



Annual Scrutiny Report 2021-22



Improving outcomes in Buckinghamshire

Foreword

As Chairmen of the Select Committees, we are delighted to present our Annual Report for 2021/22. We would like to pay tribute to all Buckinghamshire Council officers and staff working within our partner organisations for their continued dedication, resilience and hard work throughout yet another challenging year.

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 main issues which have been reviewed and challenged throughout the year and highlights some of the key achievements. We have completed a number of in-depth pieces of work – a rapid review of the council's 16 community boards (due to be presented to Cabinet in May) and a rapid review of member engagement in planning which led to 6 recommendations being made to Cabinet. Scrutiny of the council's budget took place across three full days in January and resulted in 12 recommendations being made to Cabinet. There are also a number of ongoing inquiries which are due to be reported to Cabinet in the Summer – primary care network development, social worker recruitment and retention and a review of pollution in Buckinghamshire's rivers and chalk streams.

We would like to thank all Councillors who have participated in scrutiny over the year, Cabinet for their continued support of scrutiny and all officers, co-opted Members, partners and members of the public who have contributed their time and expertise to our meetings and in-depth reviews.



Cllr Patricia Birchley,
Chairman, Children's & Education
Select Committee



Cllr Mimi Harker,
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 Bill Chapple OBE,
Chairman, Transport,
Environment &
Climate Change Select
Committee

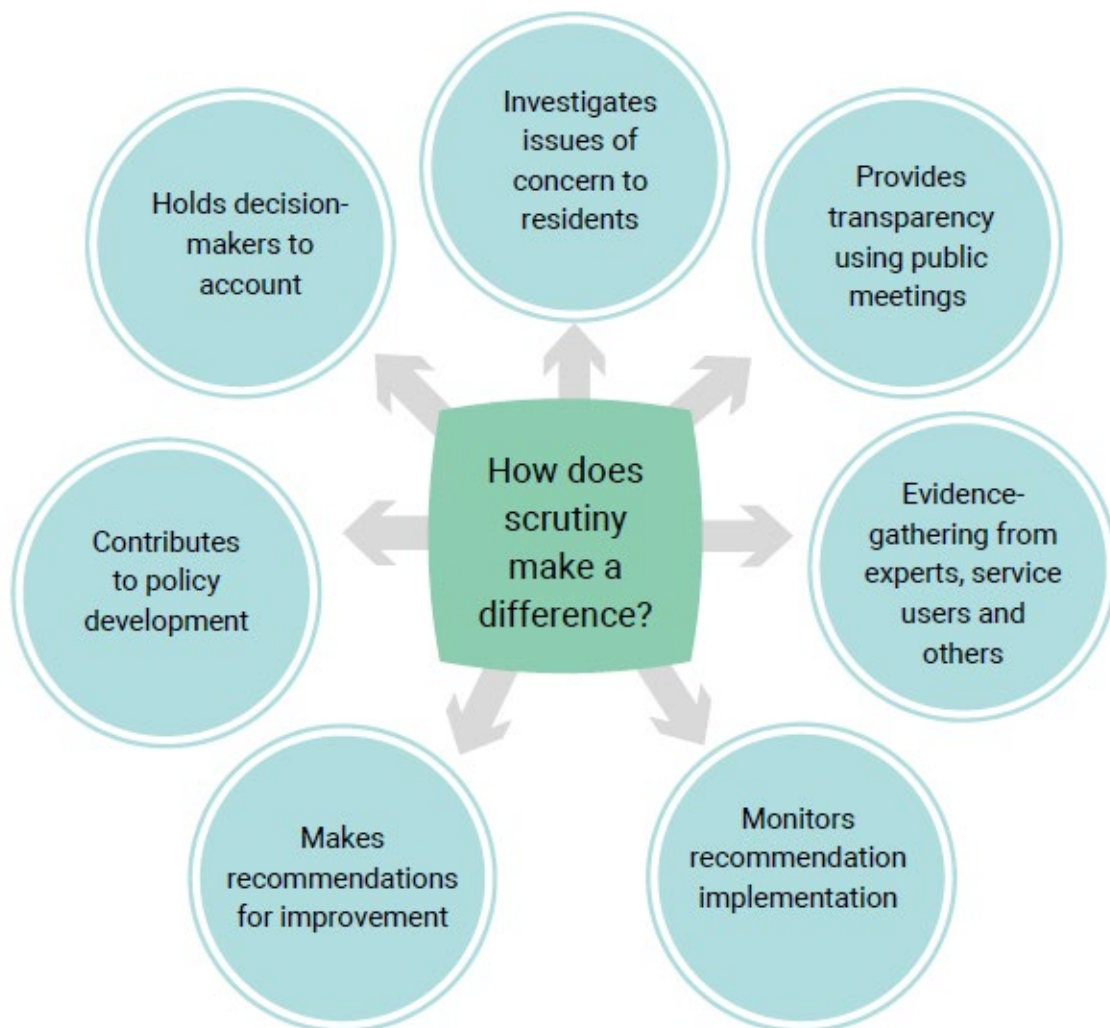
What is scrutiny?

