



Annual Governance Statement (AGS) 2024/2025



Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 3 |
| Statement of opinion | 4 |
| Governance at Buckinghamshire Council | 5 |
| Essential elements of governance | 6 |
| Governance – key roles | 8 |
| Preparing the Annual Governance Statement | 12 |
| Effectiveness of our governance in 2024/2025 – an overview | 14 |
| Action Plans | 21 |
| Conclusion | 22 |
| Annex 1 | 23 |
| Annex 2 | 25 |



Introduction

We want to make Buckinghamshire the best place to live, raise a family, work and do business.

Our key priorities are:

- Strengthening our communities
- Protecting the vulnerable
- Improving our environment
- Increasing prosperity



Delivering these requires good governance - for our residents, employees, businesses, service users and councillors. [Our Corporate Plan](#) provides the building blocks to our success. Supporting the Plan are number of strategies and policies showing how we will deliver our ambitions, and our '[Local Code of Governance](#)' sets these out in more detail.

Despite some relief from reduced inflation rates and less acute cost of living pressures compared to recent times, it has still been an incredibly challenging year for the Council. Whilst inflation has decreased, the demand for our services has continued to rise rapidly, particularly in adult social care, children's services and housing and homelessness. This has put significant pressure on our budgets, and we have again had to take some very tough decisions to ensure that we remain financially sustainable.

Despite these challenges, we have made progress towards our environmental commitments, with an innovative litter enforcement campaign complementing our already stringent fly tipping policies to protect our local environment. We have continued to support our most vulnerable residents through our Helping Hand service, offering both financial and practical support to those in need. Our Opportunity Bucks programme has delivered interventions in some of our most deprived areas, and our Community Boards have once again made a real difference locally, providing leadership and helping to leverage external funding for projects.

We continue to deliver against our Corporate Plan and Strategic Vision for 2050. Good governance is essential to that. It underpins both our approach and our commitment to engage with local communities and partners.

This Annual Governance Statement looks honestly at how effective our governance has been during 2024/25. It also looks ahead to some of our governance priorities and improvements for 2025/26.

Statement of Opinion

We are pleased to confirm our opinion that the Council's governance arrangements in 2024/2025 were sound and provide a robust and effective platform for achieving the Council's priorities and challenges in 2025/2026.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Broadbent".

Steven Broadbent
Leader



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachael Shimmin".

