

# EXAMINATION OF OUR TWO TIER SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE

During this year there has been an in depth scrutiny into the current ways the two tiers of local governance are working together. MKC contracted the Improvement Development Agency (IDeA) to carry out the work.

MK is unique in the South East in that it is a unitary authority for a large and growing urban community plus an extensive rural area and the whole borough is parished. In the mid - 1990s, MKC set out to establish local forums to engage and listen to the concerns of our residents. The 1974 reorganisation had left the more established urban areas in the new town without local councils, and although almost 50% of the borough was covered by Parish or Town councils these tended to be rural councils that were smaller by nature. After the establishment of the unitary council, work was undertaken with community groups to complete the borough-wide pattern with 45 local councils now extending across the whole borough. There are currently 426 councillors across both tiers of local government in Milton Keynes, including 375 Parish and Town councillors and 51 Unitary councillors (20 of whom are 'double-hatted' representing both tiers). There are 11 Councillors representing the approximate 12,000 strong population of our Parish, living in just over 3100 homes.

MKC was the first urban authority to agree a set of protocols as to how the relationship with local councils should be conducted. The Parish Charter formalised the relationship in 2004 and more than 40 local councils, including ourselves, have agreed to adopt the Charter.

The relationship between parishes and MKC has been supported by the establishment of a team that liaises between parishes and MKC (the Community Liaison Team), and a Parish Fund, which has acted as a catalyst for substantial investment. A number of formal systems now need to be updated, including the Parish Charter, which should be revised and universally agreed and adopted, and the Parish Assembly which needs to be refreshed to ensure it is fit for purpose.

We shall report here the things that are working well for us, other things not working

so well will be the subject of further work later this year and a small working party made up of four of our Councillors will be starting on that soon as we review the IDeA findings.

## *What is working well?*

Parish Councils are often the hub of community issues and the Parish Clerk plays a key role in this process. Our PC produces informative newsletters (like this one), has a useful web site, and is active in running and supporting the NAG in this area. Good communications and an open ethos is key to our strategy.

Our Parish Council is focussed on the needs of our communities, and MKC councillors whilst committed to their local Ward area also take on strategic issues that impact on the wider community. Our working relationship is generally good but there is always room for improvement. Remember politics don't come into Parish Council work.

The relationship with the MK Community Liaison Team (CLT) is working well and provides a useful interface with MKC, especially in unblocking logjams in our processes. CLT works closely with MKC service areas including the Street Care team.

The Parish Funds offered by MKC allows our Parish Council to nominate community projects. The approved schemes are 50% funded by MKC with the balance from the parish. This is a useful mechanism that enables the PC to determine community projects. We aim to make more use of these funds in the future.

In later editions we will report on how the IDeA report findings are likely to effect our future working arrangement. Government Policy pressures will cause more responsibility and workload being pressed onto Parish Councils. This, in turn, will mean more paid jobs at Parish level. We want to ensure that householders are not subject to 'double taxation' when the Parish has to increase it's Parish precept to cope with the cost of these new responsibilities.

It's a whole new ball park where the goalposts are constantly on the move...watch this space.

# WHAT'S FOR US IN THE FUTURE?