

**WHAT MAKES
US MILTON KEYNES
CITY COUNCIL**

We aim to make a difference
Councillors lead the way
Our team is well organised
We do the right thing
We act as one council
We're always open for business
We recruit with care
We make every day matter
We talk, we listen
We are financially sound
We focus on performance
We take risk seriously
We're stronger together

**WHAT MAKES
US MILTON KEYNES
CITY COUNCIL**



WE AIM TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Our aim is to make our city a better place to live.

We've worked out the big, longer term things we need to do to achieve our aim and you can read all about them in the **Milton Keynes 2050 Strategy**.

However, we also have a lot of things to get on with right now, and our **Council Plan** sets out our more immediate priorities, including:

- Creating cleaner, safer and healthier communities
- Building a diverse and inclusive economy
- Tackling social inequalities
- Delivering decent, affordable homes
- Taking action on climate change

You can read both plans at milton-keynes.gov.uk/council-plan

We also produce specific action plans from time to time to help get things done or address particular issues, but we only do so when it is really necessary.

We don't encourage anyone to spend time producing plans and strategies which don't directly lead to action.

COUNCILLORS LEAD THE WAY



Milton Keynes City Council is made up of councillors who are elected by residents in local elections.

We elect one third of the local councillors every year for three years and then have a year off in the fourth. Currently we have 57 councillors across 19 areas (which we call wards). We are having a review of our boundaries and this may change in the future.

Our councillors represent the views of residents living in their ward and work hard to get things done for them. This is usually called casework.

Every four years, the council elects a Leader. The Leader then appoints councillors to lead on specific responsibilities, like adult services. They fulfil this role in addition to being a ward councillor.

The decisions that get made by councillors are then implemented by council employees, alongside delivering all the everyday services that residents expect.

It is important we get the relationship between councillors and council employees right, and the council has a protocol which sets out how this should work.

Milton Keynes City Council is a unitary council. This means that we are responsible for the full range of services in the area – over 200 of them. We work closely with our parish and town councils. The city council and our parish and town councils are all independent and not part of national government.



OUR TEAM IS WELL ORGANISED

Led by the Chief Executive, the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) is made up of the Deputy Chief Executive and eight experienced Directors, each leading an area of our work.

- Adult services
- Children's services
- Community and customer services
- Finance and resources
- Legal and democratic services
- Planning and placemaking
- Property and environment
- Public health

We have nearly 40 Heads of Service who together with the Director are accountable for service delivery.

Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP) is a separate company, owned by the council. It develops land to help the city become a better place to live, socialise and work.

Around 2,500 colleagues (we prefer this term to 'staff') work across our eight busy areas, with many more people working for organisations that deliver services on our behalf, like waste, recycling and highways.

We're also responsible for maintaining 67 community schools who employ more than 2,800 people, although the management of the schools and our colleagues working in them is delegated to headteachers and school governing bodies.



WE DO THE RIGHT THING

Our core values are at the heart of how we want to work together as a team and we expect everyone to share them. Every day, each of us has the opportunity to represent Milton Keynes City Council in the best way possible.

OUR CORE VALUES

Do your best for our city

DEDICATED

Care for each other

RESPECTFUL

Be a great team player

COLLABORATIVE

- We also deeply believe in:
- Always working safely
 - Promoting a supportive culture
 - Taking ownership of problems
 - Being willing to change
 - Making well-informed decisions
 - Being accountable

We are determined to create a positive environment where everyone can thrive. Our commitment to **equality, diversity and inclusion** is fundamental to our organisation's success and we are committed to preventing discrimination, eliminating prejudice, promoting inclusion and celebrating diversity. CLT monitors pay gaps, puts policies in place and organises specific projects – but every day we all have a responsibility to make a difference by showing respect for each other.

WE ACT AS ONE COUNCIL



'One council' is an attitude and we embrace it. In big organisations, silo working can take hold, with different teams pulling in different directions. We're more interested in cooperation than competition between our teams.

To support a One Council approach we encourage teams to come together to share what they are doing or to solve problems. Managers should take the lead in making this happen.

We expect conversations between teams to be positive and direct. When something is agreed, everyone commits to it. If something isn't working, we don't focus on blame, but on making it better.

Everyone should be able to rely on their colleagues and they should be reliable in turn.

Some of our support services, like ICT, facilities, democratic services, legal, or finance are fundamental to every team's success and the organisation as a whole.

We expect them to be included in anything that they may need to know about, and be asked for their help and advice when appropriate - not at the last minute or as an afterthought.

Not everyone appreciates that we are a 24/7 organisation, providing essential services like home care around the clock as well as being ready to respond in case of an emergency.

We're always looking for ways to improve customer service. Our aim is to make it as easy as possible to deal with us as well as keeping the cost low.

Many services remain firmly rooted in the community, like our nine libraries or our 13 children's centres. We continue to invest in these, unlike some other councils.

Being out and about in the community is an important part of the work for many of our colleagues, regardless of if they work at home or from an office.

When people need to reach us we are easy to talk to. We've now successfully moved away from expecting residents to come to our offices and wait around for us. Instead we focus our efforts on handling more contact on the phone or electronically and we regularly deal with 1,000 customer service calls and 1,200 online forms each day.

Meanwhile, our more specialist teams handle additional contacts, such as the children's multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH).

WE'RE ALWAYS OPEN FOR BUSINESS



WE RECRUIT WITH CARE



We aim to employ the best people we can and we put a lot of effort into that. Once people are with us, we aim to recognise performance and develop our 'doers'.