Rachael Shimmin
Chief Executive

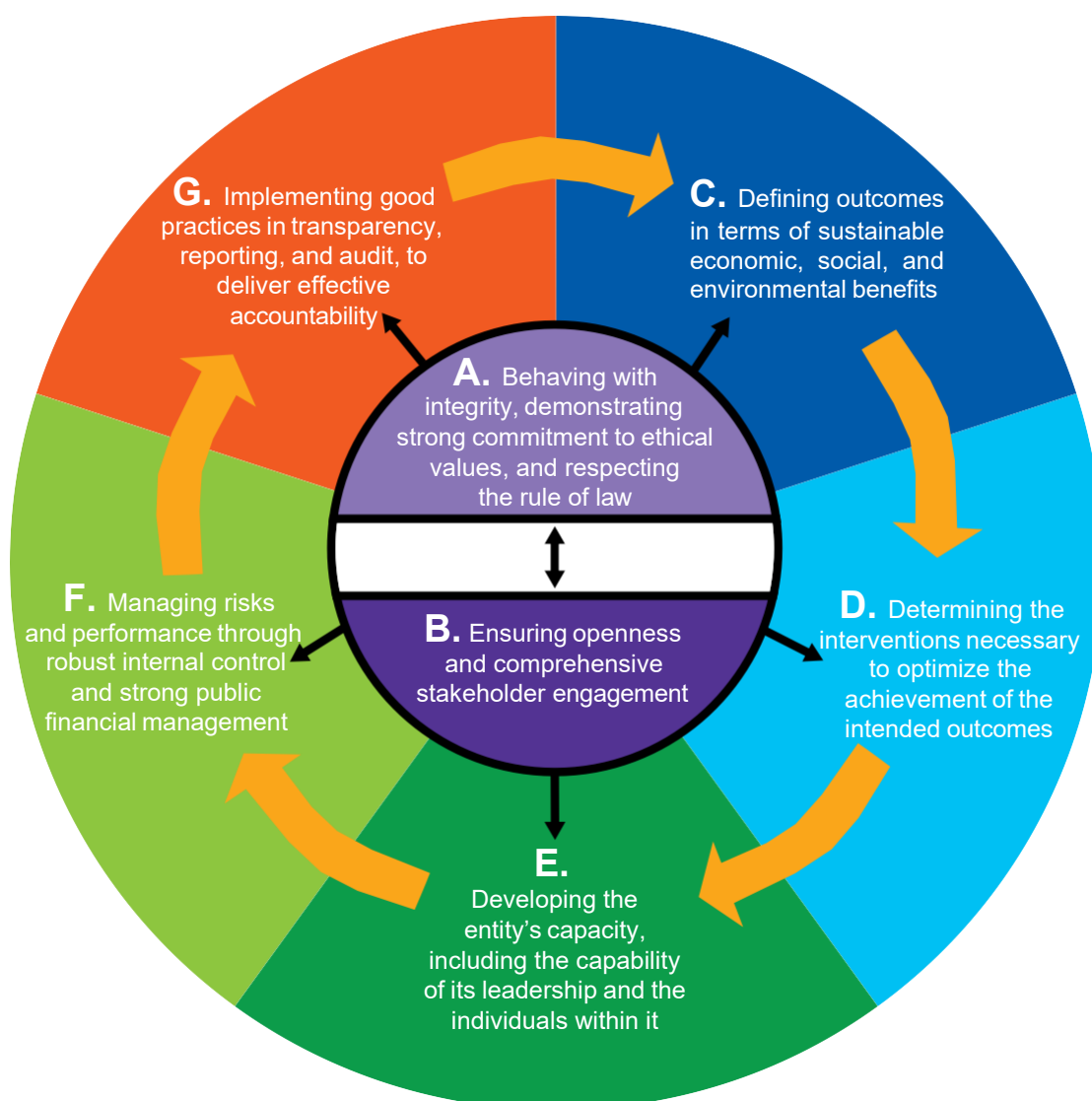
Governance at Buckinghamshire Council

Governance means: the values, culture, processes and systems by which the Council is controlled, directed and through which we deliver services for our communities. Governance means carrying out our activities in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is properly accounted for, and used well.

We have a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to put in place proper arrangements for:

- the continuous improvement of our functions
- the governance of our affairs, including those of the Local Government Pension Scheme, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

The Council has approved and adopted a constitution, with other governance policies and practices. Together they form our 'corporate governance framework.' This Annual Governance Statement reviews the effectiveness of that framework, mindful of the CIPFA's "**Seven Principles of Good Governance**".



Essential elements of governance

As a local authority, the responsibility for good governance is shared by councillors and officers.

Prior to the local elections on 1 May 2025, Buckinghamshire Council had **147** councillors, three for each of the 49 wards. Following a review by the Local Government Boundary Commission, Buckinghamshire Council has **97** councillors across 49 wards: 10 three-member wards 28 two-member wards 11 single-member wards. These councillors are from different political parties and have different roles in the decision-making process. It was a key aspect of the Council's governance during 2024/25 to prepare for this; electorally and constitutionally. All councillors agree to follow the Member Code of Conduct and the rules for making decisions set out in our Constitution.

Five important strands of governance interlink. Together they aim to ensure that decisions are taken in a resourced and soundly managed environment, with strong internal & external controls.

1. Making decisions
2. Holding decision-makers to account through scrutiny
3. Financial management and external audit
4. Managing risks through internal control
5. Senior Management Team and Statutory Officers

1. Making decisions

The Council as a whole sets the budget and policy framework of the Council. The Executive – through the Cabinet – takes the key decisions within that framework. Within the Constitution, the 'Schemes of Delegation' give certain roles to councillors and to officers. For example, the Financial Procedure Rules and other supporting procedures clearly define how decisions are taken and highlight the processes and controls required to manage risks. The Council's democratic decision-making structure can be [found here](#). All meetings are held in public where the public can attend and many of the meetings are webcast live and available for re-watching.

2. Holding decision-makers to account through scrutiny

Scrutiny provides the legal power for councillors to investigate issues of concern for residents and hold decision-makers to account for the decisions they make. Scrutiny is not decision-making but acts as a check and balance to the Executive, which takes the majority of key decisions on behalf of the Council. There are also specific powers for scrutiny to hold the NHS to account within health scrutiny. During 2024/25, scrutiny was carried out by six Select Committees. This has been reduced to five Select Committees from 6 May 2025.

3. Managing the Council's finances

Strong financial management is critical to ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council and our framework reflects that. The Constitution contains the Financial Procedure Rules which set the principles for managing the Council's financial affairs. A set of strategic documents form

the second level of financial governance, with a third tier represented by detailed financial instructions to provide clear guidance on the operation of key financial processes. All documents are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they remain current and fit for purpose, reflecting changes in the external environment and also in the Council itself.

The Council operates in an uncertain environment which has led to major failings in other councils. The Council's Financial Management Strategy sets out how we work to manage this uncertainty and to ensure the Council's aims and objectives continue to be delivered into the future. There is strong external assessment of the Council's financial capability and areas for improvement are captured in the Finance Improvement Plan. The "CIPFA Financial Management Code" sets out the key elements for demonstrating good financial management in the public sector. This underpins our Financial Management Strategy. The **External Auditor** is legally required to satisfy themselves that the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. They would report to the Council if any significant matters came to their attention. The External Auditor also attends meetings of the Audit and Governance Committee.

4. Managing risks through Internal Control

The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It could not eliminate all risk of not achieving policies, aims and objectives. It can, though, provide a reasonable if not an absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process to: identify and prioritise the risks to the Council of not meeting its policies, aims and objectives. evaluate the likelihood and potential impact of those risks being realised; and manage them efficiently, effectively and economically. The **Chief Internal Auditor** undertakes the required annual self-assessment of the Council's Internal Audit function, against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The Chief Internal Auditor attends meetings of the Audit and Governance Committee.

