



MK **Milton Keynes**
City Council

Together we can.



April 2025

Introduction

A partnership of Milton Keynes City Council and Local Councils

Local Councils (Town, Parish, and Community Councils, which we shall refer to 'parish councils' throughout this document) are working hard to benefit their communities and residents. In partnership with Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC), they innovate solutions to fast moving challenges, creating a powerful alliance and building a stronger Milton Keynes.

Here we set out the parameters of the dynamic working relationship that exists between parish councils and MKCC. It is a strong partnership that that is essential to meet the expectations of our residents, even in the face of challenges. It grows stronger when we all embrace the premise that, **'together we can'**.

Parish councils are key in supporting communities and improving local areas. Milton Keynes is unique - the first unitary local authority to be fully parished in England. This unique democratic model is one to be celebrated and must continue to benefit residents and communities.

Parish councils and MKCC can be proud of the relationships we have - much has been achieved. But these continue to be difficult times for local government. Increased demand, restraints on budgets, and a reliance on willing volunteers presents continued challenges. As a result, it is necessary to address the framework of how we work together to achieve the best results and affect real change at a local level.

The MKCC Plan (2022-2026) recognises the importance of this partnership and the vital role that parish councils have in shaping their own local areas and Milton Keynes as a whole.

Our structures

- MKCC is recognised as the Principal Authority for the area.
- Policy is set by a combination of democratically elected ward councillors and national legislation and administered by MKCC Officers.
- Parish councils (48 within Milton Keynes) are the first tier of local government and have a unique and in-depth knowledge of their local communities and places. Parish Councils are autonomous and independent and are corporate bodies constrained by statute. They have a number of statutory powers and broader powers can be acquired through a General Power of Competence.
- Policy is set by parish councillors and administered by parish council officers, usually (but not exclusively), the clerk.

- MKCC Ward Councillors and parish councillors recognise the great value in having good relationships across the different parish councils and MKCC. Good communication and engagement are central to being effective. Parish councillors understand the role that ward councillors play at the MKCC wide level. Equally, ward councillors understand the role that parish councillors play at local area level. Whilst each are different types of councillors (be they ward councillors or parish councillors), all are committed to ensuring the best outcomes for their areas and for Milton Keynes as whole.

Working together

- **‘Together We Can’** embodies the true ethos of partnership working, involving all partners contributing to a common goal, communicating, and working effectively with each other.
- By pooling knowledge, experience and tools, all councillors and council officers (both local and principal) can build a better understanding of what works at the very local level. They identify the needs and views of residents and communities and represent and act upon them.
- Success is dependent on all partners treating each other equally and with respect and understanding of the statutory landscape within which each partner operates.
- Collaborative relationships are mutually beneficial for all and involve both officers and councillors at every level.
- The non-statutory Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (MKALC) gives voice to issues affecting parish councils across Milton Keynes and liaises with MKCC on their behalf (although of course individual parish councils also raise specific issues). MKALC is supported by a County Association (BMKALC) and National Association (NALC) which provide advice, training and literature to parish councils.

Challenges that local communities are facing are sometimes very difficult to solve but **together we can** work towards positive solutions, ensuring all parties feel valued. It is vital that we treat each other with respect, dignity and politeness (even when we might not always see things the same way).

We strive to behave fairly and constructively towards each other when we disagree, we will listen and be respectful in our exchanges of views. Disagreements will arise sometimes and that’s okay because everyone can express their opinion and be heard. Debate may even be robust but aims to make Milton Keynes a better place for our residents and communities.

What this means in reality is that parish councils and MKCC will:

- Respond in a timely manner to ensure a regular flow of information, particularly where issues remain outstanding or unresolved. We recognise the importance of communication and will respond with acknowledgements and regular / periodic updates.
- Provide inductions to new key officers, as well as existing officers, on the role of parish councils and MKCC.
- Within MKCC, have parish council champions that work with ward councillors, council officers and cabinet members to highlight the key role that parish councils have.
- Support closer working between ward and parish councillors.
- Recognise that one size does not fit all given parish councils vary greatly in size, capacity, staffing, finances, etc and appreciate that sometimes, parish councillors of smaller parishes, will take on some functions to support the clerk / officer roles. Strive to continuously work together and improve engagement.
- Not work in silos and ensure the words within this document translate into actions.
- Ensure that the Parish Partnership Team continue to be a point of contact, information and advice and provide issue resolution for parish council difficulties.