We encourage managers to use simple language when recruiting, say clearly what the job will involve and explain why working for us is a good choice – which is often about more than pay alone. Benefits, such as our pension scheme, should not be overlooked or left out.

We are totally committed to fair and transparent recruitment processes and expect everyone to approach recruitment in this way. We also expect managers to be open-minded and consider candidates with different experience. We shouldn't limit who can apply by using overly restrictive job descriptions.

As a very large employer, up to 40 people join us every month. We take their development very seriously as many of them will be with us for a long time.

We successfully use apprenticeships to help colleagues, younger and older, to extend their skills and gain qualifications as well as offering high quality on the job training. We also understand that not all learning happens in a formal way and encourage things like coaching and mentoring to help colleagues develop.

We encourage colleagues to question assumptions about how, why, and where we do things. If an activity adds little value to what we're here to do, then we stop doing it.

We no longer produce detailed annual service and team plans.

Instead, each service has a short statement of what they're there to do, their key performance indicators and what resources are available. This is only updated when something changes.

We also now don't have the traditional type of organisation-wide annual appraisals.

Instead, everyone should have regular one-to-one time with their manager to get feedback and agree goals. This is also a great way of checking in with colleagues' health and wellbeing.

Finally, we've embraced home working and many of our colleagues are permanent homeworkers who come into the office one day a week. Site based workers can spend up to two days a week working from home if this is compatible with their role and their manager agrees.

**WE MAKE
EVERY DAY MATTER**



Communicating well helps us to build trust.

We work hard to make all our written communications easy to read and jargon-free. We don't say 100 words when 10 will get the message across.

People like useful information from their council. More than 70,000 people subscribe to our email and social media updates and our website gets thousands of visits daily.

Our preference is to use a single city council brand rather than individual team identities, so people recognise who is delivering their valued services.

Listening to residents is also very important to us and if we're making changes or starting something new, we often undertake in-depth work like focus groups and roadshows. We try to make it easy for people to be involved, usually by going to where they are, and explaining clearly what might change.

We also take a lot of time on our internal communications, ensuring colleagues know what is going on, including our weekly newsletter *One Council* and a monthly manager programme *Need to Know*.

**WE TALK
WE LISTEN**



WE ARE FINANCIALLY SOUND



We are proud to be a financially sound council. We invest a lot of time and effort in budget management. We encourage openness and transparency and expect all colleagues to talk about anything they are worried about as early as possible.

All our budget managers are required to forecast their outturn position each month. Finance colleagues give challenge and support to make sure we get this right. The situation across the council is reported each month to CLT and quarterly to Cabinet.

Given the ongoing uncertainty around council finances, we generally set a one year budget. We publish a draft budget in December, with any changes scrutinised by a special councillor committee ahead of the budget being considered by Cabinet and then by Full Council in February for final agreement. Of course, we try to look forward

more than one year and we keep our Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) under constant review. We report on high-level trends and issues to Cabinet every year, usually in September and then update the plan in February.

We are very clear that everyone has a role to play in using our resources as well as we can. We spend around £200 million a year on goods, services and works. As a public body we must be fair and transparent, following clear rules for every purchase we make, and involving councillors when spending larger amounts.



WE FOCUS ON PERFORMANCE

We provide regular updates on progress on each of the actions in the Council Plan as well as the performance of services.

We provide updates every three months on our work to deliver actions in the council plan and at the end of the year, the Chief Executive produces a written summary of achievements.

Also reported and published every three months is a summary of our performance against a set of council-wide indicators (161 in total). The report is carefully considered by CLT and by councillors.

We keep a close eye on our major corporate projects, including capital schemes like new buildings or roads. The Deputy Chief Executive chairs a panel which looks at capital projects and approves (or not) new ones.

CLT reviews a report on corporate projects at the end of each quarter before they go on to a councillor scrutiny committee. This report is also publicly available on our website.

One of the most distinctive features of our organisation is how transparent we are. We are required by law to share information on request and to make big decisions in public in case people want to comment. We only withhold something if there is a reason.

Risk is everywhere, what matters is how we respond to it.

We have a system to identify risks and how we are controlling them. Our approach is set out in our Annual Governance Statement, something we have to produce by law.

We recognise that good risk management starts at the top of the organisation, so CLT regularly reviews a corporate risk register and reports to an audit committee made up of councillors and independent members.

Our senior management team also produce risk registers for their areas of responsibility and keep these under regular review.

Our internal audit team carry out over 70 audits every year, checking things are being done properly across the organisation. We have a zero tolerance policy to fraud and corruption and a clear whistleblowing process for anybody who has a concern.

We take proactive steps to protect everyone's health and safety. Risks and actions are assessed and regularly reviewed by CLT.

To maximise IT and data security, all colleagues complete training on topics like cyber security and data protection and we monitor whether it's being done.

**WE TAKE RISK
SERIOUSLY**





WE'RE STRONGER TOGETHER

Every day we work alongside many local organisations to make our city a better place to live.

We want to be a really great partner to work with. It's important because getting things done often takes collective effort, especially when it comes to our more difficult challenges.

Which is why we're very proud of the longstanding and mature relationship we have built with the NHS, the police and fire service, local schools, academies and our college, the voluntary sector, community groups and other local organisations.

Between us, we know someone in just about every organisation in our city and put a lot of effort into keeping it that way.

Like any relationship, it takes work to keep these partnerships strong, especially when there are disagreements, which can happen from time to time.

So we expect all our colleagues working with partners to invest time and effort into these relationships. That means being positive and supportive as well as being brave and truthful when something needs to be said.

Where we fund a partner organisation to provide a service for us we always ask them to make it clear that the council has provided the money.



JUNE 2023