



## Communities & Localism Select Committee supplementary agenda

Date: Thursday 21 January 2021

Time: 10.00 am

Venue: Virtual Meeting via MS Teams

### Membership:

N Brown, P Cooper, E Culverhouse, M Harker OBE, M Hashmi, T Hunter-Watts, P Irwin, P Kelly, G Peart, B Russel, L Smith BEM, L Sullivan, A Waite, L Walsh and J Wassell

Agenda Item	Page No
<b>8 Town and Parish Council Charter</b> The Committee will receive an update on the Town and Parish Council Charter. The charter will act as a framework (memorandum of understanding) to support partnership working and inform Buckinghamshire Council's approach to liaison with local councils. It will set out the relationship between the new Buckinghamshire Council and the 169 town and parish councils in Buckinghamshire, including how to harness the opportunities to strengthen partnership working and improve services for residents. It sets out the joint principles and respective roles, responsibilities and expectations, and it will be a live document which will be refreshed regularly in consultation with town and parish councils.	<b>3 - 30</b>

### Presenters:-

Gareth Williams – Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health  
Claire Hawkes – Service Director for Localities and Strategic Partnership

If you would like to attend a meeting, but need extra help to do so, for example because of a disability, please contact us as early as possible, so that we can try to put the right support in place.

For further information please contact: Clare Gray on 01895 837529, email [democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk).





## Report to Select Committee

**Date:** 21 January 2021

**Title:** **Town and Parish Charter Update**

**Author and/or contact officer:** Kate Walker/ Claire Hawkes

### Introduction

- 1.1 The new Localities and Strategic Partnerships Service have a focus on developing strong links and relationships with town and parish councils as key partners of the new Buckinghamshire Council.
- 1.2 The service has developed a Town and Parish Charter that articulates this ambition and includes several new working arrangements to support collaboration and strengthen the relationship between all tiers of local government.
- 1.3 The Charter sets out the relationship between the new Buckinghamshire Council and the town and parish councils in Buckinghamshire, including how we will harness the opportunities presented by the new beginning with a new unitary council, to strengthen partnership working and improve services for our residents. It sets out the joint principles and respective roles, responsibilities and expectations, and it will be a live document which will be refreshed regularly in consultation with town and parish councils.
- 1.4 The content of this document has been informed by consideration of national best practice, particularly consideration in relation to other unitary councils. Throughout the programme to deliver the new Buckinghamshire Council there were a series of workshops held with town and parish councils looking at how to improve working relationships. Feedback from these sessions has been used to develop the contents of the charter and how we work together.
- 1.5 The Charter has been developed in partnership with BMKALC and a working group of town and parish council clerks who have shared their expertise and vision of wanting to develop collaborative cultures and good joint working.
- 1.6 The impact of the pandemic at the beginning of the year meant that this work had to be paused in March 2020, however the desire to build good relationships with T&PC's remained. The Localities service were heavily involved in the coronavirus

community response, which was naturally the priority between March and September, this involved collaboration and building relationships with local councils that will be the foundation for the Charter.

- 1.7 At such a time of change it is important that there are clear structures and opportunities for communication, consultation and collaboration. The intended benefits of the charter are that it improves joint working strategically and operationally through setting out clear liaison structures, roles and expectations. The charter includes new liaison structures as follows:
  - a) Community Boards
  - b) Town and Parish Councils Liaison Forum
  - c) Clerks Liaison Forum
  - d) Annual Local Councils Conference
- 1.8 These liaison structures are already operating having been initiated during the response to Covid-19 and following positive feedback from clerks.

## **2. Update on Charter development**

- 2.1 Following the update to the Select Committee in November 2020, the working group have made final amendments to the draft charter ready to share more widely with all town and parish councils, their councillors and the unitary councillors.
- 2.2 It is important to allow town and parish councils and unitary councillors time to consider and review the proposed charter.
- 2.3 There will be an engagement period from 25 January – 24 February during which we will ask for feedback on the contents of the charter. The draft charter will be shared in full with town and parish councils, and unitary councillors electronically and they will be asked to send their comments and feedback to the service via email and through a short free text online survey.
- 2.4 BMKALC will work with us to support this period of consultation.
- 2.5 Following consultation, the final charter will be completed and designed as an accessible document that can be shared digitally by the communications team.

## **3. Communication, engagement & launching the Charter**

- 3.1 We are all still adjusting to our new ways of working, including the new Community Board model and until it is fully embedded it will be important to work closely with our town and parishes to show how valued they are as key local partners of the new council.

