

Chance to comment on your quality of life

THOUSANDS of residents get the chance to spell out how happy they are with local services over the next few weeks.

Milton Keynes Council is dropping questionnaires through letterboxes of 3,500 homes to discover what people feel about the quality of life in their neighbourhood.

The completed forms – which need to be returned by December 19 – will enable the council and other local organisations to see how well they are delivering vital services and what might be done to improve them.

Fire crews tackle blaze at warehouse

FIRE crews from Great Holm and Bletchley were called to a warehouse at Wymbush.

A generator fire at Optima, on Garamonde Drive, saw the crews rush to the scene on Friday lunchtime.

They used one hose reel, two sets of breathing apparatus and thermal imaging equipment to tackle the small blaze.

Time to think of others

DEPENDING on the sighting of the moon thousands of Milton Keynes' Muslims will celebrate Eid today or tomorrow.

It marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting and has similar significance to Muslims as Christmas does to Christians – with families sharing gifts and spending time together.

It is one of the most important events in the Muslim calendar and begins when the first sight of the new moon is seen in the sky.

For Muslims it's a time to think of those who are not so well off and to spend quality time with family and friends.

They will dress in their best clothes and have a special celebratory meal – eaten during day-

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time, the first daytime meal Muslims will have had in a month.

And there will be a host of events taking place around Milton Keynes to celebrate it, and at mosques in Wolverton, Bletchley's Duncombe Street, Granby and Cranfield.

But the biggest event will bring in a crowd in its thousands.

Organised by the Milton Keynes Muslim Association the Eid Extravaganza will actually take place this Saturday at Bletchley Leisure Centre and is described as a fun family event with a bouncy castle, football game, arts and crafts and other activities all going on.

"It is a chance to see the

family again as fasting takes a lot of devotion," said Mohamed Suleman, secretary of the MKMA.

Perhaps one of the most surprising things about Eid Extravaganza is non-Muslims are welcome and encouraged to come, and Mr Suleman said it is an event they want the whole society to be able to feel involved in.

"We want more integration, we don't want it to be a segregated event.

"We want people to learn about our culture. Muslims want to integrate while maintaining our religion."

Mohamed thinks this is possible in Milton Keynes and says people are getting more understanding. Ramadan can be a

draining period for Muslims.

During it they can't eat or drink, not even water, during daylight hours.

And Anouar Kassim, chairman of Islamic Arts Heritage and Culture, has voiced a warning that people will need to be more understanding in the next few years as it starts approximately 11 days earlier each year, meaning it will fall more in the summer.

Mr Kassim said: "Work places and schools need to be aware now. The days will be longer and weather hotter, which could make things harder.

"It shouldn't mean I am fasting, I can't do this or do that.

"There is a balance in what you must do in your working life and spiritual beliefs, but it is something to think about."

the mk mix

>> Barbara Gornicka, left, and Iwona Mijal opened their Polish convenience store in Wolverton just over a year ago and they have not looked back since. Barbara is 26 and studied hotel and tourism whilst Iwona, 27, has experience working with children with special needs.



easily help Poles settle in to Milton Keynes.

If they were not Polish it is like with anything, you have to always start small and work your way up and if you smile and are always polite you stand a good chance. It is a bit simple but this is what we believe.

>> Tell us something about Poland which only a local would know, anything you're particularly proud of...

Oscypek, pronounced Ostepec, is a very special Polish cheese which you can only get from the mountain side near where we come from in Poland. We think this cheese is amazing. It comes from a special goat in our area and is completely different to any cheese you have ever had. It's too difficult to explain the unique taste. You just have to taste it for yourself to appreciate it fully.

>> You're probably aware that MK has a mixed reputation in the rest of the UK. You've got a fresh pair of eyes, what would you say to people who can't find anything good to say about the city?

They have got it all wrong. Milton Keynes is perfect for anyone who is starting out or looking to make a fresh start/new life. The city has that feeling about it.

People are extremely helpful, look at us... we came to MK with not very much and we have made something. If we can make Milton Keynes work then anyone can.

>> Where were you before you came to Milton Keynes?