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 young adults and children. These are areas that were impacted significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic and the demands on services have increased significantly in both numbers and complexity. During the year the services have undergone two Ofsted inspections with significant improvements seen in service provision across the services.

Topics the committee has focussed on

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

- Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services 2021
- Emotional Health in Schools
- Closing the Attainment Gap in Buckinghamshire schools
- Special Educational Needs Improvement Programme
- Fostering, Adoption and Guardianship Orders
- Social Worker Recruitment and Retention



Ofsted Inspection

In March 2022 the Committee received a report from the Director of Social Care regarding the recent Ofsted inspection of the service which had been held between 29th November and 17th December 2021. Ofsted had conducted their reinspection of services relating to children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. The inspection had covered the overall effectiveness of the service; the experiences and progress of children in need of help and protection and the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.

The committee congratulated the service on their extensive work which moved the service rating from “inadequate” to “requires improvement to be good”. As a result of the Ofsted inspection, the Committee had immediately set up a rapid review group to look at one aspect of the service in depth: social worker recruitment and retention.

Social Worker Recruitment and Retention

The Committee set up a rapid review group of four councillors led by Councillor Mark Dormer, to look at this issue in depth. Meetings were held in quick succession over a period of 8 weeks and included focus group meetings with social workers and their managers, the Director of Children's Services and representatives from the finance and human resources department. The group also took into account research gathered on the national picture which confirms that social worker recruitment and retention is a complex problem with many inter-related factors involved. The review group intend to report their findings to the June 2022 committee.

Communities & Localism Select Committee

The Communities and Localism Select Committee holds decision makers to account for improving outcomes and services for Buckinghamshire. This Select Committee has responsibility for scrutinising the Communities and Culture and Leisure portfolios and the Regulatory aspects of the Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory portfolio, which makes for wide-ranging and varied agendas.

Issues the committee has focussed on

In the past year the Committee has considered and provided feedback on a number of significant issues including the following:

- Leisure Facilities Strategy
- Youth Engagement with Community Boards
- Devolution
- Community Support 'Helping Hands' Service
- Buckinghamshire Culture
- Domestic Abuse

Community Boards Rapid Review

The Select Committee has commissioned a rapid review of the Council's 16 Community Boards to understand both the challenges and the successes of their first two years of operation. This in-depth piece of work has been undertaken by a cross-party review group, who have then identified areas for recommendation and refocus as the Community Boards emerge from working reactively in response to the emergency of the Covid-19 pandemic, into a time of working more proactively on wider engagement and embedding the Community Boards as a means of inspiring and enriching local communities.

As part of the review process, the Chairman has attended a number of Community Board meetings and the review group has met with a variety of different stakeholders including separate sessions with Community Board Chairmen, Community Board Co-ordinators, Town and Parish Council representatives, Council officers and Community Groups who have received funding from the Community Boards. In addition to the feedback gained during these discussions, every Buckinghamshire Councillor sits on at least one Community Board, so the review group members have also been able to draw on their own experiences. Whilst it was not possible to engage with every single stakeholder (there are 171 Town and Parish Councils alone) all 16 Community Boards were represented across the two days of evidence gathering that the review group held in March.

The review group's report and recommendations will be considered at the Communities and Localism Select Committee at its April meeting before being presented to Cabinet shortly afterwards in May.



