



Buckinghamshire
Adult Learning



Accountability Agreement 2025/26



PURPOSE

Buckinghamshire Council's Adult Learning Service provides learning opportunities that improve people's lives and outcomes, enabling people to participate in their communities and support growth and prosperity in Buckinghamshire.

Service Vision

We anticipate and respond to the needs of individuals, communities, employers and Buckinghamshire's economy through the delivery of outstanding, inspirational and highly flexible learning opportunities.

Strategic Aims and Objectives

With a focus on education and employment, we will:

1. Support young people, parents, carers and residents to overcome challenges
2. Provide opportunities for young people, parents, carers and residents to meet their potential
3. Keep young people, parents, carers and residents safe
4. Improve young people, parents, carers and residents' health and wellbeing

"As part of 'Opportunity Bucks' the council has identified wards where people experience the most hardship, are economically inactive and are ambitious to enter the workforce. Leaders have established an educational offer within these areas to make sure those with the greatest need can access essential training.

Leaders and teachers make sure adult learners overcome any barriers to learning and develop the knowledge and skills they need to improve their life chances".

Ofsted (May 2024)
Adult provision
judged as 'Outstanding'

CONTEXT AND PLACE

Buckinghamshire Adult Learning serves the whole county of Buckinghamshire and its 551,000 residents. As a new unitary council, formed in 2020, we use our unique co-terminus position with the NHS trust, College Group and partners to harness the outcomes for over 5000 adult learners per year.

Buckinghamshire has excellent educational facilities with 87% of schools and colleges rated good or above by Ofsted, including Buckinghamshire Adult Learning.



Our £18.4m economy is strong with 31,210 businesses providing 248,000 jobs¹.

Buckinghamshire is home to world-leading assets which provide huge potential for economic growth dependent on harnessing innovation and equipping our residents with the right skills:

- Creative, including Pinewood and the National Film and Television School
- Digital
- High performance technology, including Silverstone Business Park
- MedTech at Stoke Mandeville Stadium
- Space through Westcott Business Park

However, there is unequal access to the strong Buckinghamshire economy for its residents.

Buckinghamshire's claimant count rate stands at 3.3% as of March 2025, which is lower than the average for England of 4.3%. This equates to 11,435 Buckinghamshire residents who claimed 'out-of-work' related benefits. Meanwhile, 12,900 Buckinghamshire residents were economically inactive and wished to work during December 2024.



26,930 (11%) of residents in Buckinghamshire over the age of 18 have no qualifications².

There are ongoing pressures on public services with spatial concentrations of health inequalities, such as a gap of seven years in life expectancy between males in the most and least deprived population quintiles.

¹ [Jobs & Skills - Research Reports - Buckinghamshire Economic Intelligence Observatory \(buckseconomy.co.uk\)](https://www.buckseconomy.co.uk/research-reports/jobs-skills)

² Census 2021: Highest level of qualification - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

Challenges of an ageing population on public services and labour market with 10% more residents over 90 years old than the national average and an expected growth of 147% in this age group by 2038.

Successful Homes for Ukraine had seen an increase of residents to Buckinghamshire, this is alongside Afghan and Hong Kong resettlement programmes which are offered in the county.

