

October 2007 v 1.2

## Parish Charter

Definitions:

The District Council is South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils is the representative body for Parish and Town Councils in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

## Introduction

1. The parish councils of South Cambridgeshire and the District Council has agreed to publish a charter which sets out how they aim to work together for the benefit of local people. This Charter is the result of discussions locally to establish a new way of working and to confirm existing good practice.
2. The District Council acknowledges that parish and town councils are the grass-roots level of local government. By working with them and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils, the District Council aims to act in partnership with local communities, in ways which are consistent with the duty to have regard to the needs of the wider community.
3. In their role as democratically accountable bodies, parish and town councils offer a means of shaping the decisions that affect their communities. They offer a means of decentralising the provision of certain services and of revitalising local communities. In turn, the parish and town council(s) recognise the strategic role of the District Council and the equitable distribution of services that it has to achieve.
4. This Charter reflects the increasing importance of partnership working and the development of Quality Status. Thus the first part of the Charter (Part 1) applies to all parish and town councils in the area. The second part (Part 2) applies to Quality Parish and Town Councils only.

## Part 1 All Parish and Town Councils

### SUSTAINABILITY

5. The District Council will work in partnership with all parish and town councils in its area to promote sustainable social, economic and environmental development for the benefit of local communities.
6. The District Council will seek to work in partnership with all parish and town councils in endeavoring to meet and advance its climate change related commitments as a signatory to the Nottingham Declaration.

## **COMMUNITY PLANNING AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING**

7. The District Council recognises the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils as a key community partner and consider it vital that the Association is represented on the South Cambridgeshire Strategic Partnership and other relevant forums. The District Council will consult and involve parish and town councils accordingly about the content and direction of the community strategy as it affects the local communities they represent.
- 7a. Where a Parish or Town Council (or group of councils) has prepared a parish or town plan, the District Council will take account of its proposals and priorities in developing and implementing the community strategy as it affects the local areas concerned. The District Council will strengthen links between the parish council(s) and the Local Strategic Partnership in order to improve delivery of local priorities.

## **LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

8. The District Council will hold liaison meetings with representatives of all parish and town councils that wish to take part. There shall be liaison meetings as and when there are topics to discuss and shall be facilitated between the District Council and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils.

Parish and town councils will invite representatives (members and/or officers) of the District Council to area meetings of The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils. The District Council will advise C&PALC of a point of contact to enable this.

9. Principal authorities will help to organise the administration of parish and town council elections in their area and will split the cost of simultaneous elections where held on the same day. The cost of ballot papers will be borne by each local council for its own elections. The respective authorities will work together to maximise the cost effectiveness of holding such elections.

## **CONSULTATION**

10. The District Council will aim to give parish and town councils the opportunity to comment before making a decision, which affects the local community. In furtherance of this, the District Council will circulate a list of its public reports to committees and sub-committees to parish clerks at the same time as they are sent to members of the District Council. The District Council will provide with that list **specific** website addresses as to where reports may be viewed on the website of the District Council. Parish and town councils can request a copy of any public report and are encouraged to comment directly to members of the {principal authority}.
11. There may be exceptional circumstances, for example, on national/local security where consultation will not take place on confidentiality and safety issues.
12. The District Council will attend meetings with the parish and town councils as appropriate and/or area meetings of the C&PALC at a mutually agreed time to discuss matters of common interest. This is in addition to the liaison meetings referred to in 7 above.
13. Upon request parish and town councils will send copies of their agendas and papers to the District Council and to councillors for their area. Officers and councillors of the District Council will be given an opportunity to speak, by prior arrangement, at parish

and town council meeting on matters of mutual interest. It is understood that no electioneering will be undertaken at such meetings.

### **LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING**

14. Where a parish or town council (or group of councils) has prepared (in consultation with the District Council) a parish or town plan which includes proposals concerning land use and development planning issues that are compatible with the development (e.g. a village design statement) the District Council should, subject to its development plan preparation, normally adopt this as Supplementary Planning Guidance (provided it meets the requirements set out in national planning guidance).
15. Where the parish or town plan proposals imply some changes to the current development plan or the future local development framework for their area, the District Council will consider and discuss the proposals with the parish council (or councils) as part of its next review of that plan. If any aspects of the proposals are not accepted the District Council will detail the reasons in a letter to the parish or town council(s).