- 3.2 Following the engagement period and agreeing the final charter the Localities service will focus on launching and embedding the charter across the council and Buckinghamshire Town and Parish Councils.
- 3.3 The working group discussed using examples of how town and parish councils work and how we work together to bring the work of local councils alive. Every town and parish will have great examples to share. The proposal is to share a variety of examples through an additional document and other communications materials, such as videos, to go alongside the charter in promoting this as a good way of working together.
- 3.4 We will work with BMKALC who also produce a similar product as part of their annual reporting.
- 3.5 The Localities and Strategic partnerships service will use the Charter as a driver for a 'Think Local' campaign which would support a whole council approach of working closely with community boards and collaborative cultures with parishes. This is something the working group are passionate about and keen to support in raising awareness of town and parish councils as we come together as a new council.
- 3.6 Given the current climate, we are exploring ideas to launch the charter virtually, including the opportunity of linking this to the annual BMKALC conference if the timings allow.
- 3.7 The working group advised that town and parish councils would want to take the charter to a meeting to formally agree and adopt the commitments. We have discussed doing this alongside an electronic signing up to the charter.
- 3.8 To fully embed this way of working across the organisation we will develop a campaign to promote the charter and raise awareness of town and parish councils, the important role of the clerks and being a council that thinks local through our community boards and town and parishes.

**3.9 Timeline:**

25 Jan – 24 February	Share with town and parish councils for comment and feedback Share with all unitary councillors for comment and feedback
March	Feedback taken into account and final draft shared with working group, Cabinet Member, town and parish councils and Buckinghamshire Councillors.
End March	Cabinet member decision to confirm Buckinghamshire Council commitment to charter  Launch and virtual signing up to the charter by town and parish councils

	<i>(this may move to mid May following elections and purdah if needed)</i>
May, June	Embedding the charter and awareness raising campaign
Summer	Town and parish conference

*The draft of the Town and Parish Charter will follow as a supplementary agenda item before the meeting.*



# Town and Parish Charter



Working together for the people of Buckinghamshire



A shared commitment between Buckinghamshire Council  
and the parish and town councils of Buckinghamshire

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## 1. Welcome

**Gareth Williams, Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health,  
Buckinghamshire Council**



Strong local working relationships is essential in supporting the council and our services to understand and respond to what matters to our local people and communities. Local councils are at the heart of their communities; their connections, relationships and local knowledge is invaluable in supporting the council with local service design and delivery and they will play a key role in the council's new approach to locality working through Community Boards.

The council is committed to working closely with local councils, understanding and complementing each other's roles for the benefit of our people. We share the goal to make our county, towns and villages, great places to live, work and bring up a family and know that there is strength and value in doing that together.

The tremendous community spirit and dedication we have seen across Buckinghamshire of people coming together to support our communities and the vulnerable during the pandemic of 2020 has been overwhelming and we want to continue to build on this for the future. Relationships have been built, local links strengthened and there are many great examples of collaborative working. This has demonstrated the huge impact we can have when we work together, and I look forward to seeing this develop and grow.

We have a diverse range of local councils across Buckinghamshire, from town councils and large parishes, to small parish meetings in our rural villages and are committed to a flexible and adaptable approach to working with you all.

### **Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (BMKALC)**



**Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes  
Association of Local Councils**

We are a membership organisation representing the majority of town and parish councils and parish

meetings across Buckinghamshire. We give advice on best practice as well as updating members on the changes to statutory law that affects them to keep them operating legally and not making ultra vires decisions.

By working in partnership with the unitary authority we ensure that the views of local councils, who are the first tier of government and closest to the residents, are taken into consideration by Buckinghamshire Council to establish good working relationships between all parties. As Buckinghamshire is a very diverse county with a range of local councils both large and small, it is important that we work together to continue with a flexible way forward to benefit all groups.

To this end we have worked closely with Buckinghamshire Council before and during the transition to a unitary authority to ensure an understanding of local council structure, statutory law as well as their processes and procedures. We will continue the close working relationship ensuring the views, concerns and suggestions for the way forward are still taken into account by Councillors and officers of Buckinghamshire Council as each level strives to improve the lives of their communities and residents.

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## **2. Introduction**

Buckinghamshire is a newly formed unitary council area (from April 2020), with a secondary tier of local councils known as town and parish councils governed by locally elected representatives.

Both the unitary and local councils want Buckinghamshire to be a great place to live, work and bring up a family and know that by working together we can serve our residents better and improve their lives.