5. Senior Managers and Statutory Officers

The Council's **Corporate Management Team** – comprising the Chief Executive, her directors and statutory officers - implements the policy and budgetary framework set by the Council and provides advice to Cabinet and the Council on the development of future policy and budgetary issues. The Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT) has a separate budget board meeting; and all meetings of CMT have legal and finance input into their discussions.

There are regular meetings throughout the year of our three Statutory Officers (the Chief Executive/ Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer, Chief Finance Officer) to review and monitor governance issues. The Chief Internal Auditor also attends as does the HR Director.

- Rachael Shimmin – Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service
- Lisa Marie Williams – Assistant Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer (from April 2025)
- David Skinner – Chief Finance Officer (the 'Section 151 Officer')
- Maggie Gibb – Chief Internal Auditor

In addition, the Council has a statutory officer overseeing each of Adults and Children's services, both reporting directly to the Chief Executive.

Governance - key roles:

| | |
|--|---|
| The Council | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approves the Corporate Plan • Approves the Constitution • Approves the budget and policy framework of the Council |
| Cabinet | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main decision-making body of the Council • Made up of the Leader of the Council and a number of Cabinet Members with responsibility for different portfolios • Supported by Deputy Cabinet Members |
| Audit and Governance Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides assurance to the Council on the adequacy and effectiveness of the governance arrangements, risk management framework and internal control environment • Approves annual Financial Statements and the Annual Governance Statement • Attended by the Section 151 Officer and Chief Internal Auditor |
| Standards and General Purposes Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversees the Council's Councillor Code of Conduct and the overall standards of conduct and ethics of Members and co-opted Members of Buckinghamshire Council |
| Select Committees (5) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The select committees each fulfil a check and challenge function for decisions and policies made by the Cabinet helping the Council to assess its performance and learn lessons. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Children's and Education Select Committee • Covering the portfolio areas of: Education and Skills, Youth Provision and Children's Services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Finance and Resources Select Committee • Covering the portfolio areas of: the Leader of the Council, Resources, Property and Assets. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee • Covering the portfolio areas of: Planning and Enforcement, Housing and Homelessness, Town Centre Regeneration. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee • Covering the portfolio areas of: Adult Social Care and Communities and Public Health. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Transport, Environment, Communities and Climate Change Select Committee • Covering the portfolio areas of: Transport, Logistics and Environment, Communities and Climate Change. |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Shareholder Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sub-committee of Cabinet. The Shareholder Committee manages the shareholding interests in the Council's trading companies and joint ventures • Appoints and removes directors to the companies, issues best practice guidance and arranges training • Monitors the performance of the companies |
| Community Boards and Town Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 advisory Community Boards in local areas provide a forum for discussing local issues, making recommendations to decision-making bodies, and overseeing allocated spending • A High Wycombe Town Committee exists to consider and advise the Council on any issues affecting the unparished area of High Wycombe Town. The Committee is an advisory body and does not have decision making powers • The Council also works closely with Parish and Town Councils, as well as the Mayor and Charter Trustees of the unparished area of High Wycombe. The Charter Trustees have a ceremonial role and are responsible for preserving the historic identity and civic traditions of the town |
| Corporate Management Team (CMT) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chief Executive (CEO) and Corporate Directors • CMT has overall accountability for the governance framework • CMT implements the policy and budgetary framework set by the Council and provides advice to Cabinet and the Council on the development of future policy and budgetary issues • Accountability for developing and maintaining the Council's governance and risk framework |
| Chief Finance (S151) Officer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for managing the Council's finances and providing expert financial advice to the Council • Accountable for developing and maintaining the Council's internal control and counter-fraud framework • Contributes to the effective corporate management and governance of the Council • Attends formal 1:1s with CEO, and attends all CMT meetings |
| Monitoring Officer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advises the Council on ethical issues, standards, and powers to ensure the Council operates within the law and statutory Codes of Practice • Overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of the Whistleblowing Policy and contributes to the effective corporate management and governance of the Council |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Director of Adult Services</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Children Act 2004 requires every upper tier local authority to appoint a Director of Adult Services (DASS) • Provides key professional leadership role for staff working in adult social care services • Ensures accountability of services to local communities through consultation with local people and, in particular, users of services • Statutory member of the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Buckinghamshire Adults Safeguarding Board • Delivers the Council's part in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Improving preventative services and delivering earlier intervention » Managing cultural change to give people greater choice and control over services » Tackling inequalities and improving access to services » Increasing support for people with the highest levels of need |
| <p>Director of Children's Services</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Children Act 2004 requires every upper tier local authority to appoint a Director of Children's Services (DCS). • Discharges the education and children's social services functions of the local authority (set out in section 18(2) of the Children Act 2004) including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Children and young people receiving education or children's social care services in the area; and » All children looked after by the local authority or in custody • Works with other local agencies to improve outcomes for children and young people. |
| <p>Managers</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for developing, maintaining, and implementing the Council's governance, risk, and control framework • Contribute to the effective corporate management and governance of the Council |
| <p>Internal Audit</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides independent assurance and opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's governance, risk registers and management and control framework • Delivers an annual programme of risk-based audit activity, including counter fraud, investigation and assurance activity • Responsible for developing and implementing the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and monitoring the investigation of any reported issues • Ensures all suspected or reported irregularities are dealt with in accordance with the Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Whistleblowing Policies; identifies improved controls • Makes recommendations for improvements in the management of risk |

| | |
|----------------|--|
| External Audit | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audits / reviews and reports on the Council’s financial statements (including the Annual Governance Statement)• Provides an opinion on the accounts and use of resources, including the arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the use of resources (the value for money conclusion)• Statutory duty to ensure that the Council has adequate arrangements in• place for the prevention and detection of fraud, corruption & theft |
|----------------|--|

