

## Appendix 2

# Combining a County Deal with LEP integration – the Buckinghamshire model for Economic Governance and Levelling Up

*June 2022*

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## A new model for Economic Governance and Levelling up In Buckinghamshire

Buckinghamshire has the opportunity to pursue two processes in one: the rapid agreement of a County Deal and Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) integration. The county can be an early example of how to develop a new model for economic governance, that secures for the future the critical work of the LEP in supporting and developing our key sectors and combines this with a wider focus on place, skills and regeneration. The new Growth and Levelling Up Board will integrate the LEP into its governance as part of the County Deal arrangements. This will fulfil the principles set out in the Government's guidance to LEPs – ensuring that there is a business voice within a democratically accountable governance structure, and integrating the LEP into one economic delivery function with the Council.

It will enable Buckinghamshire to bring together programme funding with investment, and the new powers and flexibilities of a Level 2 plus County Deal to accelerate growth and return to the 2010 levels of productivity, adding a further £13bn to the UK economy by 2050.

This integrated model will build on the advantages of being a new unitary Council, one that already has co-terminosity with the LEP, and strong partnership and delivery arrangements through the Buckinghamshire Growth Board, the Council's economic function, Buckinghamshire LEP, and Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF). Unlike in other parts of the country, this is a straightforward integration and does not require legislation to establish a County Combined Authority.

The proposal is designed to achieve four key objectives for Buckinghamshire:

- To create a rapid County Deal and LEP integration proposition that can put Buckinghamshire at the top of the queue for a Level 2 plus County Deal and LEP integration on the earliest timetable, Pathway 1.
- To integrate economic, regeneration and skills governance and delivery into one vehicle that can catalyse investment with new powers and funding flexibilities to increase the rate of productivity and economic growth in Buckinghamshire.
- To establish a robust set of governance arrangements that enable economic development, sector support and regeneration to be brought within a democratically accountable county structure.
- To maintain a powerful business voice and a clear focus on our key growth sectors within every level of this new structure from the main Board, through the Business and Sector Growth Board, to the thematic boards.

### Benefits of this approach

The new model will allow for the rapid agreement of a Level 2 plus County Deal with Government. It will build on the collaborative and partnership approach that has been a hallmark of Buckinghamshire's economic success. This will bring together the best of Buckinghamshire's current arrangements into a form of more integrated governance and delivery that can drive economic, place and levelling up activity for the county. The main benefits of this include:

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- **Catalysing funding and investment** – this integrated model will create a platform for catalysing investment and programme funding, through utilising Enterprise Zone revenue, developing a recyclable and commercially orientated Buckinghamshire Investment Fund, and securing investment flexibilities linked to revenue generated through future growth.
  - **Critical mass of capacity, knowledge and expertise** – it will consolidate, safeguard and strengthen the skills, knowledge and strategic insights of key people and functions within the existing LEP and Council economic team, and build a stronger economic strategy and deliver function to support the new Board. This will result in better and more efficient delivery.
  - **Retaining our focus on the key sectors that can drive future growth** – through this new integrated structure we can maintain our focus on driving growth opportunities in our key sectors of space, creative and digital, high-performance tech and medtech, and we can link this with the skills, investment and regeneration/place strategy, which will be driven by the new Board.
  - **Maintaining first class business support** – we will retain BBF as our business facing brand, that can continue to provide the best possible growth hub support to our local business base.
  - **Putting skills and regeneration at the heart of growth and levelling up** – the new integrated arrangements will also draw in skills and regeneration programmes into the heart of Buckinghamshire's growth strategy, utilising Post 19 Adult Education Budget funding, UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the potential of a Development Corporation Deal with Homes England.

### How the new arrangements will work

Our proposal includes a strengthened and expanded **Growth and Levelling Up Board** with a broader scope and remit across all areas of economic, place and levelling up policy. It will have its own brand, and will set the strategy, oversee and commission delivery and be responsible and accountable for performance.

It will be a lean and focussed Board, representing economic, place and levelling up leadership, with Council and business representation, alongside Higher Education/Further Education and health representation (see the Appendix for the recommended membership of the Board). The Board will balance accountable leadership and senior strategic business representation, with the Buckinghamshire Council Leader and Growth Board Chair (Cllr Martin Tett) and the LEP Chair (Andrew Smith) as Co-Chairs. Democratic accountability will be maintained through weighted voting to ensure a Council majority in decision making.

