

# Empowering Local Councils

Governance  
Information  
Training  
Mediation

# ANNUAL REPORT 2022



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes  
Association of Local Councils

# INTRODUCTION

**Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils (BMKALC), represents Town and Parish Councils in the geographic county of Buckinghamshire. It encompasses two Unitary Authorities, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. BMKALC seeks to empower its members councils through support and education in their mission to achieve the very best for their communities, whilst ensuring good governance, compliance, transparency and respect. We are a non profit making association funded through grants, subscription and training fees. Surplus income is ploughed back into developing member services.**

**2021 – 2022 saw BMKALC emerge from the Covid – 19 pandemic having embraced remote service delivery. Increased reliance on local councils by the electorate, placed extraordinary demands on the skills and knowledge of both councillors and officers, BMKALC substantially increased training opportunities to support this.**

**The Chief Executive Officer, Mel Woof, is responsible for the the overall development and delivery of service. Helen Hogan is her deputy and develops and delivers training and Lorraine Morton is the office and communications manager. Lorraine further co-ordinates our events and seminars.**

## ASSOCIATION GOALS

- **To achieve and retain 95% of council membership**
- **to operate within a defined budget**
- **to invest in easy to access basic governance skills for all councils**
- **to provide training for new specialist skills to equip councils for todays demand.**
- **to provide contemporaneous information quickly and on multiple platforms**
- **to provide training at multiple times and over multiple platforms**
- **to provide partnership for specialist services to support councils**

# CHAIR OF BOARD REPORT

This cooperation has resulted in regular meetings between BMKALC, Chairmen of the old local District Associations, Cabinet member for communities and staff from the Localities and Strategic Partnership team. We were active consultees in the BC Parish Charter / All Councils Charter represented our members aspirations. The format of the BC Parish Liaison Meetings was amended with Bucks Council support to include greater opportunity for member's involvement. The relationship with Milton Keynes continued to grow with, for example, establishing a series of customised training for Planning.

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Conscious that it is important to maintain communications with our all our membership, meetings with Clerks continued to be held, a new Web site, Facebook page and twitter account were launched. We started looking into how BMKALC could directly reach individual councillors so that they can realise the membership benefits.

As a key step to improving the efficiency within the office, we accelerated the further development of digital accounting using QuickBooks.

Thanks to the efforts of Cllr Paul Harvey BMKALC continues to be well represented at the National Association of Councils. We worked with NALC to lobby Government about extending the emergency legislation to allow councils to hold remote or hybrid meetings beyond May 202. The Government refused so it was back to face to face meetings.

Our Association continues to be resilient financially as revenues from membership and training courses are maintained and whilst always mindful that our tenancy in Judges Lodgings may come to an end, we look to plough any profits back into our training, information, and support services.

In closing, I was pleased to leave the Association in January 2022, in the safe hands Sue Smith and Des Bray with a team of dedicated and experienced councillors and I am sure you will agree that the "new" / refreshed office team comprising of Mel, Helen and Loraine has bedded in well and are providing an ever-improving service to our members. Our Association continues to enjoy a bright future.

Paul Nicholls  
September 2022

# CHAIR OF BOARD REPORT

2021 was a difficult year for the Association for a variety of reasons including the impact of Covid. Throughout that time the Association continued to function effectively and provide the wide range of services required by our members. It was not until September 2021, that it was possible to return to working in the office full time. Bucks Council provide our office facilities and sort to relocate us into offices that we felt were not as suitable as those we had enjoyed in Judges Lodgings. Through the efforts of the County Officer the Association returned to Judges Lodgings together with improved facilities.

The impact of Covid was far reaching, beyond simply working from home, for example redesigning training courses so that they could be run virtually. The Association was further significantly impacted by several changes in personnel. The County Officer, Carol Burslem, gave notice in July 2021 that she would take retirement in November, after 12 years of devoted service; in the event she stayed till March 2022 but on reduced hours for the last few months. Perri Sullivan our Deputy County officer left the Association in Nov 2021 to take up a new and challenging role in a local authority and Michael Foote stood down as Treasurer, to be replaced by Isobel Derby.

I would personally like to thank them all for their commitment to the Association. Finding a replacement for Carole proved to be most difficult, but I am pleased to say that ultimately Mel Woof, who had previously held the role of Deputy County Officer, was appointed as our new County Officer, and joined us in March 2022. With the Deputy role not filled until April 2022 the Association was under resourced for some months.

Despite all challenges, this Association maintained a high level of activities on behalf of our members including support for the local elections. One of the key objectives is to provide educational facilities; and training courses for councillors and clerks continued to be well attended. The range of course topics was expanded to reflect councils needs, often using third parties to provide specialised training.

The BMKALC Conference and AGM were combined and brought forward to September, held as a hybrid meeting with members able to attend either online or in person. Jackie Weaver was one of the guest speakers.

We continued to represent our member's views at both Bucks Council and Milton Keynes where we continue to build a closer working relationship.

# A VIEW ON 2022 - 2023

At the close of March 2022, BMKALC bade farewell to Carole Burslem. Carole had been with the organisation for 12 years, supporting us through difficult changes in our local landscape and within the governance of Local Councils. I had the privilege of working alongside Carole as her deputy from 2018 to 2020 before leaving to act as clerk for one of our councils. I returned to BMKALC in March 2022. Helen Hogan joined us in May as my deputy and Lorraine expanded her activities and responsibilities in the new team. In the first six months of 2022-23, the BMKALC team have....

- completed our move to online banking and accounting.
- delivered a rebranded, updated and functional website providing online payments and linking to our accounts system
- delivered new training courses across multiple platforms, cemented existing and signed new partnerships for membership services.
- attend a regular fortnightly meeting with the Parish and Town liaison officers at Buckinghamshire Council and Milton Keynes Council with an objective to stay informed, share news and consider best practice.
- reviewed our Training offering and pulled it into a training framework to ensure we remain relevant and up to date.
- worked to deliver the 2022 Conference on Local Climate Initiatives.
- worked closely with our Unitary Authorities and National Association of Civic Officers to support our local councils following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.
- continued to meet with our national colleagues to understand projects and initiatives which they are working on and to assess their suitability within our patch

# A VIEW ON 2022 - 2023

- produced a weekly report of activities and notices to all councils in the area

We will continue to build on this framework throughout the rest of the year and are already planning for 2023 -24, Conference 2023 has a working title and sponsors are already being identified. New ways of working together to harness more of the incredible talent out there and sharing it around the whole of the membership is underway. We need to encourage more clerks to qualify for CiLCA and to do our best to encourage new councillors to join us at the next election. That way more councils can start their journey for Quality Council Accreditation and also chose to exercise the General Power of Competency.

We rely on your continued support to meet our objectives, we simply could not achieve all we do, without that, In exchange we shall continue make sure you can rely on us to be here for you, too.

Mel Woof  
Chief Executive Officer

# KEY TARGETS FOR 2022-23

## INTERNAL

- Complete migration to automated accounts system
- Update Website to include application controls enabling councils to view and access their online bookings and make electronic payments
- Gain CiLCA Certified Trainer Status for Mel Woof
- Update First Aid Training for the team

## COMMUNICATIONS

- Fortnightly meetings with County Liaison Officers
- Establish Larger Councils Clerks Forum in partnership with SLCC
- Attend MK Parish Liaison and continue to develop closer working relationship

## SERVICE OFFERS

- Free January Training Bites
- Two training / topic seminar days a year
- Explore potential for Internal Audit services for smaller councils