We are originally from a small town called Rzeszow – pronounced Sheshuf – which is about 300 km south west of the Polish capital. We've known each other for about eight years and have done a lot of travelling together. Both of us love travelling – so far we have been to Spain, Italy, Tunisia, Malta, Crete, Greece, France and the Netherlands.

>> What attracted to you come to Milton Keynes?

A close friend of ours recommended we come to Milton Keynes. When we got here we loved it immediately. We were not thinking of opening a shop because we were busy just paying our bills and doing simple jobs like office cleaners. From there we moved on to be factory workers and then assembly line workers. Then the opportunity came up to open a shop and we thought it would be a good idea as there is a good size Polish community in Milton Keynes. It seemed just right at the time and we think our timing was good too. We think we are quite lucky.

>> What's the most striking difference you've found between MK and the place where you've lived the longest?

We have to be honest and say there are simply more opportunities for young people in Milton Keynes. When you're young it can be quite difficult to find your place, but we have found a place here. Also compared to Rzeszow, Milton Keynes is very very

mixed. Back home in Rzeszow you have very few Western Europeans, let alone people from anywhere else in the world. This is the biggest difference between where we have come from and where we are now.

>> Please tell us about all the ways in which you are involved in MK.

Our main involvement in Milton Keynes is through our shop called Nasz Sklep which means 'Our Shop'. We sell fresh Polish bread which is very popular with our customers. Our Polish sausages and classic Polish dumplings are also a real favourite along with our fresh cakes. We also have a Polish newspaper stand and we have a lot of Polish-interest leaflets on display so we are quite at the centre of the community in this part of the city.

>> How easy have you found it to settle here?

We cannot find anything bad to say about Milton Keynes. It has been such a welcoming place for us. Since we got here we cannot think of one person who has not been nice to us. Maybe we are lucky to have been met with such a nice welcome but if you are talking about Milton Keynes we can only say positive things. Not a single complaint. Definitely!

>> We're interested in highlighting ways in which MK's diversity is working in practice, so how far have you spread your net?

A lot of information about the Polish community in Milton Keynes

comes through our shop. This place is definitely like a community centre. Apart from all the leaflets we have on our counter we have a very busy notice board in our shop window. People place their TO LET or FOR SALE signs there.

Our window always is generally busy. One of our friends runs www.mkforum.org.uk which is a chat site for Polish living in MK. It's very useful because as a new Pole arriving in MK you can go there and get lots of recommendations from other Poles about almost every aspect of living and working in MK.

Our shop is regularly mentioned and recommended so of course we really like it. There is also a Polish social group that meets a few times a month for mother and toddlers and we provide all the tea and cakes for that for free. We enjoy that.

>> Are you planning to stay in MK for a fixed time for work or family reasons, or do you think you're here for good?

Now we would not consider living and working anywhere else. We are not planning to go anywhere. We think we will be in Milton Keynes for a long long time. We think we are here to stay.

>> If someone who had never been to MK before was considering moving here to make a new life, what's the best piece of advice you could give them?

If they were Polish then they could go the MK forum website. There is a lot of advice on the site that will



>> Film director and screenwriter Segun Oguntola arrived in Milton Keynes in 2007 after growing up in Greenwich South East London and spending five years developing a film industry in The Gambia, West Africa.

>> He was immediately struck by how so many backgrounds and cultures were represented in the new city's population – and set out to find why so many people come here to make a new start, and become part of the MK mix.

>> The people Segun meets feature in this regular Citizen First focus.



The MK Mix is supported by the Ramada Encore Milton Keynes in Midsummer Boulevard, CMK. Find out more about the hotel at www.encoremiltonkeynes.co.uk or calling 0870 428 1438

There's no need for you to miss out

CITIZEN First is first for news, first for features, and first for fun – and it's a newspaper with a whole new way of looking at Milton Keynes.

We've used the very latest market research information – which major names McDonald's, Tesco and Sainsbury's swear

by – to identify the 50,000 homes which will be served by the Citizen First door-to-door distribution team.

That means there will be some parts of the city which won't receive a weekly copy direct to their door.

But anyone who's not included in that

extensive network doesn't need to miss out.

Copies of Citizen First are also available at major supermarkets across the city, and you can read each week's paper at the click of a mouse, through our www.miltonkeynes.co.uk website.

If you've got any questions about our weekly distribution, please call **01582 476666**