All 171 town and parish councils play a valuable role in local life, are trusted within their communities and possess local knowledge and insight that can help the process of community planning and decision-making. The town and parish councils across Buckinghamshire are the first and most local tier of government in the county with powers and duties laid down in law, and the ability to shape the decisions that affect communities at a local level. The establishment of the new unitary council offers an exciting new beginning for Buckinghamshire, including the opportunity to strengthen and build upon existing relationships and partnership arrangements.

Local councils in Buckinghamshire range from town councils with tens of thousands of residents and budgets in the hundreds of thousands, to parish meetings with under 100 residents and in many cases no budget at all. One size does not fit all, and Buckinghamshire Council is committed to working with all town and parish councils, and their representative bodies, in the most effective way possible so that together we can improve services and outcomes for all our residents.

This charter has one simple aim - to provide a framework for us to work together to serve the people of Buckinghamshire. We have a common purpose to promote the wellbeing of Buckinghamshire, and we serve the same residents. This is the foundation of our charter.

This sets out the relationship between the new Buckinghamshire Council and the town and parish councils in Buckinghamshire, including how we will harness the opportunities presented by this exciting new beginning for Buckinghamshire to strengthen partnership working and improve services for our residents. It sets out the joint principles and respective roles, responsibilities and expectations, and it will be a live document which will be refreshed regularly in consultation with town and parish councils.

Diversity across the local council sector is recognised. Whilst the impact of these shared commitments on individual councils will vary according to scale, its principles are consistent and by signing up to this document councils agree to:

- work together to promote the best interests of the communities we serve;
- provide quality, value for money public services and;
- promote opportunities for greater public participation and involvement in public life

The charter is founded on mutual respect of all member councils and between the two tiers of local government as democratically accountable bodies. By working together Buckinghamshire Council and town and parish councils to strengthen relationships and work in partnership for the benefit of our local communities.

For this charter to work, it needs to be picked up, read, understood and referred to at all levels throughout our organisations. The charter and its principles will be disseminated throughout the unitary council and local councils as the basis for working together to achieve greater efficiencies and better outcomes for our local communities.

Town and parish councils represent most of Buckinghamshire except the unparished area of High Wycombe which is represented by the High Wycombe Town Committee and High Wycombe Community Board. Appendix 1 provides details of how the council will continue to engage with residents of the unparished area of High Wycombe through these forums.

*The development of this charter was informed by feedback from town and parish councils, input from discussions with Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils and discussions as part of the unitary programme.*

For more information about the charter please contact [localities@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:localities@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)

### **3. Understanding town and parish councils**

There are 171 town and parish councils in Buckinghamshire ranging from town councils and larger parishes to small parish meetings.

#### **The role of local councils**

“Local councils work towards improving community well-being and providing better services. Their activities fall into three main categories: representing the local community; delivering services to meet local needs; striving to improve quality of life and community well-being.

Through an extensive range of discretionary powers local councils provide and maintain a variety of important and visible local services including allotments, bridleways, burial grounds, bus shelters, car parks, commons and open spaces, community transport schemes, community safety and crime reduction measures, events and festivals, footpaths, leisure and sports facilities, litter bins, public toilets, planning, street cleaning and lighting, tourism activities, traffic calming measures, village greens and youth projects.” (source NALC website <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/about-local-councils>)

#### **The role of the clerk**

Town and parish council clerks are the ‘engine’ of the council. The clerk is the principal executive and adviser for the council, and for the majority of smaller parish councils, clerks are responsible for the administration of its finances.

Clerks carry out the role of the Proper Officer of the Council and as such are under a statutory duty to carry out all the functions, and in particular to serve or issue all the notifications required by law of a local authority's Proper Officer. The Clerk is totally responsible for ensuring that the instructions of the Council in connection with its function as a Local Authority are carried out. Alongside this, many clerks also hold the position of the Responsible Financial Officer and are therefore responsible for all financial records of the council and the careful administration of its finances.

#### **The role of elected town and parish councillors**

Town and parish councillors are elected representatives of their community. They are unpaid for this role.

Local councillors have three main areas of work:

- Decision-making: through attending meetings and committees with other elected members, councillors decide which activities to support, where money should be spent, what services should be delivered and what policies should be implemented.
- Monitoring: councillors make sure that their decisions lead to efficient and effective services by keeping an eye on how well things are working.

- Getting involved locally: as local representatives, councillors have responsibilities towards their constituents and local organisations. This often depends on what the councillor wants to achieve and how much time is available.

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## **4. Respecting and valuing each other**

Successful partnership working at a local level can only be achieved if all parties - the unitary council and town and parish councils - understand and respect each other's roles and work to complement those roles in serving the community.

