

**A EUROPEAN/INTERNATIONAL POLICY
AND STRATEGY FOR
MILTON KEYNES COUNCIL**

C O N S U L T A T I O N D R A F T

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1. Introduction

One of the distinguishing features of Milton Keynes is the extent of its international and multi-cultural character. Many international businesses have been attracted to the borough as it has developed. Partly as a result of that there is a diverse population with many international links. For example one in 13 of the population was born outside of the United Kingdom and 15% of the workforce is employed by international companies. There is a rich ethnic mix in the population. Most schools and many youth groups have international interests. There are many other cultural, educational and social links with other countries. Many of these flow from our membership of the European Community since 1973.

The Council's job is to provide services to this Community. Its corporate aims are to:

- work in partnership for the benefit of everyone in Milton Keynes
- be an open, accessible and consultative organisation
- tackle disadvantage and promote equality
- promote a healthy and sustainable environment
- develop excellence, efficiency and effectiveness across all services

The Council is committed to making the most of the multi-cultural and international links within the borough, to help it deliver its services more effectively. Our policy therefore arises from our commitment to the community and a desire to celebrate and build on its diversity.

We believe our services can be enhanced by ensuring there is some coherence to our European and international contacts and activities and the strategy is an attempt to develop this coherence from the existing diversity.

Milton Keynes Council's policy is to enhance the Council's effectiveness by working in partnership to increase:

- **funding and economic well-being,**
- **the flow of information and understanding, and**
- **mutually beneficial influences**

through European and international activity.

To deliver this policy a three-year strategy is outlined that identifies aims, objectives and methods of working. It is based on the local, national and international context of the area and on the services that the Council delivers or can influence. It has been developed in partnership with the community.

We welcome comments on the policy, the strategy and on any omissions. If you have any comments, please contact Deborah Cooper, Economy and Learning Manager, Saxon Court, 501 Avebury Blvd, Milton Keynes MK9 3HJ Tel: 01908-253306, Email address: Deborah.Cooper@milton-keynes.gov.uk.

2. The local, national and international context for the strategy

The local context for the strategy

Although this is the first time that Milton Keynes Council has had a strategy that covers all of its services as a unitary authority, it builds on the European Strategy inherited from the Borough Council.

Milton Keynes Council has been a unitary authority since April 1997 and provides a wide range of services. The Council also has an influence on many other services through its partnership activities. International work either already influences them in a range of ways or could do so in the future. To try and develop a structure for this diverse range of activity we have divided the Council's activity and the existing international links into five areas. Below are those areas of activity and some examples of existing links and the Council services they link to. Until now there has not been a single strategy to develop any coherence between this very diverse range of activities.

Examples of existing international activity with MK Council

Nature of activity	Which Council service or partnership	Example of current international activity
Economic/financial activity i.e. so that groups in one area can benefit from links and funding that will enhance the economic viability of another area	Economic Development	The Competitive Bidding Unit provides advice to Council services and to community partners about funding available from the European Community to develop services
	Economic Development	The Competitive Bidding Unit helps to develop links with towns and regions in other countries that will enable the Council and partners to bid for European funding where an international partner is necessary.
	Economic Development	The Council works in partnership with Invest in Milton Keynes (IMK). IMK develops links with companies from other countries to encourage inward investment.
	Tourism Development	Variety of activities to support international visitors to come to Milton Keynes.
Educational/cultural activity i.e. to further the understanding of people in one area about the people in another area	Education and Early Years	Ousedale School has a long-standing exchange programme with a school in India. Many schools have language links with European schools.

