Committee's work is around challenging proposals for health and social care service change to ensure the best possible outcomes for Buckinghamshire residents. This has been an incredibly challenging year for the council's adult social care services and health partners. The Committee has heard about the significant impact that Covid-19 has had on their services and the recovery plans.

The Committee comprises 15 councillors and a representative from Healthwatch Bucks, who sits on the committee as a non-voting co-opted member.

"At Healthwatch Bucks, we value the pro-active role that the Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee plays in improving health and social care outcomes and services for Bucks residents. As a co-opted member, we contribute by ensuring the voices of people using Bucks health and social care services are heard, considered and acted upon."

Zoe McIntosh, Chief Executive, Healthwatch Bucks

Key issues looked at during 2020-21

The Committee has reviewed and challenged key areas including:

- Mental Health services
- Pharmacists
- Winter Planning – system resilience and plans for a second wave of Covid-19
- Progress with identifying key priorities for the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System
- Buckinghamshire Integrated Care Partnership – response to Covid-19 and recovery plans, including the vaccination programme
- Adult Social Care, including support to care home providers and Hospital discharges
- Progress with the development of Primary Care Networks
- Proposed closure of New Chapel Surgery, Long Crendon
- Dental services and the impact of Covid-19 on access to the service
- Maternity services in light of the Ockenden Report (published December 2020)

Key achievements

- A group of HASC Members prepared a statement for inclusion in the Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust's annual quality account. Whilst the HASC response acknowledged the key achievements and highlights for the Hospital Trust, it also focussed on areas of concern and areas of improvement, including re-admission rates, pressure ulcers, inpatient falls and responsiveness to personal patient needs. The Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust's Quality Account 2019-20 [can be found via this link](#).
- At its November 2020 meeting, the Committee heard from key health partners and representatives from the local action group on the proposed closure of New Chapel Surgery in Long Crendon and alternative plans for a community-led health provision. Following the meeting, the Committee Members submitted a response to the consultation around the proposed closure of the surgery. The Chairman has held further meetings with key stakeholders to keep abreast of how the project is progressing.

Bucks Free Press

Action group pleads for alternative local site if New Chapel Surgery in Long Crendon closes



By Rory Butler | [@rorythomasb](#)
Local Democracy Reporter



Action group pleads for alternative local site if New Chapel Surgery in Long Crendon closes

[f](#) [t](#) [in](#) [m](#) [e](#) 0 comment

THE FATE of patients using a surgery facing closure due to 'inadequacy' hangs in the balance – but a window of hope could reside in a new [local](#) facility with proper backing.

The Bucks Herald

Residents form action group to help keep Long Crendon surgery open

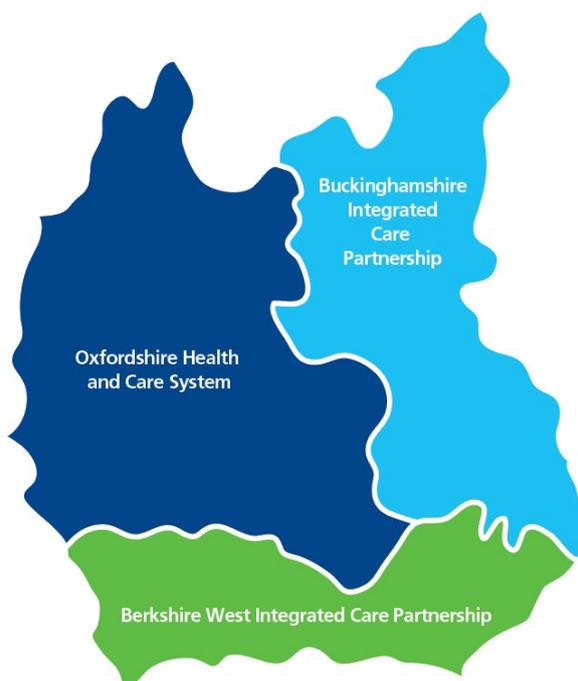
AN ACTION group has been launched to fight plans to close Long Crendon's only GP surgery later this year.

Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System

Outside of formal committee meetings, Buckinghamshire has organised a series of informal meetings with key health scrutiny colleagues from across the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System (BOB ICS) to discuss the arrangements for setting up a joint health scrutiny committee. Draft terms of reference are being progressed by the local authorities within the ICS footprint.