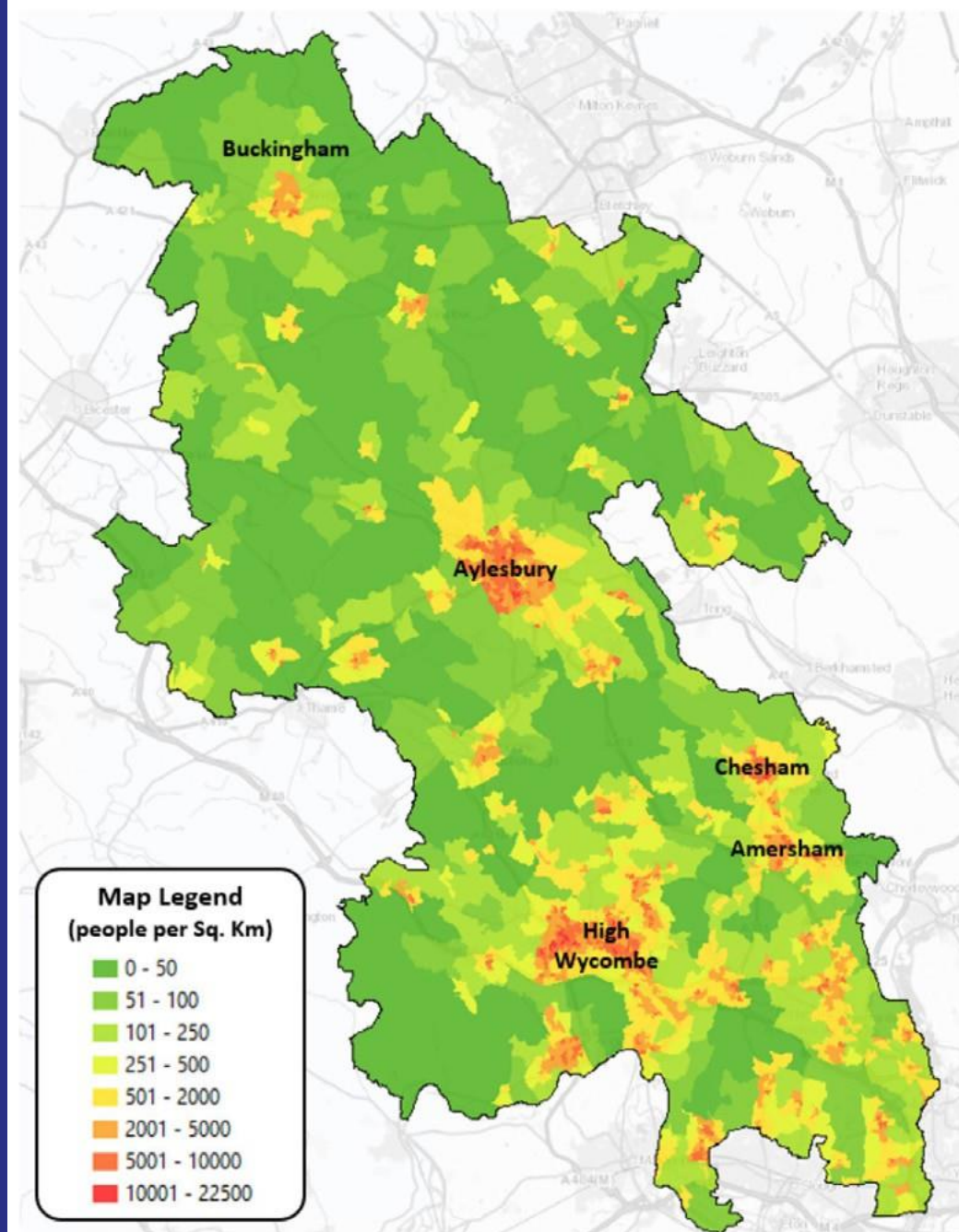
Targeted work continues in the 'Opportunity Bucks – Succeeding for All' programme, which is a long-term partnership strategy focused on levelling-up ten wards in Buckinghamshire where residents are experiencing the most hardship.

We see education and adult skills as the key to engaging our residents in fulfilling opportunities. By providing Buckinghamshire Adult Learning services in 9 centres and over 30 community venues, we will ensure that every resident has the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

In January 2024, Buckinghamshire's Skills and Employment Strategy 2024-2029 was formally adopted. This Skills and Employment Strategy is ambitious in its agenda for raising the productivity of Buckinghamshire through place-based skills and employment priorities. It shows the role people, communities, employers, learning providers and investors can play in achieving the Buckinghamshire vision for growth.

The delivery of our skills and employment priorities will improve the quality of life, and help more people benefit from the opportunities our county has to offer.