	Youth Service	There have been links and visits to many countries including USA and St Vincent
	Arts and Museums	The Service has provided support for many international performances and artist exchange programmes, including...
Social development /recreational activity i.e. so that people in one area can work in partnership to develop social links with another area	Milton Keynes Council Sports and Social Club	The club has continued the long established link with Bernkastel-Wittlich
	Sports Development	Supports international sporting events in MK
Governance/ management i.e. so that groups can learn from patterns of governance and management in one country that will help the other to be more effective	Milton Keynes Council	During the visit from members and officers from Almere, Netherlands, a seminar was held to discuss different patterns of local authority governance.
	Environment Directorate	European funding is enabling a link between new towns in Europe to discuss planning. (Interreg IIC)
Ethical/Spiritual i.e. so that people in one area can share views about ethical issues with people in another area	Community partners supported by the Council e.g. MK World Development Education Centre	MKWDEC promotes understanding of sustainable development locally and globally through schools and other fora.
	Environment Directorate Purchasing Dept.	The Environmental Purchasing Policy is informed by Agenda 21 and includes reference to international issues - e.g. in relation to fairly traded catering supplies.

National and international influences and their impact on the work of the Council

There is a range of influences that make it important for the Council to develop a strategic approach to international activity. These are listed below.

External influences that impact on the Council

Nature of influence	Influence	Impact on Milton Keynes
Economic/ financial influences	There are increasingly global markets for exports	MK has many companies operating in international markets and so the Council needs to understand how global markets impact on existing companies and the potential for new investors in MK
	There is continued economic volatility in some parts of the world	As above
	International tourism, social and business related, are important economic activities for all communities	In Milton Keynes many visitors are from the business community or visiting friends and relatives. This could be further developed because of the area's good national road and rail links.
Educational/ cultural influences	Increasingly governments are comparing educational standards across countries to establish successful education systems	MK has many organisations moving in to the area who will also be interested in the comparative success of the educational attainments of the people of MK
	The growing ease of international communications means that educators and other professionals can compare systems in countries and develop good practice	MK already has some links across the world
	Links between learners in different countries through exchange visits and written links form an important part of learning opportunities	MK schools and youth groups have extensive links, some directly linked to the national curriculum and others to a broader social curriculum

	European funding forms an important part of the income that supports developments across the community	The Council has officers to support income generation from Europe and this may have further potential as links in Europe and beyond are extended
	The enlargement of Europe and changes to Structural Funds will affect all members of the European Community	MK Council will need to watch the changes and be prepared for them
	The introduction of the Euro will affect all countries in Europe	The Council and its businesses will have to be ready for changes
Social development/recreational influences	There has, since the Second World War, been a strong emphasis in Europe towards formal and informal twinning as a social activity to develop better connections between countries	Sherington and Wavendon have twinning arrangements. There is a long-standing link with Bernkastel-Wittlich in Germany.
	There is a renewed interest in twinning or other links to develop the notion of European citizenship	This has been developed through education and youth activity more than as a social activity in MK

	Developing social links between communities has been used in other areas as an important part of community development, e.g. between groups from ethnic minorities and communities in a mother country	This could have value in MK
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Governance/management influences	Local and national governments are showing an increased interest in sharing information about systems both as 'north-south' and 'east-west' links.	There could be interesting links for MK , but none have been promoted by the Council to date
	There is Government funding for support for Eastern European countries wishing to join the European Community to develop local government structures	There could be interesting links for MK , but none have been promoted by the Council to date, though individual members have made visits
Ethical/ Spiritual influences	Churches and other community groups show an interest in ensuring there are links with other countries that help people in this country to develop an understanding of the broad ethical issues of connections between countries	Several churches and groups in MK are active in this area
	The activities of Councils have an impact across the world as Agenda 21 has outlined	Milton Keynes has committed itself to sustainable policies and these affect all aspects of its work.

The rationale for a strategy now

The following summarises the reasons why European and international activity within Milton Keynes Council should continue and why there should be a policy and strategy to provide a framework for it.

a. The Council is already involved in a wide range of valued international work. It is currently neither coherent nor co-ordinated

The wide range of international activity that currently exists includes school exchanges, youth service international visits, European funding bids, international exchanges of information on issues such as new town planning. It is not peripheral to the main activities of the Council but is integral. For example, language exchanges for children learning a foreign language, are an important component of the curriculum.