The **Investment Board** will be a sub-board of the main Board, combining democratically elected decision-making through a Council-led (elected Member) body and expert advice through a private sector advisory group. It will set the strategy for the **Investment Fund** and could also oversee a **Buckinghamshire Development Corporation** (the Levelling Up Bill makes provisions for any local authority to propose a Development Corporation for part of their area).

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There will also be a **Business and Sector Growth Board**, which will both provide a business advisory voice to the new integrated structure, as well as oversee business and sector growth innovation, inward investment, place branding, destination management and tourism. As this will be the main business voice within the new structure, it will be made up of the private sector membership of the current LEP Board, including the Chair of BBF.

A series of thematic boards will sit underneath the Growth and Levelling Up Board. Their roles will be to oversee and take forward the work agreed by the main Board through their own programmes and delivery, and to advise the main Board in its development of strategy. The three thematic boards will be:

- **Levelling Up Programme Board** – driving the development of a Levelling Up Programme and UKSPF Investment Plan (with delivery across other thematic boards).
- **Skills Board** – delivering an accelerated skills delivery system.
- **Place and Regeneration Board** – overseeing Buckinghamshire’s town centre transformation and renewal plans and delivery.

The boards and programme delivery will be supported by a new integrated economic development function which brings together the LEP with the Council’s economic team, working with BBF, which will remain a separate business facing entity.

The summary diagram on page 5 illustrates the new arrangements.

### Next steps

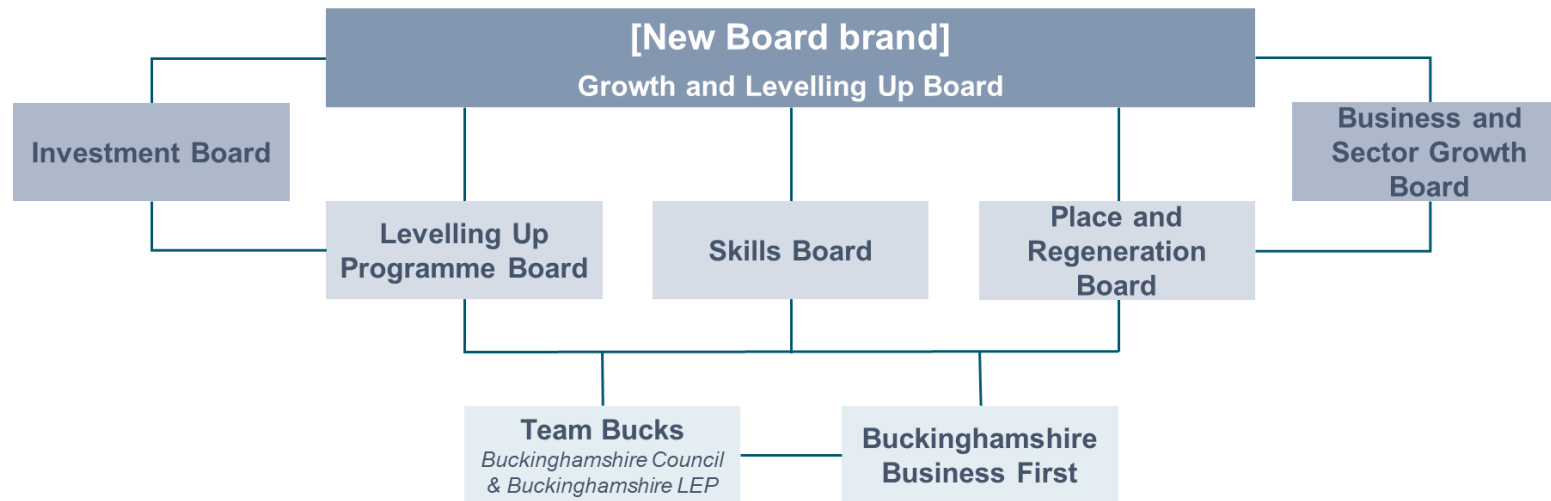
The next steps for the development of new governance arrangements are to:

- Get endorsement for the integrated governance and delivery proposal at the Growth and LEP Boards in July, and then submit a joint letter from both Boards to Government signalling intent for a full integration plan to be submitted by January 2023, as part of a County Deal.
- Whilst full and formal integration will have to await the final agreement of the County Deal, the LEP, the Council and BBF can establish the basis for integrated working much sooner, through setting up the new combined Board and implementing aspects of integrated working and delivery that do not require Government approval. A joint working group could be established to programme manage this.
- Meanwhile, as a matter of priority, Buckinghamshire should continue to engage with Government on seeking to secure an early commitment to a County Deal, which will also need to include plans for LEP integration and the future delivery of sector and business support functions.
- As part of the integration plan, it will also be necessary to commission a ‘due diligence’ review into contractual commitments and financial assets and liabilities, as well as legal advice in relation to company and transfer issues.