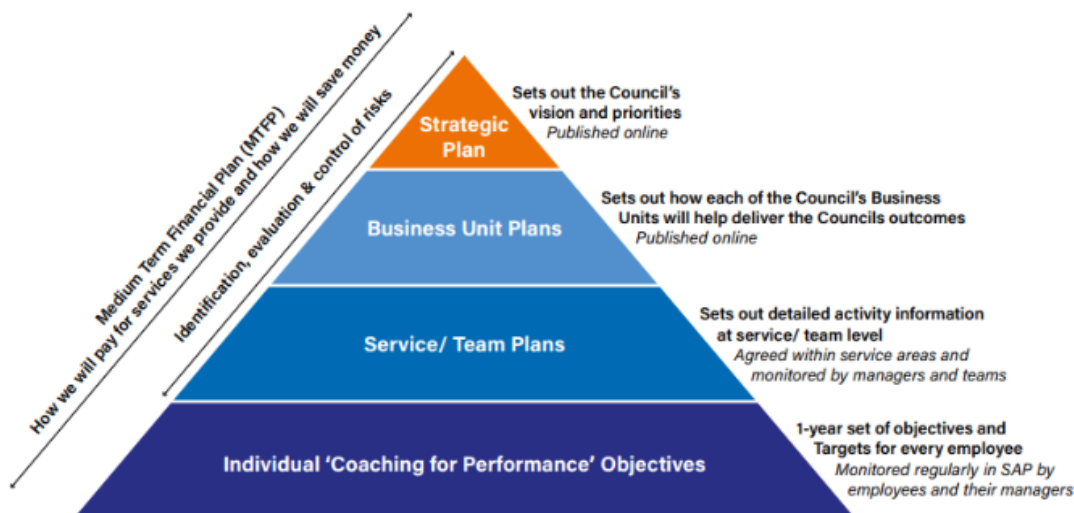
Population Density in Buckinghamshire (people per Sq. Km)



APPROACH TO DEVELOPING THE ANNUAL ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT

The priorities for the service are set with the agreement of the Corporate Director Childrens Services and the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and in line with the Corporate Strategic priorities. Buckinghamshire Adult Learning Service is then governed in line with the Performance Governance Framework for Buckinghamshire Children's Services.

Delivering the Strategic Plan



Adult Learning's annual planning cycle commences in October and finishes in April prior to the beginning of the academic year. The service conducts a detailed analysis of national, regional and local priorities, taking into account the direction of Government policy, regional analysis, local insight data produced by Buckinghamshire's Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) and relevant information identified through Buckinghamshire County Council's Better Together for Buckinghamshire Strategy 2021-25.

1. The Adult Learning management team, as a starting point for the planning process, set draft service targets based on an initial set of planning proposals.
2. An analysis of what Buckinghamshire needs is conducted which provides an in-depth analysis of Buckinghamshire's data, from a wide range of sources.
3. The service's annual Operational Plan is approved by the Council; the 2025-2026 annual plan was originally approved in October 2024. Following additional grant allocation by the DfE as part of a pilot to explore whether local authorities are better positioned to identify and address local skills needs, rather than central government, this plan was modified in April 2025.

Strong governance, together with local engagement with external stakeholders are two things that are intrinsically linked within Adult Learning. We know that the closer links with stakeholders, the better the insight into local wants and needs, which is crucial to ensuring we provide relevant and purposeful skills, knowledge, and experience to the residents of Buckinghamshire.



Our learners are:

- Those with below level 2 qualifications in English and/ or maths;
- Those with below level 1 digital qualifications and/or digital skills required for work;
- Those for whom English is not their first language who need to improve their English speaking, listening, reading and writing skills, in particular to obtain employment;
- The unemployed who need basic and work readiness skills to obtain work, include those recently unemployed, or at risk of unemployment;
- Those who wish to improve their skills through undertaking an apprenticeship, or study an entry level to level 3 vocational qualification in national skill priorities areas, enabling sustained employment, promotion and/ or to ensure employers have an appropriately skilled workforce;
- Young people with EHCPs needing to improve their skills through undertaking a supported internship to sustain employment and/ or ensure employers have an appropriately skilled workforce;
- Parents/carers with below level 2 qualifications who are on state benefits or whose children are attending schools in areas of deprivation, so they improve their own skills and also support their children to drive up attainment levels;
- Neuro diverse adults to maintain wellbeing and support development of independent living skills;
- Community groups who need support within their communities to take the first steps to formal learning and increasing community inclusion;
- Residential homes, day care providers, acquired brain injuries unit and other such organisations to support them in enhancing the quality of life for those with health and support needs;

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

What happens to get the Accountability Agreement approved?