In general, officers, councillors and other partners involved in joint working value the helpfulness and professionalism of their colleagues. There is openness and a willingness to work together.

There is always room for improvement and through this charter we will recognise the impact of how we behave with each other and our commitment to building strong partnerships.

### **Buckinghamshire Council recognise that town and parish councils:**

- Are a vital part of local democracy and represent communities at a truly local level.
- Serve their residents by addressing the most local needs and concerns of their communities
- Are a primary source of information about community aspirations and opinions and a key connection between the unitary council and their community
- Provide an opportunity to foster greater community empowerment, in particular through devolution and Community Boards

### **Town and parish councils recognise that Buckinghamshire Council:**

- Represents the interests of local communities at a unitary county level
- Has strategic roles and responsibilities and has to work within government financial constraints
- Has to take into account community interests wider than the town or parish

### **We will:**

- Work together to raise awareness and support a greater understanding of town and parish councils across the unitary council to strengthen working relationships.

## 5. Effective communication

Working together effectively is founded on good relationships and regular opportunities for discussion, sharing and keeping one another updated. To facilitate this regular and effective communication channels are required.

As a democratically elected council, the first point of contact for town and parish councils will be their local Buckinghamshire Council councillors. Buckinghamshire Councillors are able to escalate and pursue local issues on behalf of local councils and residents, including through Community Boards if appropriate.

Operational day to day matters can be dealt with directly with council officers such as highways, playgrounds, waste and recycling. Parish clerks will be provided with key contacts in all services with which they need to interact as well as a dedicated phone line into the customer contact centre and dedicated parish liaison officers.

To ensure effective engagement at a strategic, regional and county-wide level, regular strategic forums and conferences will be held to enable discussions with services such as Highways.



There are several mechanisms in place to facilitate closer working relationships and the opportunity for regular dialogue.

- **Community Boards**

The Community Boards will be the key forum for the council to connect with local communities, groups and organisations. Community boards are a new way of working with our communities to explore issues that matter most to them and find creative solutions together with those who can make them happen. They will not replace the role or work of

town and parish councils but complement all public services, with specific projects and funding. The dedicated chair and coordinator will be the main council link for local issues.

Community boards are the local forum for addressing local issues and enabling local solutions by working together, including delivery of devolved budget and influencing local service design and delivery. Community boards will be tailored to their local area so each one will be different, with the common goal on bringing communities together to make a difference. They will use local data and intelligence, together with extensive engagement and listening to the people in their communities to prioritise areas of focus and explore issues that are of most importance.

Community Boards are open to all members of the community to attend and get involved. This includes Buckinghamshire Council officers, town and parish councils, public, partners, local community groups and organisations.

They are chaired by an appointed local Buckinghamshire Council councillor.

Councillors and clerks of town and parish councils are encouraged to take an active role in their community board, through attendance at meetings and involvement in the working groups and wider work of the boards.

- **BMKALC Town and parish councils' liaison forum**

The county-wide liaison forum supports two-way communications on strategic issues of common interest (e.g. service changes, budgets, etc.).

Town and parish councils (up to two representatives per local council, councillor or clerk) meet with Buckinghamshire Council senior officers on a quarterly basis. The forum is chaired by a BMKALC executive board representative with Buckinghamshire Council executive officers in attendance.

- **Clerks' Liaison Forum**

The Clerks' Liaison Forum is a quarterly forum for clerks and council staff to liaise on both practical and strategic issues. This forum is open to all clerks to meet with Buckinghamshire Council senior officers, chaired by Deputy Chief Executive, Buckinghamshire Council.

- **Town and Parish Councils' Conference**

The conference will be an annual event to share best practice and strategic updates, open to all local councillors and clerks involving a range of services from across Buckinghamshire Council, Buckinghamshire Council senior officers and councillors.

**To support effective communication Buckinghamshire Council will:**

- Provide Town and parish councils with a named officer for each Community Board area

- Provide a named officer with overall responsibility for strategic support and liaison with Town and Parish Councils
- Develop and maintain effective communication channels for Town and parish councils including:
  - A single priority telephone number for Town and parish councils to use when contacting Buckinghamshire Council
  - Newsletters with local updates for each community board area
  - Key contacts list for council service areas
- Ensure proactive and timely communication on key issues that will have an impact on Town and Parish Councils
- Ensure timely responses to information requests from Town and Parish Councils
- Advise Town & Parish Councils of changes to contact details
- Maintain a single database and website list of all town and parish councils
- Work in partnership with town and parish councils to enable the transfer of services and assets where this will benefit local communities, in accordance with the Council's agreed Service Devolution and Asset Transfer Policy

### **To support effective communication Town and parish councils will:**

- Progress enquiries and resolve issues through the communication channels promoted
- Provide feedback to ensure that channels remain effective and fit for purpose
- Maintain relationships with named officers in Buckinghamshire Council to facilitate effective joint working and communications
- Ensure timely responses to information requests from Buckinghamshire Council
- Advise Buckinghamshire Council of changes to contact details so that a single list can be maintained.

