

# Working with Local Councils Policy

March 2024

## Basildon Borough Council

Basildon Centre  
St Martins Square  
Basildon  
SS14 1DL

01268 533 333  
[www.basildon.gov.uk](http://www.basildon.gov.uk)



<b>Key Information</b>	
Author:	Amy Lipley, Policy and Insights Officer
Accountable Director:	Director of Strategy and Governance Choose an item.
Responsible Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Communities Choose an item.
Date of Cabinet Approval:	14/03/2024
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	(Insert hyperlink) Click or tap to enter a date.
<b>Consultee(s)</b>	
Groups and/or individuals consulted during the development of this Policy:	The Working Together Commission Local Councils Liaison Committee
Groups and/or individuals consulted on draft Policy:	Local Councils Liaison Committee
Policy, Performance and Insights Team approval	Tom Conniffe Click or tap to enter a date.
Senior Leadership Team approval	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Click or tap to enter a date.
Has the Policy been considered at a Scrutiny Committee Meeting:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Choose an item. Click or tap to enter a date.
<b>Governance</b>	
The Policy applies to:	(List who is covered by this Policy)
The Policy is available in the following locations:	Publications Scheme <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Intranet / SharePoint <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Council website / Service webpage <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
This Policy has related documents:	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>  Insert links to related documents i.e. Strategy, Action Plan, Procedure
The Policy was disseminated to:	
This Policy is due its next review:	14/03/2027

<b>Document Control</b>				
<b>Date</b>	<b>Officer Name, title</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Amendment(s)</b>
22.06.22	AL	0.1		
07.07.23	AL, TC	0.2		
18.07.23	AL	0.3		

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## 1. Introduction

Parish and town councils are the first tier of local government and are the closest to the electorate in the UK. Collectively, they are often referred to as ‘local councils’,<sup>1</sup> and are statutory bodies which often vary in capacity, resources, and responsibility. The first parish and town councils were created in 1894 through the Parish Councils Act.<sup>2</sup> The Local Government Act 1972 and the Localism Act 2011 set the current legislative context, and local councils continue to play an important role in the communities they serve.

Basildon Council and local councils have always had a positive relationship but in 2022 started to explore how this relationship could be developed further and what the opportunities were for the two tiers of governance in the borough to work more closely together for the ultimate benefit of residents. In autumn 2022, as part of this exploration, the Working Together Commission, comprising representatives from the borough council and each of 9 the local councils, was established.

This Policy outlines Basildon Council’s belief that local councils have a key role to play in the borough and commitment to work with local councils to ensure residents receive the most effective and efficient service.

## 2. Policy Statement

Basildon Council is committed to working with local (town and parish) councils in the borough to support them to articulate and achieve their ambitions for their parishes by working more closely together to provide the most effective and efficient services to residents.

## 3. Context

Nationally, there has been a growing trend toward the parishing of localities and there are now around 10,000 local councils in England. This equates to over 40% of the current population being served by a local council,<sup>3</sup> and over £1 billion invested into parished communities each year.<sup>4</sup>

Localism is a long-established concept, with the first parish and town councils created in 1894 through the Parish Councils Act. While the Act has since been superseded, and a new

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<sup>1</sup> House of Commons Library, 2021. *Parish and town councils: recent issues*. Available at: <<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN04827/SN04827.pdf>> [Accessed 22 June 2022].

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Library. 2020. Available at: <<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/unitary-authorities-the-role-of-parish-and-town-councils/#:~:text=This%20means%20that%20despite%20their%20large%20numbers%2C%20only,and%20a%20further%2037%20have%20five%20or%20fewer.>>> [Accessed 22 June 2022].

<sup>4</sup> *About Local Councils*, National Association of Local councils (NALC) <<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/about-local-councils>> [Accessed 22 June 2022].

legal foundation created for local councils by the Local Government Act 1972, the importance of local councils has grown following the Localism Act 2011.

Under the Localism Act 2011, local authorities and eligible parish and town councils were granted the 'general power of competence'. This granted greater potential for them to contribute to local and community governance through new powers including:

- the ability to create a local plan,
- the right to challenge the way a principal local authority is running a service and the ability to make a bid if the service is put out to procurement, and
- the right to bid for the responsibility of assets from principal local authorities.

