



Report to Select Committee

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Title: **Town and Parish Charter Update**

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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.

