



# All Councils 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

### Steve Bowles, Cabinet Member for Communities, Buckinghamshire Council



Strong local working relationships are essential in supporting Buckinghamshire 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 Buckinghamshire Council with local service design and delivery and they will play a key role in the unitary council's new approach to locality working through Community Boards.

Buckinghamshire Council is committed to working closely with local councils, understanding and complementing each other's roles for the benefit of our residents. 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 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.

# All Councils Charter

This charter is founded on the mutual respect of all member councils as independent, democratically accountable bodies and has one simple aim - to provide a framework for us to work together to serve the people of Buckinghamshire. 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 all 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

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

- Are independent democratically elected bodies who work within their own financial constraints and represent communities at a truly local level by addressing the most local needs and concerns of their communities
- Are key partners who provide opportunities to foster greater community empowerment, through devolution and Community Boards

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

- Must consider community interests wider than the town or parish, representing the interests of local communities at a unitary county level
- Has strategic roles and responsibilities and must work within government financial constraints, guidance and legislation

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

- Progress enquiries / resolve issues through the communication channels promoted and 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

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

- Provide town and parish councils with a named officer for each Community Board area and a named officer with overall responsibility for strategic support and liaison with town and parish councils
- Maintain a single database and website list of all 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 Buckinghamshire Council service areas

## **To support effective communication all councils will:**

- Ensure proactive and timely communication on key issues that will have an impact on each other's councils
- Ensure timely responses to information requests from each other's councils
- Advise each other of changes to key contact details
- Work in partnership to enable the transfer of services and assets where this will benefit local communities, in accordance with Buckinghamshire Council's agreed Service Devolution and Asset Transfer Policy.

*\*Please note, it is recognised that not all councils have the resources or the desire to take on additional services and assets and that there is no compulsion or expectation to do so.*

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

- Invite Buckinghamshire Council councillors to attend town and parish Council meetings as appropriate
- Encourage a councillor to attend community board meetings to represent the council and to work collaboratively with partners to resolve local issues
- Promote and support training and briefing opportunities to town and parish council officers and councillors
- Consider opportunities for the transfer of services and assets to benefit local communities where appropriate
- Encourage councillors to support Community Boards by participating and contributing to ideas /projects, and considering match-funding, if appropriate
- Work with Buckinghamshire Council to address local needs, including through advice and signposting, as appropriate.
- Encourage councillors and residents to give their views on consultations, including official council responses if appropriate
- Submit local views on planning matters

### **Buckinghamshire Council will:**

- Appoint the Cabinet Member for Communities as the unitary council's lead for relationships with town and parish councils and the champion of local councils.
- Recognise town and parish councils as key members of the community boards
- Encourage Buckinghamshire councillors to attend community board meetings and support the development of local solutions to local problems, for example through innovative projects
- Encourage Buckinghamshire councillors to attend town and parish council meetings and work constructively with town and parish councils
- Ensure that support is provided to town and parish councils for the administration of elections, polls and referendums, as required
- Provide planning training for town and parish councils and adopt a Statement of Community Involvement which will set out how BC will consult with town and parish councils on local planning issues
- Provide opportunities for strategic conversations with cabinet members and senior officers on specific issues where appropriate
- 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 BMKALC and town and parish councils, guidance and training for councillors and staff on how to work effectively with local 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.)
- Recognise the diversity and variety of town and parish councils, and tailor approaches accordingly (i.e. one size does not fit all) but work in partnership with town and parish councils to enable transfer of services and assets, where it is agreed by all parties, in line with BC's Service Devolution and Asset Transfer Policy
- Support town and parish councils to address local needs through the provision of advice and signposting
- Ensure that town and parish councils have the opportunity to comment on proposed changes to services, as consultees and that information about all public consultations are communicated to town and parish councils in a timely manner with proportionate notice period for responses
- Provide briefings to town and parish councils on complex consultation issues with a summary report for any BC consultations that are more than four pages long
- Recognise town and parish council's cycles of meetings, precept timelines, etc.

This charter's implementation is the joint responsibility of all councils in Buckinghamshire. It will be published and communicated widely to officers and councillors in all our councils.

This charter is a statement of intent on the relationship between all councils in Buckinghamshire. It will be reviewed regularly and will continue to develop over time.

### 3. Introduction

This charter is founded on the mutual respect of all member councils as independent, democratically accountable bodies and 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, as we serve the same residents. This is the foundation of our charter.

The charter sets out the relationship between the town and parish councils in Buckinghamshire and the new Buckinghamshire Council, 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 all 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

For this charter to work, it needs to be picked up, read, understood and adhered to at all levels throughout our organisations. The charter and its principles will be shared 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. Although the High Wycombe Town Committee is not a town or parish council, appendix 2 provides details of how Buckinghamshire Council will continue to engage with residents of the unparished area of High Wycombe.