**Community
Boards**



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 2021/22

- Customer First – the customer experience framework for the Council
- Work Smart Programme
- AVE and Consilio Business Plans
- Better Buckinghamshire Programme
- Overall Property Strategy
- Progress made on the previous year's Budget Scrutiny recommendations



Buckinghamshire Council @BucksCouncil · Jan 7

We want you to #HaveYourSay! Our Budget Scrutiny process begins Monday, so if you have questions about our budget, let us know, and we'll ask them in our sessions. Email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk with your questions!



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 10th, 11th and 13th January 2022 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 budget that was recovering from the pandemic. The Inquiry returned to being held in person and was webcast live. Questions from the public were received via email and social media and were put to the Cabinet Members.

Following the Inquiry, the Committee met to discuss, consider and develop their key findings and recommendations.

The Inquiry report contained **12 recommendations**. As a result, changes were made which included:

- Reviewing the Corporate Plan.
- Producing a timetable of key strategies which are under development across the Council with target dates for key milestones.
- Delivering the Estates Strategy at greater pace.
- Greater visibility given to contingencies contained within the budget.
- Review of legacy special expenses.

"I always feel that the budget we discuss today is far better for the cross-party scrutiny that takes place. We are often listed by the LGA as an absolute exemplar in the way in which scrutiny of budgets should take place."

Cllr Martin Tett (Full Council on 23 February)
Leader of Buckinghamshire Council

This has been another extraordinary year which has been challenging for all of us in local Government and the Inquiry Group recognise how difficult a task it has been to put a budget together in the context of an ongoing global pandemic, including the recent Omicron variant of Covid-19. We appreciate the efforts of Cabinet and officers at a time when there are gross uncertainties around economic recovery, future Government funding, significant increases in demand and a potential change in Government focus linked to the 'levelling up' agenda.

Cllr Ralph Bagge (Forward in Scrutiny Inquiry Report)
Chairman of the Finances & Resources Select Committee

Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee

The Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee scrutinises a number of portfolios that have a crucial role in 'place shaping' for Buckinghamshire now and in the future, namely Planning and Regeneration, Housing, Homelessness and Regulatory Services and the Leaders' portfolio, which has responsibility for economic development and national infrastructure projects.

Key Areas of Work during 2021/22

The Select Committee has considered the following important topics during the past 12 months:

- Strategic Vision for Buckinghamshire
- Supporting Buckinghamshire's High Streets
- Buckinghamshire Local Plan
- Planning Enforcement
- S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy
- Digital Infrastructure
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
- Town Centre Regeneration



Member Engagement in Planning Rapid Review

In October 2021, the Select Committee decided to undertake a review of Member Engagement in Planning. As part of a service improvement programme, the Planning and Environment service had identified a need to ensure that members are well-supported to deal with enquiries from residents in connection with planning matters. Buckinghamshire Council has 147 elected members and the Planning service are dealing with circa 13,000 planning applications and 1,650 enforcement enquiries per annum. This generates a significant amount of queries/liaison between planning officers and members, therefore it is important that member engagement is meaningful and can resolve issues at an early stage.

It made sense for Select Committee members to undertake this piece of work, in order to deliver genuine member insight. The cross-party review group agreed to look into the issues that were causing difficulties for both members and officers and subsequently presented their report, which included 6 recommendations to Cabinet on 1st March 2022, where it was very well-received. The recommendations including provision of a Member Planning Handbook and access, training for members on using the GIS online maps, political awareness training for Planning staff and a review of new Member Planning Surgeries to assess their effectiveness were all accepted.

"This is a great example of where Scrutiny adds some tremendous value."
Cllr Martin Tett (Cabinet on 1 March)
Leader of Buckinghamshire Council

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 continued to be an incredibly challenging year for the council's adult social care services and health partners.

The Committee comprises 15 councillors and a representative from Healthwatch Bucks, who sits on the committee as a non-voting 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 2021-22

The Committee has reviewed and challenged key areas including:

- Obesity – reviewing the development of a whole system approach;
- Winter Planning – system resilience through Winter and the ongoing pandemic;
- Refreshed Adult Social Care's Better Lives Strategy;
- Performance of South Central Ambulance Service;
- Support for Carers – building on the HASC inquiry findings from 2018;
- Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust's community hubs proposal;
- Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust's clinical strategy – ongoing development;
- Director of Public Health's annual report on Domestic Violence and Abuse.