In order for the plan to be approved, it is well researched and has strong relationships with other teams in the council and with other local and partner organisations. Buckinghamshire Adult Learning works with a wide range of partners to meet our strategic objectives and ensure our programmes continue to be responsive to local needs.

Buckinghamshire Adult Learning works with a wide range of partners to meet our strategic objectives and ensure our programmes continue to be responsive to local needs. The service works collaboratively with strategic partners across the council and throughout the county including schools and Family centres; employers; JCP; voluntary and community organisations and social and health care providers. Buckinghamshire Adult Learning also commissions specialist provision through delivery partners to meet specific needs, expand the offer and ensure wider reach. BAL works in collaboration with other council services to support the Council's strategic priorities.

Partners:

- Wider council teams
- Bucks Business First
- VCSE organisations
- Local employers
- DWP/JCP
- NHS
- Bucks College Group
- Local Schools
- Other council teams at all levels such as Opportunity Bucks, Libraries, Adult Social Care, Homes for Ukraine, Asylum & Migration, Helping Hand, Family Centres and Children's Services, to ensure that the programmes which the service delivers are responsive to local priorities.
- Alongside Public Health and DWP, courses for residents where English is a second language explain the health, school and work options available in Buckinghamshire, alongside needed vocabulary to independently navigate this, benefitting residents and their families.
- VCSE Organisations such as Recovery Bucks which supports those affected by drugs or alcohol in Buckinghamshire or food banks supporting those struggling with the cost of living.
- The service has close relationships with a wide range of employers, and this closely informs its developmental work, for example, the implementation of new teaching assistant standards with local schools to develop an apprenticeship which will support needs of young people's in school.
- NHS, the service is currently working to develop staff's English skills (Sodexo) and staff's mathematic skills as a legacy to the Multiply programme.
- Further Education Colleges, the service is currently working with Bucks College Group to deliver the Skills Bootcamps and manage level 3 qualification options available under National Skills funding.

REFLECTING ON SUCCESSES OF 2024 - 2025



- Ofsted grade 'good' was retained through 2024 inspection, with adults provision being recognised as 'Outstanding'
- 8722 enrolments were taken in 2024 across a wide range of courses. 94% of residents completed their courses with overall achievement rates of 85.3%
- As an active partner of the Opportunity Bucks – Succeeding for All programme, Tailored Learning has been used effectively to target learners who reside in our most disadvantaged postcode areas. Resident overall participation has increased by 2% in 2024 compared to 2023 to 52.2% overall, many residents then progress to formal learning: 54.6% digital, 51.7% English, 57.2% maths
- ESOL achievement rates have improved, with all levels in year achievement forecast at 88.5% compared to 76.9% in 23/24
- To enable residents' increased digital inclusion, where possible digital skills are built into all courses, regular drop-in sessions are available, and a digital inclusion project actively engaged 189 residents across rural Buckinghamshire to support a range of digital needs.
- Numbers participating in digital qualification courses has expanded by 19.4% in 2024 to 141 individuals, with achievement rates forecast at 95.1% compared to 82% in 23/24.
- In-house entry to L3 vocational offer has been further increased through the strategic use of subcontractors: 1255 residents accessed qualifications in 23/24 to increase work skills such as: accounting, facilities management, lean management, health and social care. The forecast for 24/25 is similar, with in year numbers so far at 897
- Numbers of apprentices starting in 23/24 was 63 and 61 in 22/23, in just six months of 24/25 the numbers of starts is currently 68 and forecast to increase further for the full year. Achievement rates are 4% above national averages and at least 95% of completing apprentices remaining in long term sustainable employment
- Supported Internships programme numbers for 24/25 remain stable at 21 and was applauded by Ofsted. A pre-supported intern programme based in a local café has been successfully introduced. In 23/24 63% of interns achieved work as a positive outcome

