



Annual Scrutiny Report 2022-23



Improving outcomes in Buckinghamshire

Foreword

As Chairmen of the Select Committees, we are delighted to present our Annual Report for 2022/23. We would like to pay tribute to all Buckinghamshire Council officers and staff working within our partner organisations for their continued dedication and hard work over the past 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 Review of Recruitment and Retention of Children’s Social Workers, a Rapid Review of Pollution in Buckinghamshire’s Rivers and Chalk Streams and an Inquiry into the Development of Primary Care Networks, with the latter’s recommendations being considered by both Cabinet and the Integrated Care Board (ICB). Scrutiny of the council’s budget took place across three full days in January and resulted in 9 recommendations being made to Cabinet before the final budget was agreed. There are also several ongoing reviews which will be reported to Cabinet later in the year including Dementia Services Pathways and Pathways for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

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 Julie Ward,
Chairman, Children’s & Education
Select Committee



Cllr Mimi Harker OBE,
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. Scrutiny also acts as a check and balance to the executive or the Council’s Cabinet, which takes the majority of key decisions on behalf of the Council.

Although scrutiny cannot make decisions, it makes recommendations for improvement to decision-makers, which can be Cabinet, but also there are often recommendations for other partner organisations.

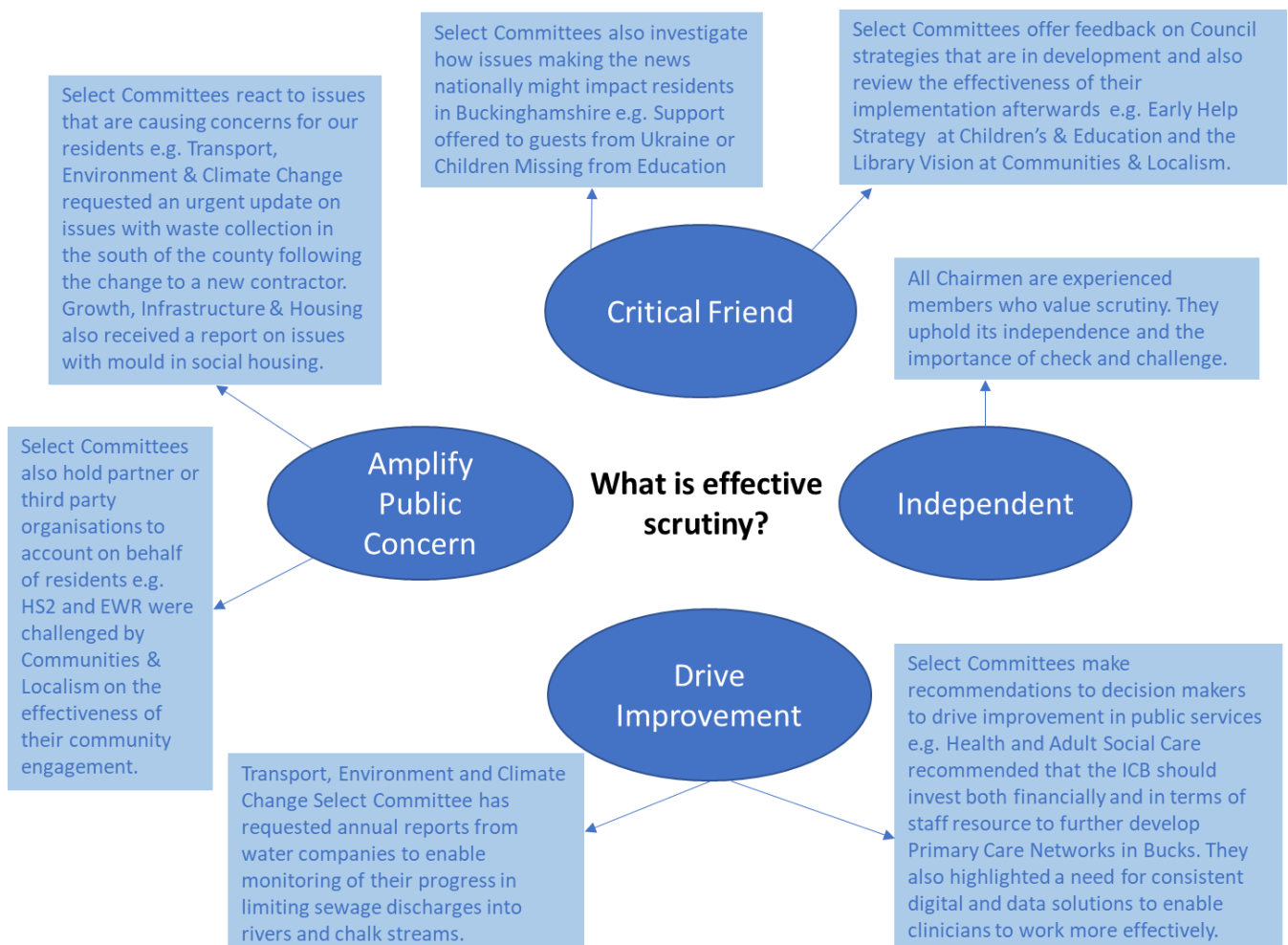
There are also specific powers for scrutiny to hold the NHS to account within health scrutiny.