Consultation and engagement

MKCC and parish councils recognise that consultation and engagement can be challenging. However, it is key in ensuring that parish council and resident voices are heard on issues impacting both them and Milton Keynes more generally.

As the principal authority, it is MKCC that runs formal consultations on both local and national issues. More informal engagement with parish councils can also be used to help form the development of policy and practice of the Council.

MKCC will:

- Consult and engage positively with parish councils on matters which impact them and their communities. Matters that will be of importance to some may be less to others, so a bespoke approach can be taken.
- **Start conversations early**, where it will impact parish councils. Formal consultation may follow but engaging parish councils early can have a beneficial impact on success.
- **Publish formal consultations** on <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/consultations> enabling parish councils to respond accordingly and highlighting, in advance, (through the parish clerks), the consultations that are coming up.
- **Engage with parish councils** using the Parishes Forum (PF), the Parishes Advisory Group (PAG) and other meetings to enable consultation, engagement and dialogue to take place. This can be both formal, but also can be informal through discussions with parish councillors / officers and local resident and other groups.
- **Attend parish council meetings**, where appropriate, to discuss the impact on the parish council and its parish area.

- **Ensure that formal consultations**, other than those governed by statutory regulations such as planning matters, will be for a minimum of six weeks excluding the Christmas/New Year holiday period and giving some extra allowance in August when many parish councils do not have formal meetings. (In reality consultations are often longer than the minimum)
- **Understand that community engagement and consultations** is about listening and learning and having meaningful dialogue with the community and is an opportunity to find out what is important to them, their neighbourhoods and local areas.
- **Use the most effective method** to consult and engage, including digital methods.
- **Consult in plain English** to be clear and concise.

And for **parish councils**, they will:

- **Respond and engage** with formal consultations and provide contributions to shape policies that matter to residents and communities.
- **Provide officer / clerk contributions** and support where the nature of the consultation or engagement is more about operational processes.
- **Engage with MKCC officers in the development of policy or initiatives** respecting the uncertainty and confidentiality which comes in the early stages of development but recognising early influence of these decisions can lead to successful results for residents.

Over recent years the nature of consultation has evolved as there has been an increase in delegated decision making as MKCC has responded to national government directive.

We need to ensure that, going forward, the primacy of both formal and informal consultation is maintained by MKCC and the MKCC Cabinet is committed to ensuring this.

Useful documents:

- *Cabinet Guidance on Consultation*
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/691383/Consultation_Principles_1_.pdf
- *Statement of Community Involvement* setting out how MKCC engages and consults with local communities and stakeholders on planning policy documents and planning applications
[Statement of Community Involvement \(SCI\)](#)

Asset and service devolution

We recognise that parish councils are all different in their makeup, capacity and size and will require different solutions and responses. As they have different needs – one size simply does not fit all. Assets and services are for the benefit of residents and parish councils can be best placed to deliver this.

MKCC will support those parish councils with an appetite to become more involved in service and asset devolution and work across the parish council community to ensure that the involvement is at a level that suits individual parish councils and the communities and residents they serve. Parish councils taking on devolved services are supported by service specific officers and regular meetings take place between such officers and the devolved parishes.

Parish councils are welcome to make use of the past experiences and expertise accumulated by MKCC in relation to devolution projects in which they choose to engage. For example, this could include shared ambitions for healthy and active communities, to be the Greenest City, promote biodiversity and combat climate change.

Section 106/Planning Obligations

Under planning legislation and regulations, MKCC can require a developer to contribute towards providing infrastructure or taking steps to offset the impact of a development; obligations of this nature are set out in what are often known as S106 Agreements. Organisations that apply for funding are encouraged to engage with parish councils for the area, given that parish councils have a good understanding of local community needs. Parish councils also have the opportunity to apply for funding themselves, particularly in relation to certain categories. **Appendix A** provides officer contact details for parish councils to have initial discussions relating to particular categories of funding. Details of the available S106 funding can be found on [EXACOM](#) and it is advised that anyone considering applying for funds also contacts the MKCC Planning Obligations Team (planning.obligations@milton-keynes.gov.uk) as part of initial considerations.