The Localism Act and the period of austerity that accompanies the period following the Act, have seen principal local authorities working in greater partnership with local councils to look at how they can provide the best services to residents with decreasing resources. Through an extensive range of discretionary powers, local councils throughout the UK provide and maintain a variety of important and visible local services.

### **3.1 The local picture**

Currently, 42% of the Basildon borough is parished, with an expectation that this will grow over time. The 9 local councils in Basildon borough are:

- Billericay Town Council
- Bowers Gifford and North Benfleet Parish Council
- Great Burstead and South Green Village Council
- Little Burstead Parish Council
- Noak Bridge Parish Council
- Ramsden Bellhouse Parish Council
- Ramsden Crays Parish Council
- Shotgate Parish Council, and
- Wickford Town Council.

## **4. Working Together with Local Councils**

The Working Together Commission, comprising representatives from the borough council and each of 9 the local councils, was established in autumn 2022 to investigate the possibilities for working more closely with local councils. The aim of the Commission was to:

*“Collaboratively explore what opportunities might exist for the Borough Council and local councils in the borough to work more closely together to improve the delivery of services to residents and the associated issues with doing so.”*

Between November 2022 and March 2023, the Commission held 4 meetings, with Members and officers from the borough council and local councils hearing from expert witnesses to help them explore and better understand how all tiers of local government can work together to better serve their communities.

The key findings from the first phase of the Working Together Commission included:

- The role local councils can play is highly dependent on capacity and for the smaller councils in particular this is limited
- Precedence must be placed on building relationships between all tiers of local authority as a platform for more effective collaboration
- All tiers of local government should be considered on a paralleled weighting yet delivering varying scopes of services.
- There needs to be enhanced clarity and shared understanding of what local councils want to achieve in their area, what role they can play and what is required of the borough council to support this
- Devolution of assets and services is only one way associated with local councils taking on an enhanced role. Others include the possibility of local councils enhancing services in their area by topping up or providing new services.

A full report of the first phase of the Commission sets out its deliberations in more detail.

## **5. Who or what will be affected by the Policy?**

This Policy aims to provide the basis for the borough council to work with local councils to support them to articulate their ambitions for their parish and for these to be delivered. This sets out the Basildon Council offer but does not confer any commitment upon local councils.

A Full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed. This shows that enacting this policy should not have any negative equality, inclusion or diversity implications.

There are no new direct financial implications from the adoption of this policy as it stands. Financial implications may arise in future but this is dependent on the scope and nature of the work with local councils that this policy generates.

## 6. Corporate Knowledge

Corporate Ambitions	Levels of Impact			
	High	Medium	Low	None
We want Basildon to be home to healthy and active local communities able to support themselves and each other.		X		
We want Basildon to offer a high quality of life for all residents through attractive, liveable, accessible, and safe neighbourhoods and towns along with the provision of enduring facilities, green spaces and town centres that meet the needs of the community.			X	
We want Basildon to have a thriving, dynamic and diverse economy where all our communities benefit from increased opportunity and our workforce has the right skills for our local economy and beyond.		X		

### Outcome and Priorities

Outcome	Priority
Parish and town councils within Basildon borough are empowered to respond to the needs of their local communities.	Basildon Council and local councils in the borough form a closer relationship through working together.
	Basildon Council supports town and parish councils to articulate and achieve their ambitions for their localities.
	Parish and town councils are able to access Basildon Council resources to help



	them articulate and achieve their ambitions for their localities.
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## 7. Accompanying Strategy

This policy will enable the development of an action plan to set out how Basildon Council will support local councils to articulate and achieve their ambitions for their locality.

## 8. Links to other Corporate Policies or Partner documents

- [Corporate Plan 2023-2027](#)
- [Localism Act 2011](#)
- [Levelling Up White Paper \(2022\)](#)
- [Local Government Finance Act 1992 \(Sections 34 and 25\)](#)
- [Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities 2014](#)

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