Scrutiny at Buckinghamshire Council is carried out by six Select Committees. Each Select Committee has a different remit 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 some co-opted representatives from relevant local organisations.

What do we need for Effective Scrutiny?

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) have identified four factors that will contribute to effective scrutiny in local government. They are:

- Provide constructive ‘critical friend’ challenge
- Amplify the voices and concerns of the public
- Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- Drive improvement in public services



Children’s & Education Select Committee

The Children’s and Education Select Committee has an important role to play in scrutinising social care and education provision for both young adults and children in Buckinghamshire. Many children who come into the council’s care or who receive other support services have increasingly complex needs and it is vital that the council can respond with appropriate services in a timely way.

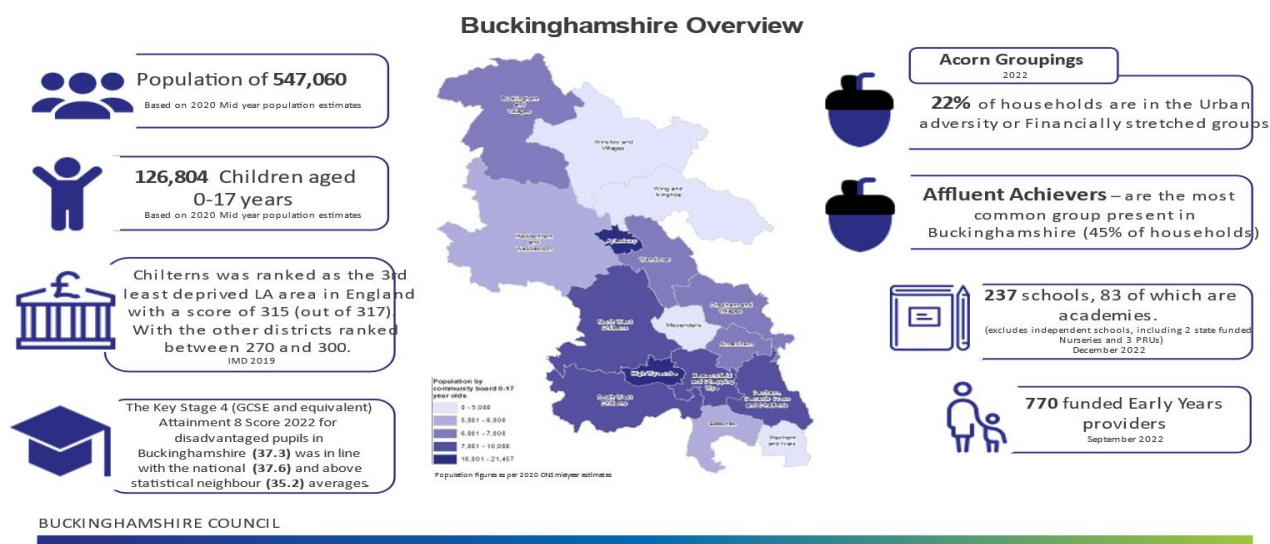
Children’s social care was greatly impacted during the Covid-19 pandemic as there was a significant increase in demand on services both in numbers and complexity. These demands will continue to rise with the increasing child population and the increases in the cost of living.