“Teachers are highly effective in helping adults with little prior experience, to develop digital literacy skills. This enables them to access online content safely.” (Ofsted, May 2024)

CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL PRIORITIES

Strategic Aims and Objectives

Impact and/or contribution towards National, Regional and Local Priorities for Learning and Skills Priorities impacted and reason for objective:

1: Support young people, parents, carers and residents to overcome challenges

- To offer basic English, maths and digital provision which underpins all national, regional and local priorities, for example, the Better Together for Buckinghamshire aspiration for people to gain the skills they need for jobs and independent lives.
- To improve digital inclusion in Buckinghamshire, increasing the digital skills and confidence of 1,000 adult residents, supporting them as needed through our loaned equipment and data scheme.
- To continue as an active partner of the Opportunity Bucks – Succeeding for All programme, delivering education with a focus on levelling-up, targeted within ten wards in Buckinghamshire where residents are experiencing the most hardship.
- To further support the integration of ethnic minority communities (including those from Afghanistan, Hong Kong, Syria and the Ukraine), through the delivery of a comprehensive and targeted Programme of skills to >500 learners, including English as a second language, employability, health and life skills.
- To improve the outcomes for learners, through improving achievement rates in ESOL from 76.9% to >85%.
- To support the national priority Apprenticeship programmes to create a 100 new opportunities for young people and develop those in low skilled jobs to upskill and retain employment.
- To continue the expansion of Free Level 3 Courses for Jobs and vocational programmes by increasing our use of subcontractors, expanding numbers of local residents leading to employment opportunities.



2: Provide opportunities for young people, parents, carers and residents to meet their potential

- We will grow our vocational offer, apprenticeship and supported internship programmes to provide sustainable employment opportunities for residents, support employers to address staffing shortages to build business and the economy.
- We will increase the number of apprentices on programme to 200
- We will maintain a minimum overall achievement rate of 75% (nationally 67%), with at least 95% of completing apprentices remaining in long term sustainable employment. We will work with employers to specifically support recruitment in the identified skills gaps in areas such as health and social care, management and team leading training.
- We will sustain the number of supported internships on programme at 20 and offer 5 places a pre-supported internship programme enabling wider access. Our Job Coaches will work with employers to support job carving, mentoring and on-the-job training.
 - We will widen curriculum pathways, to further enable development of knowledge and skills necessary for jobs and independent lives. For example, the Opportunity Bucks programme aspiration to level-up within ten Wards in Buckinghamshire where residents are experiencing the most hardship.
- We will support parents and carers to support their children's education. Raising the confidence and skills in maths and English, breaking cycles of underachievement. We will support families to ensure that children have the language and skills to start school.

3: Keep young people, parents, carers and residents safe

- Effective implementation of our Prevent action plan.
- Further development of Stay Safe work across the Service, in particular staying safe online and the risk of scams.
- Increase inter- council working in priority areas such as early help and adult social care.

4: Improve young people, parents, carers and residents' health and wellbeing

- We will further develop and enhance the impact of our Learning for All programme for adults with disabilities to ensure that it focuses on gaining learners the skills they need to support their personal development, live independent lives, and gain meaningful employment.
- We will engage with communities' groups to expand health and wellbeing courses to enable individuals to gain skills and knowledge to live independent lives, reducing dependency on other public services.
- We will expand English for life programmes to include UK schooling, enabling parents to participate and enable better outcomes for families





CORPORATION STATEMENT

On behalf of Buckinghamshire Council, it is hereby confirmed that the plan as set out above reflects an agreed statement of purpose, aims and objectives and was approved by Leader decision on (to be added) 2025.

The plan will be published on the Council's website within three months of the start of the new academic year.

Link: (to be added)

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

- Better Together for Buckinghamshire Strategy 2021-25
- Skills and Employment strategy 2024 - 2029
- Local Industrial Strategy for Buckinghamshire
- Buckinghamshire Economic Recovery Plan
- Latest Ofsted Report 2024
- Buckinghamshire's Local Skills Improvement Plan
- Opportunity Bucks – Succeeding for all



**Buckinghamshire
Adult Learning**

**Inspiring learning, changing
lives in Buckinghamshire**



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