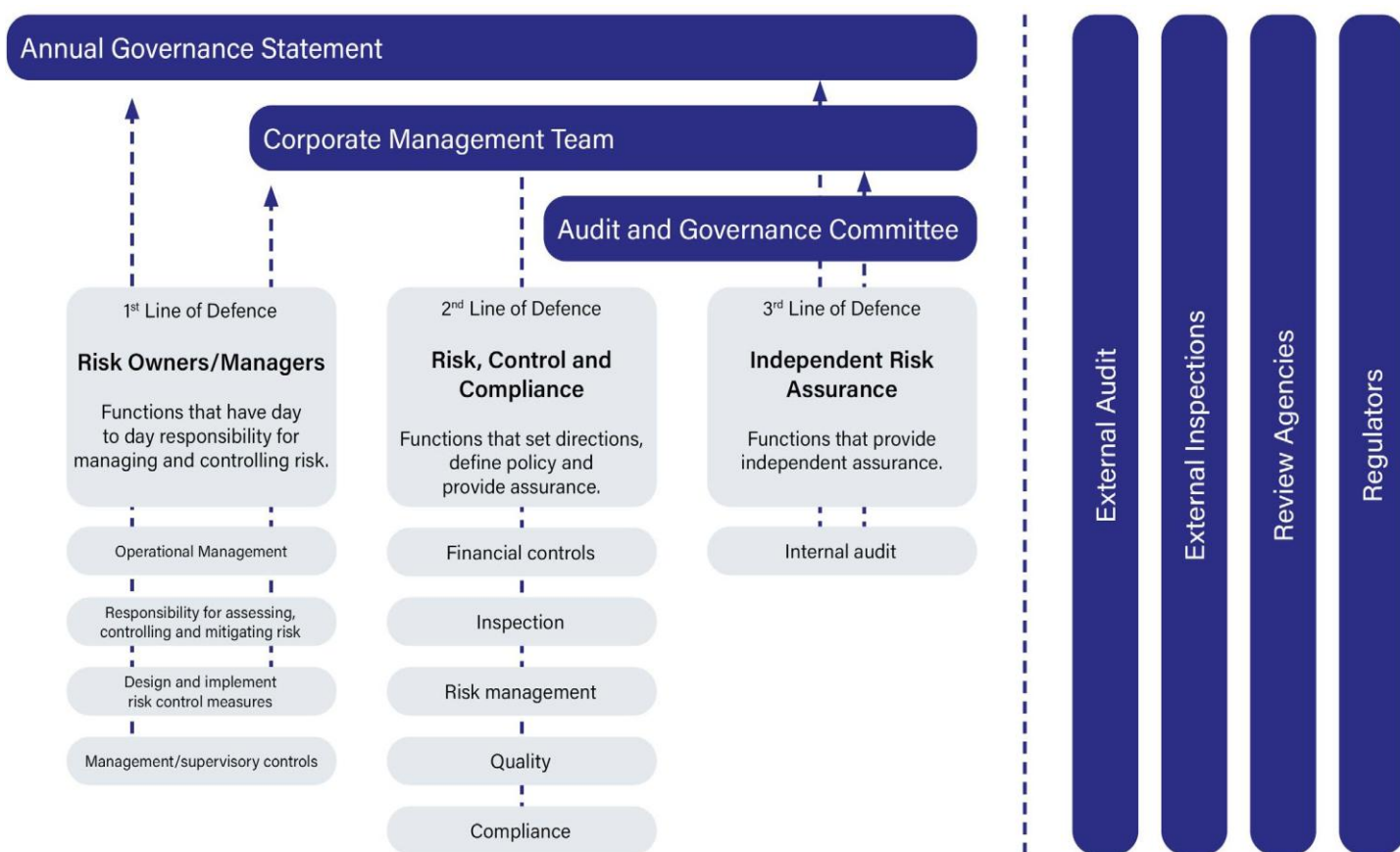


Preparing the Annual Governance Statement

The Council has reviewed the Council’s existing governance arrangements against the revised CIPFA / SOLACE ‘Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework - 2016 Edition’ good practice guidance.

The review of effectiveness is informed by **three lines of defence**:

- senior managers within the Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment;
- External Audit and other inspections made by external auditors, independent review agencies and inspectorates;
- the Head of Internal Audit and other professional leads including the Chief Finance Officer, Director of Human Resources and Director of Information Technology.