The reason for developing a policy and strategy is to provide a coherence to that activity and to ensure that there is some measure of its effectiveness in achieving what it sets out to do.

b. Milton Keynes is an international community with a diverse minority ethnic character. Ignoring that will disenfranchise parts of the community, building on it will provide positive ways of enfranchising these parts of the community.

Some of the activities undertaken by the Council's services have built on links between minority ethnic groups here and countries abroad. For example, the youth service work with Afro-Caribbean young people and links with the West Indies. There are plenty of examples of these activities being used positively elsewhere and funding is available for this from external sources.

The reason to include this in the policy and strategy is to reinforce equal opportunities work within the Council.

c. There is a need to commit resources to attract more resources

Many European activities provide opportunities for the Council to achieve its aims more effectively. This is obvious in the case of the Competitive Bidding Unit, whose European funding team have consistently raised funding for the Council and its partners to achieve Council aims.

An example of the wider application of this is within the Youth Service. International links and visits have provided an invaluable curriculum base for groups and their leaders. Informal learning is more difficult to quantify than formal learning. However, feedback at the end of trips and evidence in the forms of newsletters, photographs and exhibitions provide ample examples of the value of these trips, which are often supported with external funding.

The reason for developing a policy and strategy is to ensure that the commitment of resources is embedded in a wider strategy.

d. Milton Keynes has many international linkages and that is one of its economic strengths. Ignoring that will put the Council out of step with the community and community partners

The Coopers and Lybrand report commissioned by the Milton Keynes Economic Partnership in 1996 'The Regional and European Position of Milton Keynes', outlined some key points. European trade was important or very important to 47% of businesses and there was a general expectation that it would become more important. A large number of companies with international parent companies have been moved here, and a significant proportion of those have their UK headquarters here. The report concluded, inter alia, that there was a need to exploit the European export and trade links, including improvements for international travel.

The reason to have a policy and strategy is to ensure these issues which are reflected in the MKEP Economic Development strategy are reflected in the Council's strategies and are coherent with the Council's Economic Development Strategy.

e. Other reasons

There are many other reasons for maintaining the current levels of activity, each of which lends weight to those above

- the Government has encouraged Councils to think globally on a number of topics (e.g. sustainable policies, European working regulations), and DFID is increasingly encouraging local authorities to support its international policies
- many other Local Authorities are developing or have developed strategies (Bucks, Notts, Birmingham, Oxon have all been held up as examples the LGIB)
- UK laws require Councils to address European/international issues (e.g. asylum seekers)
- European laws and finances are going to have an impact and we need to be Europe aware as a Council and community
- there are potential untapped opportunities for Milton Keynes to develop better international tourism links, export of expertise etc.

The reasons for making commitments now

Even if the above reasons set out why Councils should, in general, support international activity, it may not be obvious that this is immediately important. The following provide the reasons for immediate action.

a. Change is happening now and the Council needs to be ready immediately. For example, the Euro has already been introduced in other countries and Milton Keynes Council already pays in and receives Euros. Pupils, officers and members of the community need to understand this now and understand the context in which the Euro has been introduced. Otherwise opportunities for funding will be missed. Young people will be less employable, businesses will not thrive.

b. It takes time to build up and develop links that bear fruit in the future. For example, a European funding bid submitted in 1999 may not start producing income or outcomes until 2000 or 2001. We are losing opportunities for tomorrow by not encouraging bids today. Equally in education: young people of 14 doing a French exchange in 1999 will raise GCSE results in 2000 or 2001.

c. Lost opportunities today will not be there in the future if we change our mind. For example, European towns seeking partnerships for European bids will go elsewhere and will not want to work with us in 2001 if we have rejected them in 1999. Opportunities for exporting our expertise (e.g. re housing to Eastern Europe) will disappear if we do not pursue opportunities now when Europe is enlarging.