At its January meeting, members invited Dr James Kent, Accountable Lead Officer for the BOB ICS, to hear about the plans for the ICS as well as challenging him on the Covid-19 vaccination programme in Buckinghamshire. Following this meeting, Committee Members submitted a response to the NHS Integrated Care – next steps consultation (deadline 8th January 2021) which could see ICS's given more of a legal footing.

The future plans and key priorities for the ICS will be an ongoing focus of work for the Select Committee.



Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) Integrated Care System (ICS) has three Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs) delivering improved services to patients

Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee

The Select Committee has a wide remit covering transport, environment and climate change issues. Some of these issues cut across a number of Council portfolios but the Select Committees can undertake joint pieces of work to ensure that the Council takes a co-ordinated approach. Climate Change and environmental concerns are high on the agenda for residents and the Committee regularly features questions from members of the public.

Topics considered this year

- Home to School Transport
- Climate Change Strategy and the Carbon Audit
- Fly tipping
- 20mph zones
- HS2 Ltd
- Transport for Buckinghamshire contract re-procurement
- Opportunities for cycling and pedestrians

Achievements

- Our meeting on 11 June 2020 was the highest viewed webcast of any Select Committee during the year to date.
- Frequent engagement by members of the public with questions on agenda items.
- Held HS2 Ltd to account in January 2021 regarding latest works and public engagement. Officers from HS2 Ltd attended a meeting and provided information on the latest works and public engagement work being undertaken. Members were provided with the opportunity to question officers and request information from HS2 Ltd. HS2 agreed to attend a future meeting to provide a further update.
- Provided challenge and support to the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change on the emerging Climate Change Strategy through a working group which met in September and October 2020.



05 August 2020



Are enough local governments acting on climate emergency declarations?

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of councils in England have declared a climate emergency. The race to net zero is well underway, with 77% of councils saying they are planning towards net zero operation by 2050, and 23% by 2030.



Home to School Transport Provision

During summer 2020, the Chairman and a selection of members were invited to support and provide critique to the Cabinet Member for Logistics on the proposed changes to the home to school transport provision. The group met twice and discussed the impact of the COVID 19 restrictions on the service, and the improvements and plan ahead of the return to school in September 2020. Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions and noted the importance of communication with parents on this matter. Following this meeting the Cabinet Member for Logistics has provided regular updates at Select Committee.

Climate Change

At its March meeting, Committee Members requested an item on the Council's Climate Change Air Quality Strategy. During the meeting, Members questioned the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change and the Energy and Climate Change Manager on how the council is addressing its emission sources through identification and implementation of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures across the council's operational estate.

Opportunities for Cycling and Pedestrians

The Committee heard about the Council's aspirations to extend a Cycleway across Buckinghamshire, which would deliver benefits in terms of public health and reducing congestion on the roads and associated emissions.



Figure 3: Spatial comparison of road space requirements for 40 car drivers compared to 60 people on a bus or on cycles.⁹

Promoting Scrutiny

Following an internal service review as part of the 'Better Buckinghamshire' programme, the scrutiny function is now supported a dedicated by Scrutiny Team. Since the start of the pandemic and the new Council's vesting day, the team have facilitated the Select Committee work and worked closely with Members to move meetings online using Microsoft Teams. The online meetings have enjoyed high levels of attendance and we have welcomed a number of members of the public who have raised questions related to the agenda items.

Going forward, the team will continue to raise awareness of scrutiny in the new Council and with partner agencies and will look to provide a voice for Buckinghamshire residents.

Public Engagement

The Council welcomes the public's involvement in scrutiny because public services are provided to help improve local lives. There are a number of ways in which anyone who lives, works or studies in Buckinghamshire can get involved in the work of scrutiny at the Council:

Get informed

Watch a webcast

The Select Committees are webcast and can be watched live or up to six months after the meeting on the Council's website. Between 1 April 2020 and 17 March 2021, the Select Committees have had a total of 2,581 webcast views.

Get involved

Contribute to an inquiry

Scrutiny work is improved by the involvement of local people. To have your say on any current scrutiny inquiry, please email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Ask a public question

Public questions are an opportunity for the public to ask questions on agenda items that have an impact on their local community or the county as a whole. For more information, visit the Council's website: www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/your-council/council-and-democracy