### **Joint communication**

The council and BMKALC joined forces to send weekly, and then fortnightly updates during the first 3 months of the COVID-19 pandemic. This proved to be a key channel to keep everyone up to date with changes during a difficult time that was welcomed by town and parish councils and has paved the way for regular communications going forward.

*“It was extremely helpful and very valuable for our community – great job.”*

*“It is by far the most informative, concise and best structured of all the Bucks communications and it is not being replaced by anything nearly as good in terms of communication flow. The lack of Covid does not mean that a lack of communication is ok. Indeed most of what has been interesting about this newsletter has been non-Covid content”*

## **6. Local democracy and community leadership**

Local democracy and community leadership is about ensuring elected representatives can fairly and effectively represent their wards and electors. It is important that the relationship between Buckinghamshire Councillors and Town and Parish councillors is open, and information is readily shared between these groups.

### **Buckinghamshire Council will:**

- Assign the Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Health lead responsibility for relationships with Town and Parish Councils to champion town and parish councils
- Encourage Buckinghamshire councillors to attend Community Board meetings
- Encourage Buckinghamshire councillors to attend local town and parish council meetings, as appropriate and work constructively with town and parish councils
- Invite town and parish councils to attend local Community Board meetings and get involved
- Ensure that support is provided for the administration of Town and Parish Council elections, polls and referendums, as required
- Provide guidance on producing neighbourhood plans
- Provide guidance on producing local emergency plans
- Provide planning training to town and parish councils
- Provide the opportunity for strategic conversations with Cabinet Members on specific issues where appropriate

### **Town & Parish Councils will:**

- Invite Buckinghamshire Council councillors to attend Town and Parish Council meetings
- Ensure agendas and papers are available in the public domain, as appropriate
- Attend Community Board meetings and get involved
- Produce neighbourhood plans, as required
- Produce local emergency plans, as required

## **Partnership working on flood defences in Aylesbury**

In February 2014, over 80 properties flooded on the Willows estate to the west of Aylesbury. Working with residents, the former Buckinghamshire County Council and Aylesbury Vale District Council purchased temporary defences (a 700m long barrier and several pumps) on behalf of the residents, using Central Government Resilience funding. The defences are designed to protect the estate in the future against flood events like that in 2014.

Aylesbury Town Council (ATC) and Buckinghamshire Council (BC, previously BCC) agreed for the defences to be stored at and deployed from the Aylesbury Town Council depot.

Buckinghamshire Council staff watch the weather forecast and water levels in the Stoke Brook alongside the Willows estate and take the decision with Aylesbury Town Council on when to use the defences. Aylesbury Town Council take responsibility to deploy the defences as required on site. There has been training with ATC and BC staff and residents to ensure the deployment is done safely and in accordance with the plan. The plan was put into action during Storm Alex in early October 2020 and internal property flooding on the estate was largely successfully avoided. The partnership between Buckinghamshire Council, Aylesbury Town Council and residents demonstrates excellent partnership working to manage this flooding issue.

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## **7. Collaboration**

Buckinghamshire Council and town and parish councils are both responsible for serving our communities, residents, visitors, and businesses. This means that Buckinghamshire Council and town and parish councils will need to work together (including delivery of services where appropriate) to deliver the best outcomes for Buckinghamshire. There are a number of examples of good collaboration already taking place, for example in highways devolution and Buckinghamshire's response to Covid - we want to build on this further.

### **Buckinghamshire Council will:**

- Recognise the diversity and variety of Town and Parish Councils, and tailor approaches accordingly (i.e. one size does not fit all)
- Work in partnership with Town and Parish councils to enable the transfer of services and assets, in accordance with the Council's Service Devolution and Asset Transfer Policy
- Encourage and support the development of local solutions to local problems, for example through innovative projects
- Support Town and Parish councils to address local needs through the provision of advice and signposting

### **Town & Parish Councils will:**

- Consider opportunities for the transfer of services and assets to benefit local communities
- Contribute to the work of Community Boards by participating and contributing ideas, supporting the development of ideas/projects, and considering match-funding, as appropriate
- Work with Buckinghamshire Council to address local needs, including through advice and signposting, as appropriate.