*This Charter was developed in partnership. It was conceived following workshops and discussions between members of all councils in Buckinghamshire and Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (BMKALC) as part of the Buckinghamshire Council's unitary programme. The charter was progressed by a working group of officers from 10 town and parish councils, Buckinghamshire Council and BMKALC. The working group would like to thank all town and parish councillors, clerks and unitary councillors whose feedback during the period of engagement has helped shape the charter.*

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

## 4. Understanding town and parish councils

### The role of local councils

“Local councils work towards improving community wellbeing 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, events and festivals, footpaths, leisure and sports facilities, litter bins, public toilets, planning, street cleaning and lighting, tourism activities, village greens and youth projects.” (source National Association of Local Councils website <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/about-local-councils>)

### The role of the clerk

The clerk is the principal officer for the council, and for most smaller parish councils, the clerk is responsible for the administration of its finances. Larger parish and town councils may have several officers or a large team of officers, depending on the size of the council.

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 to serve or issue all the notifications required by law of a local authority's Proper Officer. Alongside this, many clerks also hold the position of the Responsible Financial Officer.

### The role of elected town and parish councillors

Town and parish councillors are elected representatives of their community. They are unpaid for this role. There are occasions when parish councillors are not elected but co-opted onto a council.

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 as well as commenting on local planning applications.
- 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 may include representing the interests of their constituents on outside bodies and with other tiers of government.

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

Successful partnership working at a local level can only be achieved if all parties 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 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 independent democratically elected bodies who work within their own financial constraints
- Are a vital part of local democracy, who represent communities at a truly local level 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
- Are key partners who provide opportunities to foster greater community empowerment, through devolution and Community Boards

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

- Must consider community interests wider than the town or parish, representing the interests of local communities at a unitary county level
- Has strategic roles and responsibilities and must work within government financial constraints, guidance and legislation

### **We will:**

- Work together to raise awareness and support a greater understanding of all councils across the Buckinghamshire to strengthen working relationships.



## 6. 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 democratically elected councillors, the first point of contact for town and parish councillors will often be their local unitary councillors and vice versa. Buckinghamshire Councillors are able to escalate and pursue local issues on behalf of local councils and residents through their own contacts or even through Community Boards if appropriate.

However, operational day to day matters are often best dealt with directly between officers such as highways, playgrounds, waste and recycling. Parish clerks are 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 community, operational or strategic level, regular meetings, forums and communication channels have been put in place. These are not exhaustive and can be continually reviewed to ensure that communication is effective.

### Strengthening Relationships



## **Community Boards**

The Community Boards will be the key forum for all councils to connect with local communities, groups and organisations. Community boards are a new way of working with our communities to explore the issues which matter most to them and to find creative solutions. They will not replace the role or work of town and parish councils but encourage collaborative joined up working, with specific local projects and devolved funding. The dedicated chair and coordinator will be the main Buckinghamshire Council link for local community issues.

Community Boards are open to all members of the community to attend and get involved. This includes unitary councillors & officers, town and parish councillors & clerks, residents, partners, local community groups and organisations.

## **Clerks Forums**

The Clerks Forums are quarterly meetings for clerks and Buckinghamshire Council officers providing the opportunity for discussion and knowledge sharing on both operational and strategic issues. These forums are key to building good working relationships between staff across all our councils and are chaired by senior officers from the Deputy Chief Executives Service at Buckinghamshire Council.

## **BMKALC Town and Parish Councils Liaison Forum**

The county-wide parish liaison forum supports two-way communications on strategic issues of common interest. It is hosted by BMKALC and chaired by a representative of the BMKALC Executive Board. It is also attended by the Leader and Chief Executive of Buckinghamshire Council as well as the Cabinet Member for Communities. The forum meets quarterly giving town and parish councils the opportunity to discuss key issues with relevant Cabinet Members and Service Directors from 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, including senior officers and councillors.

## **Parish Drop ins**

The Localities & Strategic Partnerships Service will hold regular drop-ins for town and parish councillors to ensure that there are plenty of opportunities to discuss issues, share information and build relationships. Sometimes these drop-ins will be focused around a particular topic e.g. consultations etc. and others will be more general catch ups.

## 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

## 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
- Maintain a single database and website list of all 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 Buckinghamshire Council service areas

## To support effective communication all councils will:

- Ensure proactive and timely communication on key issues that will have an impact on each other's councils
- Ensure timely responses to information requests from each other's councils
- Advise each other of changes to key contact details
- Work in partnership to enable the transfer of services and assets where this will benefit local communities, in accordance with Buckinghamshire Council's agreed Service Devolution and Asset Transfer Policy.