The key sources of assurance that inform this review and where it is obtained from are:

| Where do we need assurance? | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Compliance | Standards of conduct and behaviour | Risk management | Financial management | Service delivery | Effectiveness of internal controls | |

| Where do we get assurance from? | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|---|--|---|
| Constitution | Regulatory committees, Council, Scrutiny | Internal and external audit | Risk management strategy and framework | Performance management system / reporting | Complaints, counter fraud and whistleblowing | Independent and external sources (e.g. OFSTED, CIPFA) |



Effectiveness of our governance in 2024/2025

– an overview

Statement of Accounts

The current financial landscape for local authorities remains challenging. However, during 2024/25, we have managed to retain a prudent level of general fund reserves and have prioritised financial sustainability for the future.

Since the completion of the audit of the Council's financial accounts for 2020/21 in May 2024, officers have made significant progress in clearing the backlog, improving the quality of working papers, preparation of Statement of Accounts process and implementing audit recommendations.

Lessons were learned: importance of knowledge retention within the organization to safeguard against key officers leaving; robust data integration and alignment of accounting practices and processes; enhanced quality assurance processes to ensure accuracy and completeness of financial data; resource alignment by ensuring resource, experience and knowledge are dedicated to financial reporting of a large organization.

The Council is now fully up to date in publishing its statutory accounts up to and including financial year 2023/24, which was achieved by the relevant backstop deadlines.

“The Council has a robust approach to financial management and has appropriate procedures to maintain a stable financial position. As with other councils, Buckinghamshire continues to face significant financial challenges caused by costs inflation and increasing demand for services.” [Interim Auditor's Annual Report, November 2024.](#)

Key Council Priorities: *Strengthening Communities; Increasing Prosperity*

Internal Audit – Annual Opinion

The **Internal Audit Service** provides a combination of assurance and consultative activities to the Council, and the Audit & Governance Committee approved the council's [Internal Audit Charter in July 2024](#). Assurance work assesses how well the systems and processes are designed and operating. The consulting activities are available to help develop and improve those systems and processes where applicable. The complete range of work undertaken by internal audit - together with the work of other assurance providers - forms the Internal Audit opinion. This includes:

- The results of all audits undertaken during 2024/25.
- Any follow-up action taken in respect of audits from previous periods.
- Whether or not management actions have been agreed for all material areas of weakness identified.

For 2024/25, the Chief Internal Auditor's **Opinion** was that:

“the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's internal control, risk

management and governance framework was of **reasonable assurance**. The overall system of internal control facilitated the effective exercise of the Council’s functions and provided an **unqualified** opinion regarding the effective, efficient and economic exercise of the Council’s functions for 2024/25.”

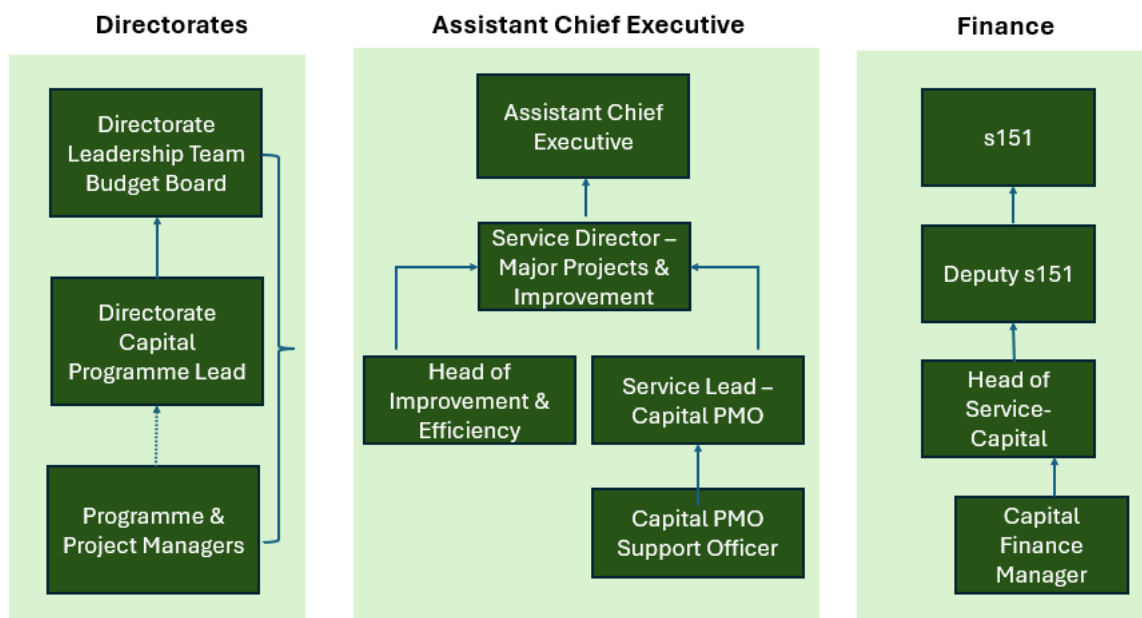
Key Council Priorities: *Strengthening Communities; Increasing Prosperity; Improving our environment; Protecting the Vulnerable*

Capital Governance Arrangements

During 2024/25, the Council carried out a review of its own capital arrangements which resulted in the development of a Capital Improvement Programme and the establishment of an Enterprise Capital Programme Management Office (PMO). The PMO, which reports to the Service Director for Major Projects and has adopted a Charter, aims to provide enhanced and clearer governance arrangements and transparency, and therefore greater assurance to Members and CMT.

