



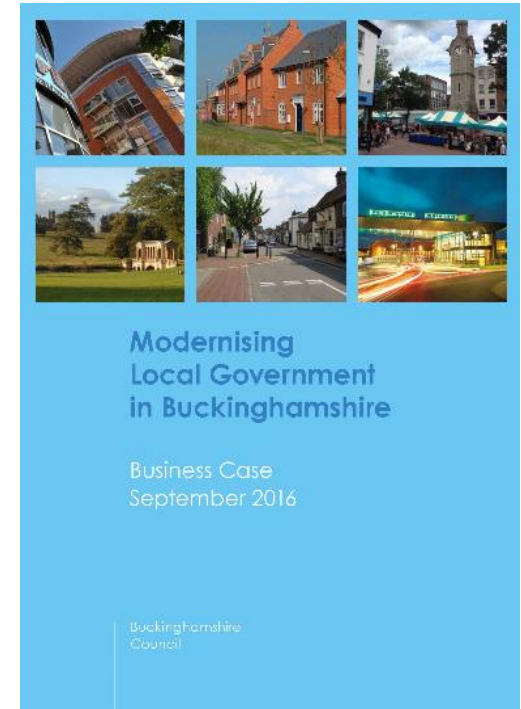
# Our Unitary Journey: Buckinghamshire Council Keeping it Local Reflections 5 Years on

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# Buckinghamshire's Unitary Story

- County Council + four District Councils
- 528,000 population in 2020
- The County Council submitted its options appraisal and business case for a single unitary council to government in September 2016
- The Districts subsequently submitted a business case for two unitary councils
- 1 Nov 2018 – Ministerial Statement One Unitary
- 1 April 2020 – Vesting Day
- **Aim 1** - Single Voice
- **Aim 2** - More Local
- **Aim 3** - Better Public Services
- **Aim 4** - Better Value For Money



# Keeping it Local – Our Proposals Beyond Safe & Legal...



## 1. Council Access Points

**For residents to access services** and talk to Council staff near to their home.



## 2. Charter & Devolution Offer

**For town and parish councils** to have their say and to provide the opportunity to take on the running of services/assets.



## 3. Community Boards

**For local members** to take decisions and for communities to have their say.



# Community Boards

The vision for community boards was to improve outcomes for residents through ensuring strong connections between Buckinghamshire Council with its diverse communities.

