

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet 9 July 2007
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Corporate Manager (Policy, Performance and Partnerships) / Strategic Partnerships Officer

MODEL CHARTER WITH PARISH COUNCILS

Purpose

1. To consult Members on the content of a proposed Parish Charter for South Cambridgeshire.

Background

2. The proposed Parish Charter is aimed at further promoting and developing co-operation between Town and Parish Councils and the County and District Councils in Cambridgeshire. South Cambridgeshire District Council and its parishes would sign this specific version.
3. The Rural White Paper in 2000 introduced the concept of Quality Town and Parish Councils and in June 2003 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister introduced guidance on the Quality Town and Parish Council Scheme that included a model charter. The framework for the proposed charter is based on the Cheshire Charter, which was developed from this model.
4. The Government's 10-year vision for local government reaffirms the importance of Parish Councils in local service provision. The local government white paper, strong and prosperous communities (October 2006) encourages councils to develop neighbourhood charters, setting out local priorities and standards to manage services at the neighbourhood level. The proposed charter will act as evidence of the local authority's commitment to work together with parishes.

Consultation

5. Meetings took place from 2005 to develop this version of the charter. The coordination was led by the Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils and included both principal authorities and parish and town councils. The charter is yet to be signed by any principal authority in Cambridgeshire.
6. Following consultation with various officers at SCDC, as well as EMT and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils, the original Charter has been adapted for South Cambridgeshire: this is attached as **Appendix A**. The aim is that all charters across the county will be similar.

Considerations

7. The district council can comply with the majority of points within the Charter without difficulty and these fit with the council's commitment to working with Parish Councils. However, a few statements, mainly relating to delegated responsibilities, are more contentious and require specific Elected Member input and guidance.

8. Paragraph 17: No-one at the district council currently has responsibility for fulfilling the function as set out in the final sentence. C&PALC has suggested that simply removing this sentence will not assist parishes.
9. Paragraph 21: The original wording also included “Where it is not good value or practicable the District Council will, in consultation with the parish or town council, explore alternative solutions to encourage more local-level input into service delivery. A quality parish or town council will be assumed to provide equal or better value.” EMTs advice is to remove these final two sentences. Does Cabinet have a view on the delegation of services to Parish Councils?
10. Paragraph 22: This relates to the financial aspects of delegation.
11. Paragraph 23: The original wording also included “It is agreed that the District Council will be the service provider of last resort and so delegated funding will be by grant from the District Council.” EMT recommends removing this final sentence due to the difficulties relating to grant funding, however, an alternative position on funding delegation would need to be proposed.

Implications

12. Financial	There may be financial implications if Quality Parishes opt to take on existing district council functions.
Legal	Possible implications if Quality Parishes opt to take on existing district council functions.
Staffing	Bullet point 17 would require additional resources. The majority could be fulfilled through existing staff resources.
Risk Management	Parish councils unwilling to sign the Charter with SCDCs revisions.
Equal Opportunities	The Parish Charter will hopefully mean that all Parishes are treated equally and can all expect the same level of service/communication with the district council.

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

13. Affordable Homes	None.
Customer Service	Improved working relationship with parish councils.
Northstowe and other growth areas	None.
Quality, Accessible Services	Potential for Quality Parish Councils to act as a local information and/or access point for district council services.
Village Life	Improved working relationship with parish councils will hopefully result in greater satisfaction with village life. Increased support from parish councils in delivering the ‘respect agenda’.
Sustainability	Increased support from parish councils.
Partnership	Improved working relationship with parish councils.

Recommendation

14. The Cabinet is recommended to comment upon the draft Parish Charter and in particular provide guidance as to its stance on paragraphs 17, 21, 22 and 23.

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