Further to the Ofsted inspection of the service in December 2021 and the SEND service inspection in March 2022, the service has continued to focus on its improvement pathways and on improving outcomes for children and young people. The Select Committee has continued to monitor and review the work underway on several important topics.

Topics the committee has focussed on

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

- Feedback from the February- March 2022 SEND Inspection
- Early Help Strategy and Impact of the Family Support Service
- Participation Strategy for Young People 2022-2025
- Children Missing Education
- Children’s Services Update March to September 2022
- Annual Report of the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children’s Partnership Board



Local Area SEND Inspection Outcome

A joint Care Quality Commission and Ofsted inspection of the local area SEND provision took place between 28th February and 11th March 2022 involving staff, service users and parents. Partners from the Buckinghamshire NHS Trust, Oxford Health NHS Trust and NHS Berkshire West CCG as well as Children’s Social Care Directors, attended the committee to answer questions on the inspection outcomes.

The Select Committee heard that the inspection found a number of strengths across the local area, despite the ongoing Covid-19 challenges. It also recognised the considerable activity that is happening as part of the SEND improvement programme and confirmed that the local area’s self-

evaluation accurately reflects the current position. That said, inspectors also identified 3 area of significant weakness:

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

As a result of the inspection findings, the local area was required to submit a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) to address the significant areas of weakness. Both the council and healthcare service continue to focus their efforts on improving the areas of significant weakness identified, while continuing with the broader improvement journey to ensure that the support children with SEND receive in Buckinghamshire is of high quality and effective.



Pathways into SEND Services

In light of the SEND inspection outcome, the Select Committee decided to set up a Review Group of five Councillors led by Councillor Diana Blamires, to look at the pathways to services for children and young people with SEND. This group has been meeting on a weekly basis since December. Members have spoken to a variety of professionals including school staff and those who have already accessed the services and those who wish to, across three different scenarios as follows:

1. Getting help before a diagnosis of Autism
2. Getting help before a diagnosis of ADHD
3. Getting help with anxiety and depression



The evidence gathering phase has now been completed and the Review Group are developing a report detailing their key findings and recommendations, which will then be presented to Cabinet in the Summer.

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 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:

- Library Strategy
- Support to guests from Ukraine and Afghanistan
- Violence against Women and Girls
- Buckinghamshire Film Office
- Safer Bucks Strategy
- Town and Parish Charter



In July 2022, a joint meeting was held with members of the Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee to consider the approach of the Council and other partners in promoting Buckinghamshire as an attractive visitor destination. This was an interesting and productive meeting and members are looking forward to reviewing the Visitor Economy Strategy once it is developed.

Community Board Review

Last year the Select Committee undertook a review into Community Boards. The Chairman presented the report detailing our key findings and 11 recommendations to Cabinet in May 2022, which was very well-received.



In February 2023 members received an update on the implementation of those recommendations – it is clear that the grant application process has been improved and face to face promotional events that were held during last year were very well-received by local residents. Community Boards are still evolving and there are plans for a further review this year, so members will continue to retain oversight of how the 16 Community Boards progress.

East West Rail & HS2 – Community Engagement

In January, the Select Committee held a high-profile meeting which was attended by representatives from East West Rail and HS2 to discuss the effectiveness of their community engagement activities in Buckinghamshire. Members were able to put questions directly to East West Rail and HS2 and we also heard questions from Greg Smith MP and several Town and Parish Councils who have been significantly impacted by the construction of these major infrastructure projects.

The Select Committee was very keen to hold East West Rail and HS2 to account and the meeting was very constructive. Members were also informed about valuable social legacy projects that have been funded along the HS2 route.