### **Co locating local services**

The vision for Council Access Points was that they would be a place in a local area where residents can go to access information about a wide range of topics, a social space that they can enjoy, and a place where they can get support from different services.

Local Access Points are an integral part of the Buckinghamshire Council's Customer Service Strategy. They are particularly important to ensure that all residents across Buckinghamshire continue to have access to services more locally, without the need to travel long distances.

Local councils have offices often located in the heart of their communities. Iver Parish Council office was agreed as a County Council 'community hub pilot' and has now become a Council Access Point for the new unitary council. Parish council staff have been trained to be able to support residents that visit the access point with their queries. An iPad and printer were installed in the office to enable residents to access Buckinghamshire Council services online and complete transactions. The Iver office also has a direct dial line into the Buckinghamshire Council customer services team to be able to transfer residents directly or gain support for more difficult queries.

Iver Parish Council said they were "looking forward to supporting the new unitary council in this exciting new venture".

## **8. Consultation**

Consultation provides opportunity to hear from businesses and residents on our proposed changes to policy, planning, and strategies. Effective and meaningful consultation is essential in empowering local communities and ensuring local voices are heard.

### **Buckinghamshire Council will:**

- Ensure that Town and parish councils have their say on proposed changes to services, as consultees
- Ensure that information about all public consultations are communicated to town and parish councils in a timely manner with proportionate notice period for responses
- Prepare a summary report for any BC consultations that are more than four pages long
- Provide briefings to Town and parish councils on complex consultation issues
- Recognise Town and Parish Council's cycles of meetings, precept timelines, etc.
- Consult with Town and parish councils on planning issues, as appropriate

### **Town & Parish Councils will:**

- Endeavour to take part in consultation exercises and respond within the given period
- Submit feedback on proposed changes through the most appropriate channel
- Cascade information on consultations to Town and Parish councillors and residents, as appropriate
- Submit local views on planning matters

## **Working with Town and Parish Councils on service design**

As part of the Planning and Environment service review the council has gathered views of town and parish councils through engagement and briefing sessions. Theme led focus groups will take place as part of the service design stage to help develop ideas further.

The Planning and Environment Service have also delivered training sessions on how planning works in the new council.

## **9. Advice and Service Support**

Residents, visitors and businesses benefit from well trained and skilled local government members and officers. We recognise the resourcing difference between the councils and therefore want to ensure we are able to provide opportunities for Town and Parish Council members and officers to receive relevant training and advice.

### **Buckinghamshire Council will:**

- Promote a ‘think local, think parish’ approach in how the Council makes decisions. This means that members and officers will consider the impact of changes in service delivery/policy on town and parish councils, including consulting, where relevant.
- Develop, in partnership with Town and Parish Councils, guidance and training for councillors and staff on how best to work with local councils.
- Provide briefings on service changes where there is a significant impact for Town and Parish Councils
- Support BMKALC in providing training resources for Town and Parish Councils, as required. This may include specific training or briefing sessions on services where relevant (i.e. emergency planning, planning policy, etc.)

### **Town & Parish Councils will:**

- Promote and support training and briefing opportunities to Town and Parish Council staff and councillors
- Work with BMKALC to support the delivery of training and identify training needs
- Feedback on training, advice and support, as appropriate
- Take advantage of training available from a wide range of sources including BMKALC and NALC to maintain and develop skills.

## **10. Shared Commitments**

### **Equality of opportunity**

Buckinghamshire Council embraces equality and diversity in all its work. The issue of equality is not the responsibility of one section or service area solely, it is owned by all Members and staff at all levels of the Council.

In Buckinghamshire we recognise the value difference can make and we are committed to serving the diverse needs of our communities. We are committed to treating everyone fairly, openly and honestly and the Council is striving to achieve equality for the diverse mix in our communities and our own workforce, recognising that people have different needs, cultures, experiences and expectations.

The Council recognises that valuing equality and diversity will lead to more sensitive services that are responsive to the needs of the communities, a workforce that is representative of the community, and a commitment to participation by all.

Local Councils in Buckinghamshire are encouraged to make the same commitments and to eliminating discrimination in all its forms, providing equality of opportunity to all the communities we serve.

### **Safeguarding**

Safeguarding responsibilities encapsulate our duty to reduce accidental harm and to protect vulnerable adults and children and young people from abuse. This includes harassment and discrimination, neglect, emotional abuse, violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, and financial abuse. Safeguarding should ensure that all reasonable actions and approaches are taken to minimise the risk of accidents and harm, and to enable individuals to make appropriate choices and have opportunities to take part in day to day life.