A Capital Programme PMO Manager was appointed in February 2025 and tasked with progressing the capital improvement programme and embedding stronger capital governance arrangements. This has resulted in the creation of a Capital Design Authority which acts as a ‘critical friend’ by reviewing all business cases as schemes progress through the agreed capital gateways and pathway for approval. Cross-service work is taking place to develop templates, best practice, metrics and reporting, as well as share knowledge and lessons learned. Member oversight is through the Cabinet Member for Resources and through Corporate Capital Investment Board (CCIB).

Capital PMO Management Structure



Key Council Priority: *Increasing Prosperity*

Procurement

The Procurement Act 2023 went live on 24 February 2025 which meant that any procurement activity from then must follow regulations from the Act. The new regime increases the transparency requirements and creates a more simple and flexible commercial system. A checklist of procurement activities for managers to consider includes planning; market engagement; building a business case; assessment of procurement risks; potential for key decision-making; budgetary approval and specification development.

Guidance and FAQs for the new procurement legislation are available on the staff intranet as well as signposting to external advice provided by [Mills & Reeves](#). The service has made changes to rationalize its training programme with new ones developed to deliver the requirements of the new Act. Of the 205 contract managers registered on the council's Contract Management Application (CMA), 160 undertook training between 1 April 2024 – 31 December 2024. An update on this was reported to the Audit & Governance Committee [on 26 March 2025](#).

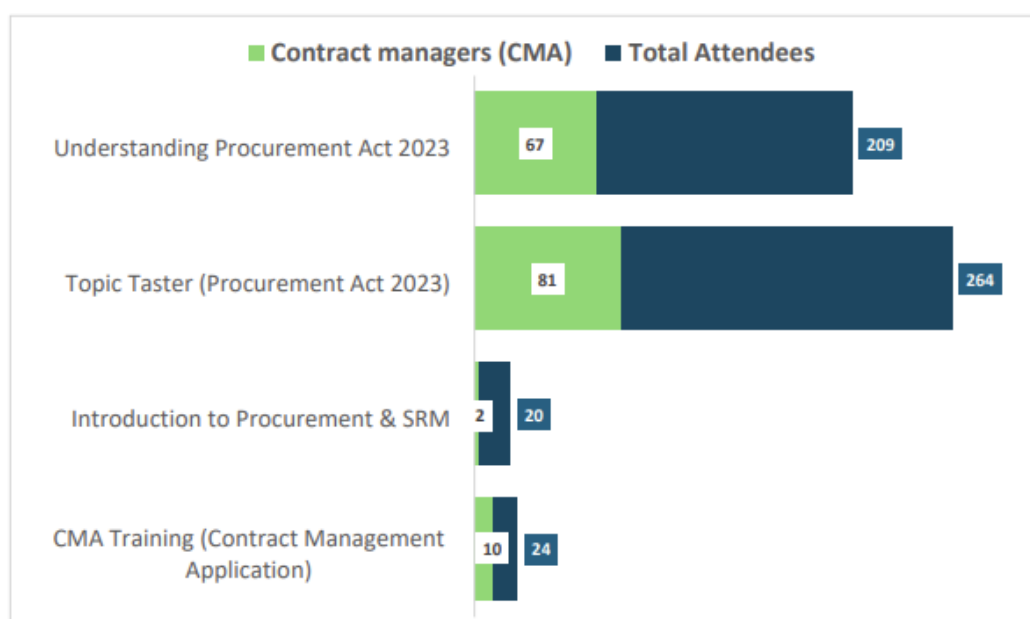


Table 5: Summary training courses and attendance 01 April 24 to 31 December 24 including no. of Contract Managers (CMA)

Key Council Priorities: *Increasing Prosperity*

Opportunity Bucks – Succeeding for all

“Our Opportunity Bucks programme has delivered interventions in some of our most deprived areas”

(Buckinghamshire Council, Annual Report 2024/25)

Buckinghamshire residents are living longer and healthier lives, with health outcomes better than the national average, and the county has strong communities and a thriving ‘not for profit’ sector. With this comes the perception that Buckinghamshire is an affluent area without the same need as other parts of the country. However the reality is that like everywhere, it has areas of affluence and other areas where health, work and education outcomes are poorer.


Launched in December 2022, the [Opportunity Bucks](#) programme made considerable [progress](#)

during the year through various projects, events and campaigns. The programme has focused on 10 wards in three areas – parts of Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Chesham – to address hardship and deprivation by designing and delivering targeted interventions that support improvement outcomes for Buckinghamshire residents. Collaborative working has taken place with the relevant Community Boards to support the programme through sharing local knowledge, networking, scoping and mapping.

Opportunity Bucks focuses on five themes:

- Education and Youth Engagement
- Jobs, Careers and Skills
- Standard of Living
- Quality of Public Realm
- Health and Wellbeing

10 Community Action Day events were held within Opportunity Bucks wards during the year. **29 services** and partner agencies have supported these throughout the year and a total of **781 residents** engaged with.