HS2 Community & Business Funds

A total of £40 million is available for community and business groups along the Phase One route to improve their local area or support their local economy

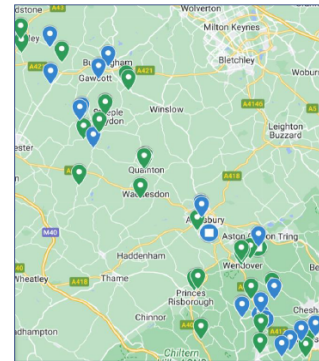
+£3.6m

£3,620,000 has been awarded in Buckinghamshire from HS2's Community & Environment Fund (CEF) and Business & Local Economy Fund (BLEF)

64

64 local projects in Buckinghamshire have received funding since 2017

Recent awards include Chalfont St Giles Village Pond, South Bucks Radio, Penn Street Cricket Club and Little Chalfont Charitable Trust



CEF & BLEF Project Map

The Chairman wrote to both project executives following the meeting to sum up the key points from the Select Committee and to encourage improvements in communications with both Buckinghamshire Council and our residents.



Looking Forward

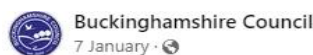
The Select Committee is currently preparing to undertake another in-depth review and members are hoping to investigate Digital Exclusion. The Scrutiny Manager is undertaking desktop research with a view to developing a scoping document for the Select Committee to consider and discuss shortly. It is important that there is an agreed scope before an in-depth review begins to ensure that there is a clear focus which is shared by everyone contributing to the work.

Finance & Resources Select Committee

This Committee considers the Council's overall financial strategy, as well as the Resources portfolio which includes property and assets, the Better Buckinghamshire programme and customer services. The work programme is often driven by the findings of the annual Budget Scrutiny process.

Key areas of work during 2022/23

- Customer First – the customer experience framework for the Council
- Work Smart Programme
- Estates Strategy
- Council Tax & Business Rates
- Better Buckinghamshire Programme
- Overall Property Strategy
- Employee Experience, Health, Wellbeing & Absence Management
- Treasury Management Investments



Buckinghamshire Council

7 January · 🌐

? 📧 Have you got any questions about budget allocation for communities, transport or housing? Send them in to budget.scrutiny@buckinghamshire.gov.uk by 9am on Monday 9 January to be discussed at the budget scrutiny meeting!

See meeting details at:

<https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/ieListMeetings...>

#BucksBudget



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 9th, 10th and 12th January 2023 and the Leader of the Council, each Cabinet Member, Corporate Directors and Finance Directors were questioned on their draft budget proposals. This year the Inquiry Group was presented with the task of challenging a budget that had little room for manoeuvre due to increased demands and service costs. Questions from the public were received via email and 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 **9 recommendations** of which 5 were agreed and 4 agreed in part. The recommendations included:

- Showing a pipeline of viable capital schemes which show the Council's ambition beyond those in the Capital Programme.
- Capital spend to alleviate revenue pressures where possible.
- Re-examining Community Board delivery.
- Appropriate budgets for CCTV provision and the emerging Visitor Economy Strategy.

"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 2022)
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 increasing inflationary pressures and global conflict. We appreciate the efforts of Cabinet and officers at a time when there are uncertainties around post-pandemic economic recovery, future Government funding and significant increases in service demand, cost and complexity.

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, Homelessness and Regulatory Services, Accessible Housing and the Leaders' portfolio, which has responsibility for economic development and national infrastructure projects.

Key Areas of Work during 2022/23

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

- Visitor Economy (Jointly with the Communities & Localism Select Committee)
- National Model Design Code Pilot
- Buckinghamshire Local Plan
- Planning Enforcement
- Affordable Housing
- Aylesbury Garden Town
- Housing Standards – Damp & Mould
- Buckinghamshire Place Based Growth Model



The Legacy of 'Everyone in' and homelessness in Buckinghamshire

In March 2023, the Select Committee agreed to undertake a review of the Legacy of 'Everyone in' and homelessness in Buckinghamshire. 'Everyone In' was an initiative launched by Government at the start of the pandemic in 2020 to house all rough sleepers in temporary accommodation. This was achieved via extensive central government funding and cooperation with local authorities. Since then, rough sleeping has begun to increase and some anti-social behaviour has been observed.