Buckinghamshire Council responds to all concerns about the safety of a vulnerable adult, child, or young person. In doing so it takes appropriate actions to address the concerns and reduce risk by working to the agreed policies and procedures in full partnership with other local agencies. The Council considers safeguarding in a proactive manner to raise awareness of issues and take actions to minimise potential risks occurring.

Local Councils in Buckinghamshire are encouraged to think about safeguarding and to help to protect vulnerable adults, children and young people as part of our shared responsibilities to the people of Buckinghamshire.

### **Ethical Standards**

All elected councillors of the unitary and town and parish councils in Buckinghamshire have a duty to adhere to the highest ethical standards and, when undertaking their role, to comply with their Council's adopted Code of Conduct.

Buckinghamshire Council is committed to promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct amongst elected councillors and have adopted a Code of Conduct setting out the behaviour we expect of our councillors as they carry out that role. The council recognises the importance of good governance in preserving the confidence of local communities and the benefit of learning from and adopting best practice to achieve this. The council responds to all concerns about the behaviour of councillors and takes appropriate action to address these concerns through the council's member complaints process.

Local councils in Buckinghamshire are encouraged to make the same commitment in promoting the highest ethical standards and behaviours amongst their councillors.

Buckinghamshire Council has a statutory duty to investigate complaints and concerns against town and parish councils and will do so fairly and expeditiously in accordance with the council's complaints procedure. The council will also share good practice and training with town and parish councils.

### **Review and operation of the charter**

The charter will initially be reviewed after a twelve-month period and again after a further three years. However, changes in functions or legislation may dictate that it be updated as and when required. It will also be reviewed following any Local Government Elections. The Charter will be monitored and evaluated regularly, through liaison meetings with BMKALC, Liaison Forums, direct communications and further opportunities to raise issues of common interest or concern through Community Boards.

## **11. Planning**

Buckinghamshire Council aims to create an outcome focused planning service that places customers at the heart of service delivery. All elements of service delivery will be continuously tested against an ambition for the service to be:

**“Shaping and enhancing the County to secure the quality of life in Buckinghamshire now and the future.”**

To do this the council will work closely with town and parish councils to:

- Ensure that there is engagement at a local level;
- Enable town and parish councils to share the views of the communities they represent;
- Recognise the importance of local knowledge held by town and parish councils; and
- Equip town and parishes with knowledge and skills to be able to contribute to the planning process.

### **Neighbourhood planning and local plans**

Town and parish councils will be able to set policies for their own local areas by preparing Neighbourhood Plans. The Buckinghamshire Council recognises the importance of a plan led system and will support local councils in the production of these where possible.

The Buckinghamshire Council will produce a Local Plan that will replace the current adopted local plans on completion, in addition to the Minerals and Waste Local Plan.

### **Planning Applications**

Town and parish councils are a statutory consultee in the planning process. Buckinghamshire Council notifies town and parish councils received in their area, whom have 21 days to submit any representations. These are very important in highlighting issues, particularly local issues that you have knowledge of, called material planning considerations, which need to be taken into account when applications are decided.

Town and parish councils should make comments using the Public Access section of the relevant part of the website (or Consultee Access where available). This ensures that comments are automatically and immediately published on the website. When commenting on applications, Town and Parish Councils are encouraged to also highlight any potential infrastructure issues in their local area that may be addressed through Section 106 negotiations with applicants.

### **Planning Committee**

The power to determine applications rests with either a planning committee or more usually delegated to officers. In accordance with best practice over 96% of applications are usually determined under delegated authority. This allows Planning Committees to focus their resources more effectively on cases of local or strategic significance, which would benefit

from scrutiny. Where an application is referred to an area or strategic planning committee, town and parish councils will be given a dedicated speaking slot where they have made representation. The speaking slot for town and parish council's is 3 minutes shared. At the strategic planning committee, more time can be allocated, at the discretion of the chairman, to allow parish and town councils to participate fully.

## **Enforcement**

The Buckinghamshire Council recognise that the Town and parish councils have an important role to play in the enforcement of planning control. The council are keen to use the parish and town councils as our 'eyes and ears'. Local knowledge when dealing with planning enforcement matters can often turn up important information and we are keen to tap into the local resource. We also see Town and Parish Councils assisting us in our monitoring of formal notice compliance.