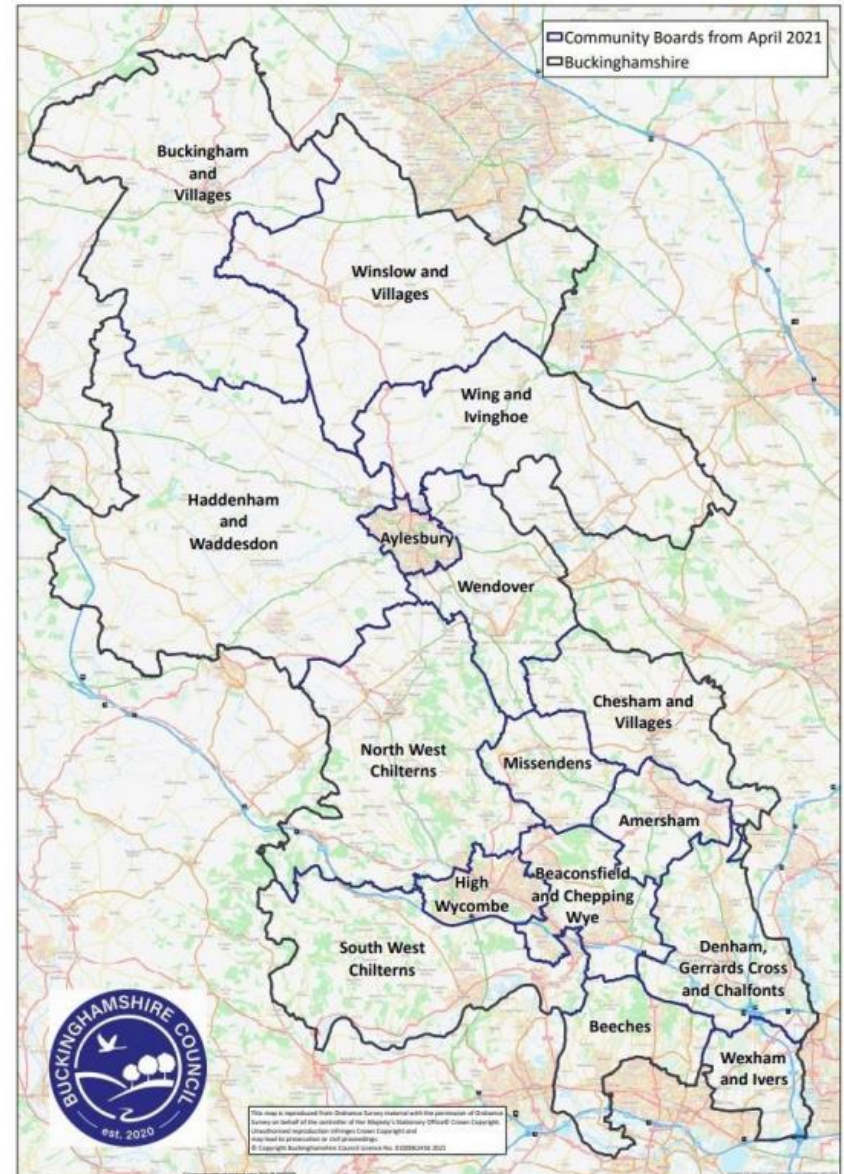
- Local Issues
- Influence
- Partnership

## What went well?

- Established local face of the Council
- Enabled 147 local members to have voice
- Local creative collaborations enabled which have delivered local priorities

## Challenges?

- Meetings seen as too formal
- Funding – perceived as only funding body



# Our Localism Blueprint: How did we develop it?

- Deliberate programme approach & resourcing focusing on co-producing the detail of how the new Council would work and engage with communities
- Extensive engagement programme with VCSE, members, parishes, the public
- Building confidence through relationships
- Member Localism Steering Group: Led by Shadow Exec Member with representative from each Council
- Senior Officer Steering Group: Co-chaired by County & District Leads with officer rep from each Council





# Our Localism Blueprint: Process Reflections

## What went well ?

- Invested in space/time for informal learning – Visits externally; invited key members from other similar county areas to speak to key members shaping proposals
- Involvement structures created for cross-party and cross-council backbenchers to shape proposals e.g. member working groups e.g. policy co-design process
- Localism not an afterthought in plans – central to the new operating model

## Challenges & Learning:

- Constant negativity on a single unitary being too distance and not able to understand local issues.
- Joint working post legal challenges/competitive bid process
- Words matter – refer to the ‘new council’ every day
- Complexity – 202 Shadow Authority members, 142 parish & town councils, 5 organisations, 1 town committee
- Devolution Ambition – Covid & increasingly challenging financial pressures meant it took longer



# Our Unitary Journey: Wider Reflections

## Key things that helped us?

- Safe & Legal Plus...
- Senior officer leadership team all confirmed pre-vesting day (down Tier 3)
- Strategic approach enabled balancing of existing change ('BAU') alongside LGR. Shadow structures key for managing the transition.
- Clear Transformation Roadmap for post-vesting day – PMO team disbanded but morphed into New Council Transformation Team.

## Other reflections:

- It's a long-term journey. Transformation programme 5 years post-vesting day.
- Active building of the new – legacy cultures – focus on workforce development
- Shadow decision-making matters – legacy council decisions impact on the new (recommend understand contract expiry dates major contracts & ensure collective approach)
- In a large unitary you need 'scrutiny' to happen locally not just in strategic committee meetings – design detail of governance interfaces.



# Being in the Unitary Change Process...