The Select Committee decided to look into the success of 'Everyone In' and what lessons could be learnt from it. A cross-party review group will examine the work that went into making 'Everyone In' a success in Buckinghamshire and also the issues that have arisen more recently as the country has returned to 'business as usual'. Evidence gathering sessions will begin during April & May 2023. Council officers, partners and charities will be invited to give evidence to enable members to gain valuable insight into the support that is available for homeless people.

Call-in Requests considered by the Select Committee

Call-in is an important mechanism in the Council's constitution which allows backbench councillors to challenge Cabinet decisions if there is evidence that the decision-making process has not been properly followed. Two decisions subject to call-in requests were considered by the GIH Select Committee as follows:

- 5th July 2022, the Select Committee considered the call-in of the decision on Proposed residential development at the site of the former Buckinghamshire County Council Sports and Social Club land taken at Cabinet on 7th June 2022. The Select Committee upheld the Call-in request and recommended that the decision be referred back to Cabinet for further consideration in light of the pre-planning consultation report.
- 15th December 2022, the Select Committee considered the Call-in of the decision on Little Marlow Lakes Country Park taken at Cabinet on 11th October 2022. The Select Committee rejected the Call-in request and took no further action.

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.

Key issues looked at during 2022-23

The Committee has reviewed and challenged key areas including:

- Mental Health Services provided by Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust;
- Health and Social Care Winter Plan – representatives from across the health and social care system attended a meeting in September to present the plan and have been invited back to the May meeting to provide Members with an opportunity to evaluate the plan;
- Performance of the South Central Ambulance Service following the latest CQC inspection;
- Health & Care Integration plan, including the development of a new Hospital Discharge model;
- Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust's community hubs project in Thame and Marlow;
- Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust's Clinical strategy and Estates strategy;
- Director of Public Health's annual report which focussed on preventing cardiovascular disease;
- Adult Social Care Workforce;
- Maternity Services;
- Six month monitoring of the recommendations from the Primary Care Network Inquiry report.

Key achievements

Development of Primary Care Networks Inquiry

The Committee held an inquiry into the development of Primary Care Networks (PCNs) in Buckinghamshire. A small group of Members held evidence gathering sessions with key stakeholders between January and June.

The aim of the inquiry was to identify areas to help PCNs in their development and to bring together the collective challenges and barriers facing the PCNs and to highlight the role of the Patient Participation Groups. Seventeen recommendations were made and centred around the following key areas: governance and oversight, PCN development, PPGs, partnership working, digital, data and information sharing and communications. The report was agreed by Committee Members and then presented to Cabinet and the Integrated Care Board in November.



“Buckinghamshire GP Leadership Group and Buckinghamshire PCN Clinical Directors endorse those recommendations made to BOB ICB within the Development of Primary Care Networks Inquiry. The Inquiry also provided additional evidence of the need for centrally funded Network Managers and flexibility around additional roles recruitment which supported our lobbying of NHS England to prioritise these changes within the national PCN contract.”

Dr George Gavriel, Chair of Buckinghamshire GP Leadership Group and Dr Stephen Burr, PCN representative to the GP Leadership Group

Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust’s Annual Quality Account

In June, a working group of HASC Members prepared a statement for inclusion in the Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust’s annual quality account. Whilst the HASC statement acknowledged the key achievements and highlights for the Hospital Trust, it also focussed on areas of concern and areas of improvement, including increasing the target of personalised care plans for all end of life patients, concerns over the readmission rates for 0-15 year olds and ongoing concerns around pressures ulcers.

Below is a link to Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust’s Quality Account 2021-22.

<https://www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Quality-account-2021-2022.pdf>



Rapid Review into Dementia Services Pathways

At its February meeting, the Committee agreed to undertake a rapid review into dementia services and the pathways for those living with dementia and the support available for carers. The Review Group held 3 full days of evidence gathering in March to hear from key stakeholders and the report is currently being drafted and will be presented to Cabinet and health partners in due course.

Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC)

Buckinghamshire is part of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care System (BOB ICS). Representatives from the 5 local authorities within the ICS footprint held their first formal Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Meeting in January. Cllr Jane MacBean has been elected as Chairman of the Joint Committee for the ensuing 24 months.

The JHOSC prepared a formal response to the draft Integrated Care Partnership’s strategic priorities, as part of the ICB’s engagement process. Below is an extract from the JHOSC’s response.



“A key objective should be the delivery of a robust digital and data solution across the footprint to improve the patient experience and quality of all services. The development of a workforce strategy also needs to gather pace, with defined timeframes for delivery to help meet the challenges across BOB, including innovative recruitment and retention solutions, identification of training gaps and shared ideas for staff wellbeing. These two priorities need to be accelerated as they underpin the successful delivery of the other 18 areas.”

The JHOSC will continue to scrutinise the ICB and ICP strategies over the coming months.

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

- Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy: Annual Review
- Tree Planting and Tree Protection
- Performance of waste collection in the south and overall waste options appraisal
- School Transport
- New Highways Model
- East West Rail
- HS2 Ltd
- Electric Vehicle Action Plan
- Air Quality Monitoring in Buckinghamshire

Achievements

- Frequent engagement by members of the public with questions on agenda items.
- Questioned representatives from Veolia in order to scrutinise performance of the waste contract in southern Buckinghamshire.
- Held HS2 Ltd to account in March 2023 regarding latest works and concerns on the Highways, lorry movements, EWR interface and collaborative working, tree planting and maintenance, water resource and flood risk. The Environment Agency also attended the meeting to discuss HS2 and flood risk. 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 as well as a letter to the Cabinet Member ahead of his Parliamentary roundtable discussion with Ministers.
- East West Rail were questioned in February 2023 when they attended the Select Committee to discuss their work in Buckinghamshire. Members took the opportunity to question issues such as road repairs and biodiversity and the Chairman followed up with a letter.
- Concluded an inquiry into pollution in Buckinghamshire's rivers and chalk streams.

Traffic Management & HS2 2023



- Road closures and traffic lights required to complete final works, utilities, demobilisations, reinstatements & road repairs.
- Q1 Works (blue) fully planned. Aim to work through the detail of future (grey) road closures by quarter with BC in early 2023.
- Road Closures unless stated

Extract from EWR presentation in February 2023



Context - HS2 in Bucks

- 206 live and planned consents on the Buckinghamshire network
- Since our consents process moved to Street Manager (Q4 2020), 765 traffic consents have been utilised and closed out and 583 forward plan notices have been raised



Pollution in Buckinghamshire's Rivers and Chalk Streams

In November 2022, the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Robert Carington, presented the inquiry group report to Cabinet. The report made 10 recommendations: 8 to Cabinet, 1 to the water companies and 1 to the Environment Agency.

The inquiry was featured as good practice in a case study for carrying out scrutiny by the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny (CfGS).



Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)
@CfGScrutiny

Take a look at this case study from @BucksCouncil which outlines how their Transport Environment & Climate Change Select Committee led a rapid review group, to investigate pollution in Buckinghamshire's rivers and chalk streams. A fantastic example of great practice in scrutiny!

4:57 PM · Feb 23, 2023 · 1,041 Views

Streetworks and Statutory Undertakers in Buckinghamshire

In March 2023, the Committee agreed to carry out a review of Buckinghamshire's Streetworks. The cross-party review group plan to hear evidence from a variety of sources including meeting with Statutory Undertakers, such as utility and broadband providers.



Promoting Scrutiny

The Select Committees are supported by a dedicated Scrutiny Team. The team work closely with their Chairmen, 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 Scrutiny. The Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee also works closely with health partners to ensure key pieces of work are identified and included in the work programme.

The team continue to raise awareness of scrutiny across the Council and with partner agencies and 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 22 June 2022 and 16 February 2023, the Select Committees have had a total of 2717 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. Between 22 June 2022 and 16 February 2023, 30 public questions have been asked at Select Committees and we would encourage anyone who has an interest in items on the agenda to submit a question. For more information, visit the Council's website: www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/your-council/council-and-democracy