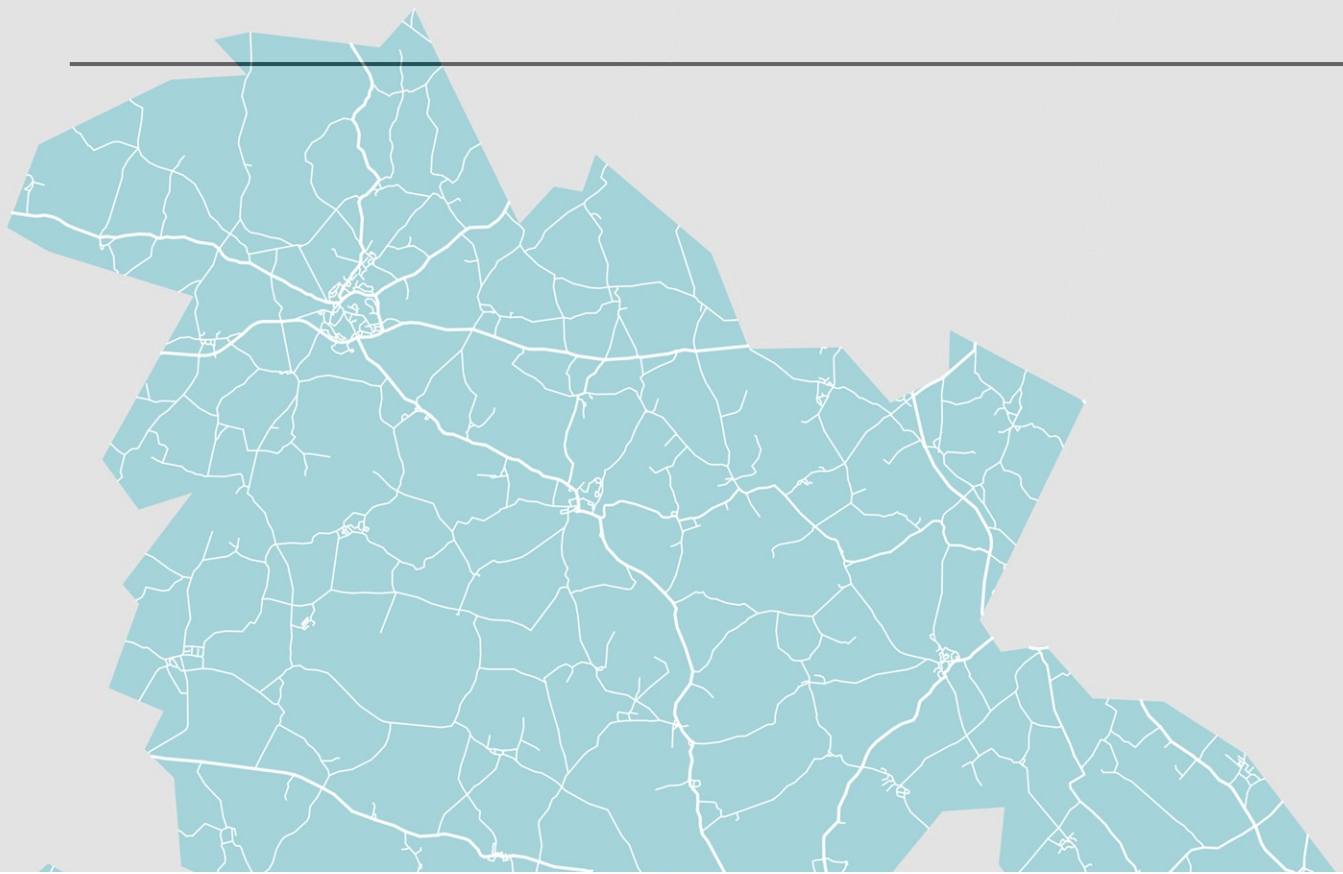
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## Summary diagram

The diagram below illustrates the new model for strategic economic and place governance and delivery capacity in Buckinghamshire.







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