3. Strategic aims and objectives

Milton Keynes Council's policy is to enhance the Council's effectiveness by working in partnership to increase

- funding and economic well-being,
- the flow of information and understanding, and
- mutually beneficial influences

through European and international activity.

The strategic aims echo the Council's policy. They are:

- 1. To support activities that will enhance the funding available to Milton Keynes and the economic well-being of the area**
- 2. To support activities that will develop the flow of information and understanding among the people of the borough**
- 3. To support activities that will ensure mutually beneficial influences between Milton Keynes and other areas**
- 4. To work in partnership and to encourage partnership between others.**

These strategic aims cover the four categories of activity and influence in the previous section.

In the list below, continuing or existing strategies are indicated by C in the final column and developments are indicated by D.

	Objective/action	Council Service	C/D
1. To support activities that will enhance the funding available to Milton Keynes and the economic well-being of the area			
1.1	Provide advice to Council services about funding available from the European Union to enhance the services offered in line with strategic plans	Economic Development	C
1.2	Provide advice to community private, public and voluntary sector partners about European funding that will enhance partners' effectiveness and the area's well being	Economic Development	C
1.3	Develop contacts with towns and organisations in Europe and beyond to enable funding bids to be made	Economic Development	C
1.4	Support Invest in Milton Keynes (IMK) and other community partners in making links with businesses abroad who wish to invest in Milton Keynes	Economic Development	C

1.5	Develop links through partnerships in Milton Keynes with communities in Europe and beyond to develop business opportunities.	Economic Development	D
1.6	Ensure the Council has a co-ordinated approach to the introduction of the Euro	Treasurer	D
1.7	Investigate ways in which international contacts can enhance the visits to Milton Keynes by those from other countries.	Tourism Development	C/D

2. To support activities that will develop the flow of information and understanding among the people of the borough

2.1	Support and monitor links between MK education providers and communities abroad	Education and Early Years, Economy & Learning	C
2.2	Support and monitor links between the Youth Service and communities abroad	Youth Service	C
2.3	Support and develop international cultural exchange	Arts and Museums	C
2.4	Support activities that enhance the understanding of the EU by people in MK	All - especially Economy & Learning	C
2.5	Support programmes of learning that enable local people to develop skills to take a full part in international activities.	Learning and Development	C/D
2.6	Support communities who are or wish to develop international links. This includes communities of interest (e.g. churches) as well as geographical communities.	Community Development	D

3. To support activities that will ensure mutually beneficial influences between Milton Keynes and other areas

3.1	Support projects that enable exchanges of information between Milton Keynes Council and/or community partners and equivalent bodies in other countries to influence activity in MK. This includes churches and voluntary sector activity	All - but funding co-ordinated by Economic Development.	C
3.2	Implement the Council's Environmental Strategy (including the Environmental Partnership Policy), and others in line with Agenda 21 commitments.	Environment	C

3.3	Develop opportunities to share knowledge of Milton Keynes officers and partners with those in other countries including Eastern Europe and developing countries	All - but co-ordinated by Economy & Learning	D
3.4	Maximise the Council's influence on EU policies directly or through others (e.g. SEEDA)	Economic Development	D

4. To work in partnership and to encourage partnership between others to develop and monitor coherent activity			
4.1	Co-ordinate an internal officer group to share information about European/International issues	Economic Development	C
4.2	Work in partnership with MKIPA and others to establish an MK-wide approach to contacts with Europe and other countries.	Economy & Learning	C
4.3	Monitor and report on this strategy and other developments	Economy & Learning	D
4.4	Develop criteria for the Council's links with other communities/countries, based on this policy and strategy	Economy & Learning	D

4. Quality Assurance and Monitoring

The European/International Sub-Committee of the Economy and Lifelong Learning Committee will monitor this strategy. An annual report will be produced documenting progress in the implementation of the Strategy.