Joint working arrangements

Parishes Forum (PF) - We ensure we meet regularly to discuss issues that are important to each other. The PF currently meets four times a year to achieve this. PF meetings can be held physically or virtually. Physical meetings take place in various locations, e.g. MKCC offices, parish council offices, other appropriate venues, etc.

Each parish council nominates two representatives annually. Parish councils share the details of their representatives with MKCC (usually following their Annual General Meetings).

The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Parish Partnerships chairs the PF. A vice chair is elected by the parish councils and serves for two years. Election is undertaken by ballot. The PF provides an opportunity for influencing, bringing fresh ideas and new outlooks, etc, as well as providing and sharing information.

MKC officers from the Parishes Partnership Team support the PF.

Parishes Advisory Group (PAG) - Is a small group of committed and enthusiastic parish councillors, and a ward councillor from each of the political parties who work co-operatively for the greater good of all parish councils across the MK area. The PAG has no decision-making powers and nor is it a constituted group. It is purely an advisory group. The Cabinet Member and vice chair of the PF also hold the same roles on the PAG.

The PAG:

- advises the Cabinet Member with responsibility for parish partnerships on matters of mutual interest to MKCC and parish councils; making any appropriate and relevant recommendations to MKCC; holds consultations with / seek views of parish councils on areas of particular interest.
- shapes and agree approaches on key issues and pieces of work before wider circulation to all parish councils. Can set up Sub Working/Task Groups to focus on the identified areas of concern or progress. Working / Task Groups to be chaired by a PAG representative and opportunities to attend will be issued to all parish councils. This could be parish council clerks, parish councillors or a combination.
- determines the way forward for the devolution agenda, ensuring services and assets rest with the level of local government that can best maximise the opportunity of particular assets and services for the wider community.
- considers agenda items, discussion topics, and show casing for the PF, and agree the agenda for the PF each quarter.
- fosters close co-operation and engagement between each parish council, stakeholders, and partners to ensure the best possible outcomes for the communities that we all work to serve.

The PAG membership consists of

- A ward councillor from each of the main political parties
- Three representatives from the **Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (MKALC)**
- Three further parish councillors invited by the Chair

MKCC officers from the Parishes Partnership Team support the PAG (See **Appendix A**).

Local Area Forums (LAFs) -meetings for groups of parish councils who share common interests / are connected by physical locality (usually ward). LAFs are attended by the Ward Councillors (who ordinarily take the role of chair). Support for LAFs is discussed and agreed with MKCC Officers and each individual LAF.

Access to Systems

Where MKCC is able, it will provide access to systems that benefit joint working – for example the Geographical Information System (GIS).

Reporting issues

MKCC encourage parish councils to report issues through the [Report It](#) function. Escalation of issues should be directed to [Ward Councillors](#). The Parish Partnership Team is also available to assist (See **Appendix A**).

Future challenges

Working together and respecting our different roles, we know that we can make a real difference to our residents as challenges and opportunities present. There will be a likely rise in demand when budgets will be under considerable pressure. When difficult times arise, but with an open and honest dialogue between us (for example, around respective future financial and funding positions) we will be able to deliver for residents.

Together we can....

Through a dynamic partnership, clear and timely communication, sharing best practice, and innovating together, we can improve our communities.

Collaboration will:

- bring a range of resources and talent to creating innovative solutions.
- use available resources more efficiently and effectively.
- help tackle the complexity of the challenges.

This document is a living document; edited, updated, and revised over time to encourage collaboration and avoid stagnation. To be circulated for review annually, giving partners the opportunity to say what has worked well, what has not, and what, if anything, needs changing.

Our framework is deliberately not focused on specific measurements or sanctions for parties, but rather meant to act as a document that sets out the parameters for mature, constructive, and productive relationships between all councils in MK.

Appendix A

The main contact for the Parishes Partnership Team is Kay Pettit who can be contacted at Kay.Pettit@milton-keynes.gov.uk or Local.Councils.Liaison@milton-keynes.gov.uk

Parish councils can contact the following officers for initial discussions about S106 Funding

- Community Safety – Joanne Smart Joanne.Smart@milton-keynes.gov.uk
- Leisure – Janette Murphy Janette.Murphy@milton-keynes.gov.uk
- Voluntary and Social infrastructure - Kay Pettit Kay.Pettit@milton-keynes.gov.uk
- Biodiversity, play areas and parks - Phillip Snell Phillip.Snell@Milton-keynes.gov.uk