Key achievements

- In June, 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 and sepsis. We were particularly pleased to read about the many initiatives being undertaken by the Trust to help support staff, but staff wellbeing remains a concern across the health and social care sector and the Committee will be reviewing this in conjunction with recruitment and retention plans. The Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust's Quality Account 2020-21 can be found via this link –

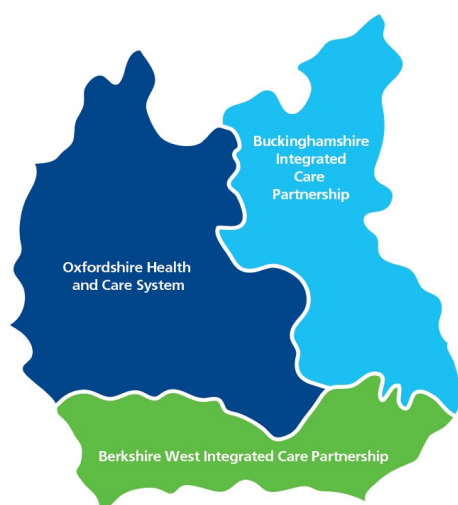
[Quality account 2020-2021 - Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust \(buckshealthcare.nhs.uk\)](https://buckshealthcare.nhs.uk/quality-account-2020-21)

- In November, the Committee prepared a formal response to the consultation on the future of healthcare services in Buckingham. The response focussed on three main areas – the process, the plans outlined in the consultation briefing paper and next steps.



Other areas of work

- At its September meeting, the Committee agreed a scoping document to undertake an inquiry into primary care network development across Buckinghamshire. The inquiry group comprises 6 Members from the Committee who started undertaking evidence gathering meetings in January. The aim is to produce the draft report with recommendations for the June Committee meeting.
- Buckinghamshire is part of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System (BOB ICS). Terms of reference for a joint health scrutiny committee have been agreed by the 5 local authorities within the ICS footprint. Last year, Committee Members submitted a response to the "NHS Integrated Care – next steps" consultation which would see ICS's given more of a legal footing. The plans for the BOB ICS have been delayed until July 2022 so the joint committee will be meeting later in the year.
- The Committee has set-up a small working group to review and feedback on Buckinghamshire Healthcare Trust's Clinical Strategy.



4 ICP local key priorities:

**Hospital discharge;
Admission avoidance;
Mental health;**

Health inequalities with a focus on cardiovascular disease.

Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) Integrated Care System (ICS) currently 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 topics. Some of these issues cut across a variety 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 Select Committee regularly features questions from members of the public.

Topics considered this year

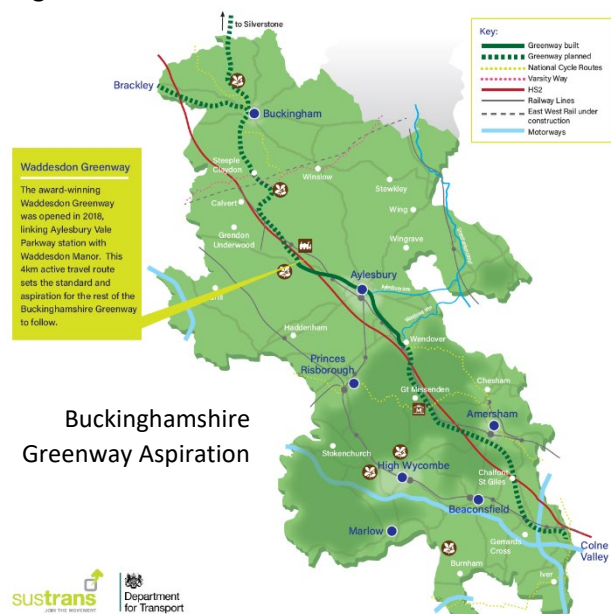
- Home to School Transport
- Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy
- Corporate Carbon Reduction
- Fly Tipping
- Bus Service Improvement Plan
- Procurement of Buckinghamshire Highways Contract
- East West Rail
- HS2 Ltd
- Integrated Household Waste Recycling Centre Contract
- Sustainable Transport

Achievements

- Frequent engagement by members of the public with questions on agenda items.
- Held HS2 Ltd to account in March 2022 regarding latest works and public engagement. Officers from HS2 Ltd attended a meeting and provided information on the latest works, including public engagement, and environmental impact on the project. Overhead drone footage of the project was also shown to the Committee. Members took the opportunity to robustly question HS2 representatives and requested further information outside the meeting. The Chairman also wrote a follow up letter to HS2 Ltd.
- East West Rail were questioned in January 2022 when they attended the Select Committee to discuss their work in Buckinghamshire.
- Commenced inquiry into pollution in Buckinghamshire's rivers and chalk streams.