Key Council Priorities: *Strengthening Communities; Protecting the Vulnerable*

Making Every Adult Matter

Buckinghamshire’s Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) team was established in 2023-24 to enable a targeted approach to support those most in need in Opportunity Bucks wards. The team’s goal is to improve outcomes for disadvantaged people, connect them with relevant services and feed learning back into the system to address any systemic barriers that may exist.

The MEAM network is a national coalition of charities that specialise in working with people who are experiencing multiple disadvantages. The network consists of over 50 other areas, who share expertise and best practice, coordinated through a centralised MEAM partnership team. The MEAM team has a Strategic Steering Group, chaired by the Corporate Director from Planning, Growth and Sustainability and with membership including Thames Valley Police, Housing Associations, the NHS and other key partners.

Key Council Priorities: *Strengthening Communities; Protecting the Vulnerable*

Constitution

The Local Government Boundary Commission’s [finalised proposals](#) for the electoral review of Buckinghamshire Council, concluded that the Council would, from the elections in May 2025, have 97 councillors and a revised set of ward boundaries. In preparation for this, a joint-working group of the Audit & Governance and Standards & General Purposes Committees reviewed the constitution and recommended sustainable decision-making arrangements to apply from May 2025 which was agreed by Full Council in [March 2025](#). In addition to this, an Independent Remuneration Panel met throughout 2024/25 to consider an appropriate Scheme of Members’ Allowances and a scheme was adopted by the Council to take effect from 6 May 2025.

Key Council Priorities: *Strengthening Communities*

Elections and local democracy

Project planning during 2023/24 culminated in the Police and Crime Commissioner election in May 2024 which was then shortly followed by the announcement of the General Election which took place on 4 July 2024. Alongside this, election preparation commenced for the local elections to be held on 1 May 2025.

In addition to the two major elections, six [neighbourhood planning referendums](#) were held during the year, [one parish by-election](#) and [one parish poll](#). There were no Buckinghamshire Council by-elections.

The Council concluded its [community governance review for High Wycombe](#) which was taken to Full Council in [September 2024](#). This was to determine whether High Wycombe should formally be parished and a town council created; or whether current governance arrangements (including the High Wycombe Town Committee and Charter Trustees) are sufficient or could be improved. This involved full compliance with the law and statutory guidance, [a large-scale public consultation](#) and detailed consideration by a cross-party working group, and by the Audit & Governance and Standards & General Purposes Committees ahead of Full Council consideration. It was decided, on balance, that the most effective and convenient local governance, reflective of the town's identities, could be achieved more by improving current arrangements than introducing new structures.

The Government held a consultation from October – December 2024 on member remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings which may impact the Council in future. This Council responded and will engage with the outcome during 2025/26 as appropriate.

Key Council Priorities: *Strengthening Communities*



You now need
photo ID to vote at
a polling station

Scrutiny

Scrutiny at Buckinghamshire Council in 2024/25 was carried out by six Select Committees. Each Select Committee had a different remit and each examined local services across the public sector. These 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. Highlights of this work include:

- Review of School attendance (Children's and Education Select Committee): in September 2024, the review group presented its report to Cabinet and all seven of the report's recommendations were agreed.
- Digital Exclusion Review (Communities and Localities Select Committee): to understand the barriers that some people experience in trying to get online. Evidence gathering sessions have taken place with community groups since September 2023 and the report was brought to Cabinet in March 2025.
- Budget Scrutiny Inquiry (Finance and Resources Select Committee): this year the Inquiry Group interrogated the draft budget that proposed tough decisions due to increased service demands and complexities. Assurances were sought regarding portfolios not having contingencies. Questions from the public were received & put to portfolio holders.
- The Legacy of Everyone In and Homelessness in Buckinghamshire (Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee): recommendations focused on the use of data to inform the impact and effectiveness of service activity.
- Review into Planning for Future Primary Healthcare in Buckinghamshire (Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee): a joint review with the Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee. Evidence gathering over two days on delivering additional capacity to existing or new surgeries.
- Flooding Response (Transport, Environment and Climate Change Select Committee): Members were concerned to hear of pockets of localized urban and rural flooding and sought reassurance from the Council and its partners on flood preparation and responses and to consider improvements. This included speaking with senior representatives from Thames Water, Anglian Water and the Environment Agency to gather evidence, and [subsequently make recommendations](#) to them. The Committee has also heard from the water companies in a [public meeting](#) to scrutinise their infrastructure plans.
- The Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee met to consider:
 - Integrated Care Board Operating Model
 - Primary Care Strategy update
 - Update on ICS Digital and Data Strategy

Community Boards

During 2024/25, the Council had 16 [Community Boards](#) (now 8) that continued to have a strong reputation as a key community partner to support communities and improve the local area. Well-established and highly functioning local partner networks have been maintained and strengthened through relationships and collaboration with the town and parish councils, the voluntary and community sector, residents and our many strategic partners. The Aylesbury, Wycombe and Chesham Boards have supported the Council's flagship levelling-up programme [Opportunity Bucks](#) through ward partnerships.