## **Training**

The Buckinghamshire Council will ensure that town and parish councils receive training to enable full participation in planning processes. Training sessions will be provided through BMKALC by officers of the service. In addition, the council will provide updates on the service at BMKALC meetings.

## **Newsletter**

Buckinghamshire Council will provide quarterly planning updates to town and parish councils advising of changes in national and local planning policy, legislation and guidance.

## Making it happen

This charter's implementation is the joint responsibility of Buckinghamshire Council and Town and Parish Councils.

This charter will be published and communicated widely to Buckinghamshire Council staff, members and all Town and Parish Councils.

Through their work in developing relationships with town and parish councils the Localities and Strategic Partnerships Service in Buckinghamshire Council will monitor and progress the implementation of the charter. Where there may be areas of concern raised these will be resolved collaboratively.

This charter is a statement of intent on the relationship of the new Council. It will be reviewed annually and will continue to develop over time.

**Signed**

Buckinghamshire Council

BMKALC

Local Council in Buckinghamshire

# **Appendix 1 - Engagement and Representation in High Wycombe**

The town of High Wycombe remains an unparished area and does not have a town or parish council. Buckinghamshire Council is fully committed to ensuring that residents and businesses in the town are engaged and supported.

Two of the ways in which the council supports residents in High Wycombe are through the High Wycombe Town Committee and the High Wycombe Community Board.

## **1. High Wycombe Town Committee**

### **Role, Purpose and Membership**

The High Wycombe Town Committee was established as a committee of the former Wycombe District Council (now adopted by the new Buckinghamshire Council) to act as an advisory body to the council, cabinet and other relevant committees on any issues affecting the unparished area of High Wycombe.

The membership of the High Wycombe Town Committee is restricted to Buckinghamshire Councillors\* representing the wards of High Wycombe that cover the unparished area.

The High Wycombe Town Committee can consider any issue referred to it by the council, the cabinet, or other committees. It also considers any issues, which in the opinion of the Chairman, or at least 5 members of the committee, is of particular relevance / importance to the residents of High Wycombe town.

The committee must meet at least twice a year, but in practice often meets four or five times a year. Meetings are webcast and can be accessed through the Buckinghamshire Council website.

In the past year the committee has discussed topics such as the High Wycombe Market, Allotments, High Wycombe Transport Strategy, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) allocations and Climate Change Projects.

### **Special Expenses**

One of the key functions of the committee is to make recommendations to the cabinet / full council as to which services should be deemed a Special Expense. The committee also recommends the amount required to be raised each year for Special Expense purposes and is consulted on any schemes or proposals that would alter these levels significantly. Special Expenses currently include: Public Halls and Community Centres, Cemeteries, Recreation Grounds, Allotments, Footway Lighting, War Memorials and grants to voluntary and community sector groups.

In addition to this the High Wycombe Town Committee monitors and reviews those services provided under Special Expenses and makes recommendations for changes or improvements to the Cabinet, appropriate Committee or Service Director.

## **Grants for Voluntary Sector Organisations**

The High Wycombe Town Committee also runs two grants schemes for voluntary sector organisations operating within the town. The community facilities grants, awarded for one-off projects which must be for the improvement/upgrading of a community facility and community support grants, awarded for one-off projects, events or activities.

## **2. High Wycombe Community Board**

### **Purpose and Style**

The High Wycombe Community Board is an exciting new initiative, enabling local people to have a voice, helping them to work with the Council, local agencies and other community organisations to make a real difference within their communities.

The Community board will represent the voices of local people and is creative in how thoughts, ideas and suggestions are captured, enabling local residents and partners to work with Buckinghamshire councillors to identify need, priorities and creative solutions.

The community board has a dedicated coordinator who will champion the local area and help to drive forward an action plan of collaborative working through informal working groups and projects to improve outcomes for residents.

### **Membership, Meetings and Budgets**

The membership of the High Wycombe Community Board includes councillors representing the unparished area of High Wycombe as well as statutory partners from police, fire & rescue and health, voluntary and community sector partners, residents and businesses.

The High Wycombe Community Board meets 'formally' around 5 times per year and has a budget of £312,000 which can be spent on local projects that address the agreed local priorities. The budget consists of three funding streams, community areas priorities fund, health and wellbeing fund and local infrastructure fund.

The High Wycombe Community Board is a public meeting which members of the public are encouraged to attend. Decisions are usually made by consensus although Buckinghamshire councillors may be asked to vote on specific issues such as budget allocation or when a consensus cannot be found.

*\*Please note this only refers to Buckinghamshire Councillors who were members of the former Wycombe District Council until formal elections to the Buckinghamshire Council take place in 2021.*