*\*Please note, it is recognised that not all councils have the resources or the desire to take on additional services and assets and that there is no compulsion or expectation to do so.*

### Joint communication

The council and BMKALC joined forces to send weekly, and then fortnightly updates during the first 3 months of the pandemic. This proved a key channel to keep everyone up to date and 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"*

## 7. 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 unitary councillors and town and parish councillors is open, and information is readily shared.

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

- Invite Buckinghamshire Council councillors to attend town and parish Council meetings as appropriate
- Encourage a councillor to attend community board meetings to represent the council and to work collaboratively with partners to resolve local issues
- Produce neighbourhood plans, if appropriate
- Produce local emergency plans, if appropriate

*\*Buckinghamshire Council will provide training, support and resources to assist local councils who wish to develop their own local neighbourhood plans or local emergency plans.*

### **Buckinghamshire Council will:**

- Appoint the Cabinet Member for Communities as the unitary council's lead for relationships with town and parish councils and the champion of local councils.
- Recognise town and parish councils as key members of the community boards
- Encourage Buckinghamshire councillors to attend community board meetings
- Encourage Buckinghamshire councillors to attend town and parish council meetings and work constructively with town and parish councils
- Ensure that support is provided to town and parish councils for the administration of elections, polls and referendums, as required
- Provide planning training for town and parish councils
- Provide opportunities for strategic conversations with cabinet members and senior officers on specific issues as appropriate

## 8. 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 that all councils in Buckinghamshire have access to opportunities for councillors and officers to receive relevant training and advice.

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

- Promote and support training and briefing opportunities to town and parish council officers and councillors
- Work with BMKALC to support the delivery of training and identify training needs
- Provide feedback on training, advice and support, as appropriate
- Encourage councillors and officers to take advantage of training available from a wide range of sources including BMKALC and NALC to maintain and develop skills.

### **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 BMKALC and town and parish councils, guidance and training for councillors and staff on how to work effectively 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.)

### **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) 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) agreed for the defences to be stored at and deployed from the ATC depot. BC staff watch the weather forecast and water levels in the Stoke Brook alongside the Willows estate and take the decision with ATC on when to use the defences. ATC 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 BC, ATC and residents demonstrates excellent partnership working to manage this flooding issue.

## 9. Collaboration

As councils in Buckinghamshire we are all 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 several examples of good collaboration already taking place, for example in highways devolution and the joint response to the pandemic. As councils in Buckinghamshire we want to build on this further whilst fully recognising that not all councils will have the resources or aspiration to take on additional services, in which case there will be no pressure or expectation to do so.

### **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, where it is agreed by all parties, and 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 where appropriate
- Encourage councillors to support Community Boards by participating and contributing to ideas /projects, and considering match-funding, if appropriate
- Work with Buckinghamshire Council to address local needs, including through advice and signposting, as appropriate.

### **Co locating local services**

Council Access Points provide a physical location in a local area where residents can go to access information about a wide range of topics, use as a social space to link with others, and get support from different services without the need to travel long distances.

Iver Parish Council office 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 (BC) services online and complete transactions. The Iver office also has a direct dial line into the BC customer services team so that residents can be transferred directly for more difficult queries.

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

## 10. Consultation

Consultation provides opportunities to hear from businesses and residents on any significant 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 the opportunity to comment 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.
- Adopt a Statement of Community Involvement which will set out how BC will consult with town and parish councils on local planning issues

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

- Encourage councillors and residents to give their views on consultations, including official council responses if 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.

## 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 in the future.”**

To do this Buckinghamshire 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. Buckinghamshire Council recognises the importance of a plan led system and will support local councils in the production of these where possible.

Buckinghamshire Council will consult town and parish councils when producing a Local Plan that will replace the current adopted local plans on completion, and 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 of applications 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. Town and parish councils have the right to request a ‘call in’ of an application to the committee or request a Buckinghamshire Councillor do that for them. 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 councils 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**

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**

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 Buckinghamshire 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.

## 12. Making it happen

This charter's implementation is the joint responsibility of all councils in Buckinghamshire. It will be published and communicated widely to officers and councillors in all our councils.

The Localities and Strategic Partnerships Service at Buckinghamshire Council, supported by BMKALC and the town and parish council working group, will monitor and progress the implementation of the charter. Once the charter has been agreed the team will develop a framework to monitor the success and progress. Where there may be areas of concern raised these will be resolved collaboratively.

This charter is a statement of intent on the relationship between all councils in Buckinghamshire. It will be reviewed regularly and will continue to develop over time.

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.

**Signed**

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**Buckinghamshire Council**

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**BMKALC**

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**Local Council in Buckinghamshire**

## **Appendix 1 – 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 councillors 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.

## **Appendix 2 - 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.*