Screenshot of HS2 drone footage presented to Committee in March 2022



Climate Change and Air Quality

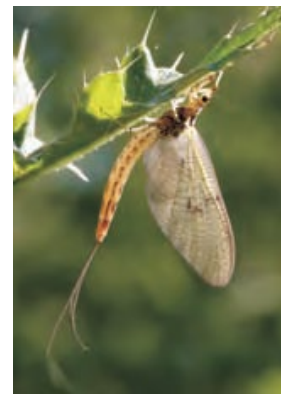
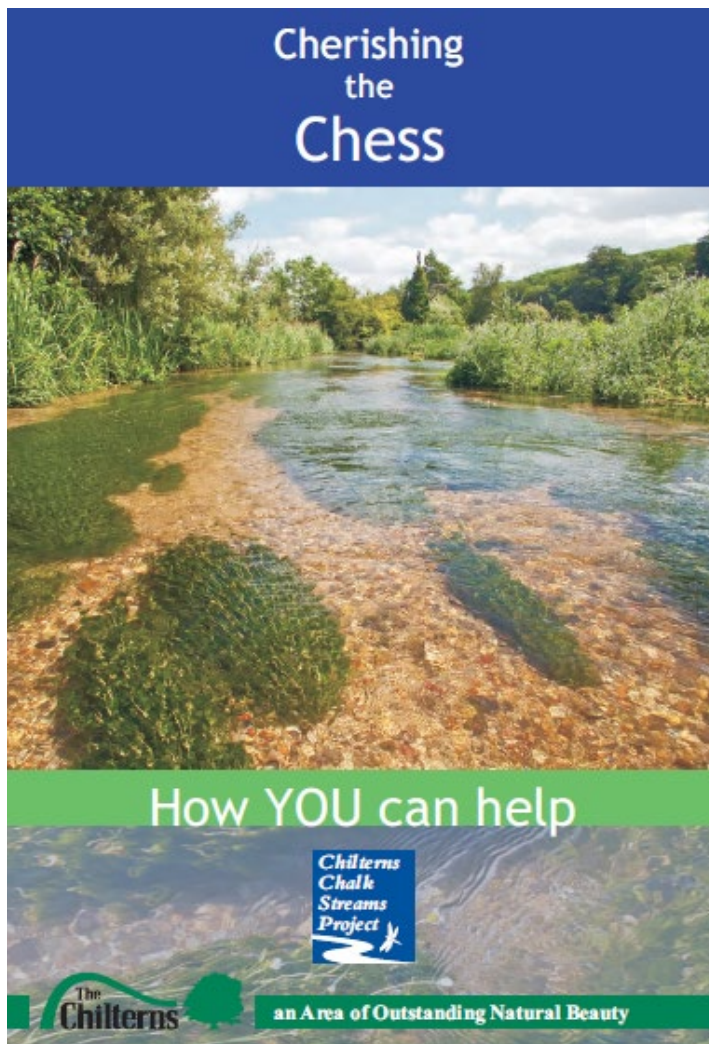
The Select Committee scrutinised the Strategy when it was published and have had regular updates from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change and the Head of Climate Change and Environment. The Select Committee will have a more detailed review of the Strategy later in 2022.

Opportunities for Cycling and Pedestrians

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

Pollution in Buckinghamshire's Rivers and Chalk Streams

In January 2022, the Committee agreed to carry out a review of pollution in Buckinghamshire's rivers and chalk streams. The working group have heard from a variety of external organisations and the voluntary sector to gather evidence. This will culminate in a final in person session with the water utility companies and the Environment Agency.



Promoting Scrutiny

Following an internal service review as part of the 'Better Buckinghamshire' programme, the scrutiny function is supported by a dedicated Scrutiny Team. The team work closely with Business Managers and Service Directors in each of the Council's directorates to identify priority areas of work to be scrutinised by the Select Committees and to promote the benefits of engaging with Select Committees.

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 24 June 2021 and 24 March 2022, the Select Committees have had a total of 3,203 webcast views (including Budget Scrutiny Inquiry meetings).

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