“Our Community Boards have once again made a real difference locally, providing leadership and helping to leverage funding for projects.”

Buckinghamshire Council Annual Report 2024/25

Additionally, the Boards used a total of £885,700 of funding to support 229 projects. For every £1 of community board funding £1.68 in contributory funding has been achieved.

A service review was carried out during the year with a new structure to be implemented from April 2025. The review considered:

- governance arrangements
- the funding process
- the frequency and format of formal meetings and agenda contents
- all processes and activities to ensure service efficiency
- maximizing local impact and providing excellent value for money

Key Council Priorities: *Strengthening Communities; Protecting the Vulnerable*

Action Plans

An update on the Actions from 2024/25 is included at **Annex 1**.
The AGS Action Plan priorities for 2025/26 are set out in **Annex 2**.



Conclusion

The opinion of the **Chief Finance Officer** is that the Council continues to operate robust internal controls and good public financial management. Further action is required to manage financial pressures and develop strategies to meet the long-term financial challenges that face the Council. There has been no need for the Chief Finance Officer to exercise his statutory escalatory powers. The Council complies with its financial regulations and procedures together with relevant codes of practice and guidance.

It is the opinion of the **Monitoring Officer** that the Council has complied with its Constitution and its corporate governance arrangements are sound.



David Skinner

Director of Finance and
Section 151 Officer



Lisa Marie Williams

Assistant Chief Executive (Monitoring Officer)

Annex 1– Review of Action Plan for 2024/25

| Governance Issue | Action to be taken | Timescale | Responsible Officer |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Statements of Accounts | Achieve preparation of outstanding sets of accounts: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) 2021/22 and 2022/23: by the end of September 2024 2) 2023/24 by the end of December 2024 3) Reporting regularly on progress to the Audit & Governance Committee | MET September 2024 December 2024 | Chief Finance Officer |
| Constitution 2025 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Achieve a revised Constitution in readiness for the post May 2025 elections when the council will have new boundaries and 50 fewer councillors (97 in all). 2) Achieve a review of members' allowances to achieve a Scheme that could apply from May 2025 to reflect the decision-making structure under a revised Constitution | MET December 2024 March 2025 | Assistant Chief Executive |
| Buckinghamshire Council Elections | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Prepare and implement a project plan for delivering the Buckinghamshire Council elections scheduled for May 2025 2) Prepare a comprehensive member induction programme, plus a suite of support, for the new Council 3) In preparing the induction programme, to review compliance with service responsibilities to keep local councillors to informed of issues affecting their ward to include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Potential for maintaining joined-up communications to councillors on issues affecting the council b) Reviewing services' responsiveness to councillor queries for information, and assessing options for the capture and culture of councillor feedback on local issues | MET September 2024 – May 2025 September 2024 – May 2025 | Returning Officer Assistant Chief Executive |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| <p>Capital Governance Framework</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Implement the Improvement Plan following the recent review of capital governance arrangements; to include 2) The establishment of a Capital Corporate Programme Management Office (PMO). 3) The creation of a 'Capital Design Authority' to provide peer to peer check and challenge around capital business cases. | <p>MET 31 March 2025</p> <p>31 October 2024</p> <p>30 September 2024</p> | <p>Service Director - Major Projects</p> |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|

Annex 2 – Action Plan for 2025/6

These represent areas of particular focus for 2025/26. The Action Plan does not detail the full, day to day conduct of governance activity; that is listed instead in the Code of Governance.

| Governance Issue | Action to be taken | Timescale | Responsible Officer |
|--|--|---|--|
| Local Authority Meetings | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Monitor impact of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Reduction of Members to 97 b. No overall control 2) Consider governance and constitutional arrangements relating to Government plans to introduce guidance on any adopted provision for hybrid meetings and proxy voting or required amendments to the Member Code of Conduct 3) Deliver a comprehensive member induction programme, plus a suite of support, for the new Council | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Sep-Dec 2025</p> <p>May – July 2025</p> | Assistant Chief Executive |
| Impact of national Government policy | To monitor and respond to changes in national policy as it applies to the governance, constitutional and operational impact on the Council. | Ongoing | Assistant Chief Executive Section 151 officer |
| Local Government Association Peer Review | <p>To prepare for and implement lessons arising from a Peer Review</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Make preparations for Peer Review – organizational awareness, core team and evidence gathering b) Review outcomes of Peer Review | <p>May – Sep 2025</p> <p>Sep – Dec 2025</p> | Assistant Chief Executive |
| Post-election implementation of decision-making arrangements | <p>To implement and operate the Council’s new democratic decision-making arrangements</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Introduction of the arrangements – at and following Annual Council (21 May 2025) b) Communication about arrangements – induction pack and induction sessions explaining the arrangements c) Achieving the first meetings of each body | <p>May 2025</p> <p>May – June 2025</p> <p>May – July 2025</p> | Assistant Chief Executive |

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------|
| Continuation of member induction | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Deliver induction programme (first phase) 2) Review progress 3) Develop phase two 4) Achieve registration of interest and six-monthly review | <p>May – July 2025</p> <p>May – September 2025</p> <p>August – October 2025</p> <p>November-December 2025</p> | Assistant Chief Executive |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------|