### **INFORMATION AND COMPLAINTS**

16. When the District Council consults parish councils, it will provide them with sufficient information to enable them to reach an informed view on the matter, and give them adequate time to respond in accordance with the statutory requirements, where applicable, having regard to the operational procedures of local councils.
17. The District Council will communicate with parish and town councils and others in the community by publishing the South Cambridgeshire Magazine regularly and making it available to the local community. It will also keep parish and town councils informed by sending them copies of other relevant District Council newsletters/local promotional material. The District Council will provide a list, at least annually of its newsletters and local promotional material available and each parish & town council will need to advise the District Council of which it requires.
18. The District Council and parish and town councils will acknowledge letters sent by the other party within 10 working days. That first acknowledgement will respond fully or give an indication of the date by which a full answer will be given. Both will provide substantive answers to letters, which need a reply. All Quality parish and town councils and principal authorities will have targets specified in their Customer Charter and all other councils will be encouraged to do the same.
19. If a parish or town council is dissatisfied with the District Council's actions, the response to a request for information, or a failure to consult, the parish or town council may make a formal complaint. The respective authorities should consider the involvement of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils and another Cambridgeshire district council in such situations to act as mediator.

### **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

20. Both the District Council and the parish and town councils have adopted codes of conduct, based on the national model code of conduct. The parish councils will work with the {principal authority's} Standards Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. The District Council's Standards Committee includes 3 parish council members to represent the interests of the district's Parish Councils and Meetings. The parish members are currently directly elected to the Standards

Committee by the Parish Councils and Meetings, the process for which is being reviewed during the 2007/08 Council year by the Standards Committee Appointments Process Task and Finish Group.

### **DELEGATING RESPONSIBILITY FOR SERVICE PROVISION**

21. If a parish or town council (or group of local councils) wishes to discharge functions on behalf of a principal authority, the District Council will consider this where it is lawful or best value (taking account of cost, quality, local preferences and practicability).

### **FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS**

22. Financial arrangements surrounding delegation of services to parish and town councils are contained within appendix 1.
23. Where a parish or town council takes on the provision of certain services, the level of funding will be agreed by the District Council and the parish/town council.

### **LOCAL COMMUNITY LIFE**

24. Within service and financial constraints, the District Council will promote local community life through e.g. capital grants and loan schemes to village halls, community centres, and other similar organisations and will promote this information, support and advice to parish and town councils.
25. Parish and town councils will assist the District Council in delivering upon the 'Respect Agenda' through encouraging members of the local community to recognise and respect the diverse views and culture of their area. Parish and town councils will also encourage residents to consider the impact that their behaviour has upon others.

### **PRACTICAL SUPPORT**

26. The District Council will, where practicable, offer parish and town councils access to their own support services, to enable them to take advantage of facilities such as printing and purchasing, at a mutually agreed price. In particular, assistance will be offered in identifying and helping to meet the training needs of parish and town councils (for example, through County Training Partnerships).

## **Part 2 Quality Parish and Town Councils**

27. In addition to the above, the District Council has agreed to work in the following ways with those parish and town councils that are recognised as having attained Quality status.

### **INFORMATION AND ACCESS POINTS**

28. If a Quality parish council (or group of Quality parish councils) wishes to become a local information and/or access point for the District Council services, the [principal authority] will help it to do so. The District Council may: -

- issue to the parish council (and up-date as necessary) relevant written information on and application forms for its services
- give electronic access to similar information and forms (where it provides these electronically) provided the parish council has appropriate technology
- provide suitable briefing, training and support to staff of the parish or town council.

#### **DELEGATION OF FUNCTIONS AND SERVICE PROVISION**

29. The District Council will discuss the mutual benefits of a Quality parish council (or group of Quality councils) taking on one or more of the functions currently provided by the District Council. It is agreed that all services, which may be legally delegated, may be considered.

## **Appendix 1**

### **General Financial Aspects of Delegation**

A – The general rule shall be that funding will follow delegation

B – That delegation funding shall be calculated on a pro rata basis that would include fixed as well as variable costs. At the time of agreeing the charter the population of the area covered by District Council will continue to grow and this growth will offset any disadvantage by the delegation of fixed costs. The District Council will provide a cost breakdown if requested to support the delegated amount.

C – The funding will be delegated by way of grant. This will provide a prudent structure should the delegated service ever need to return to District Council.

D – The amount of the grant should be reviewed every two years and increased in line with the Retail Price Index or the overall costs of District Council whichever is the greater.

E – Any disagreement on the amount allocated should be set before mediation.

## **Appendix 2**

- 1 Within two months of the signing of this Charter the two parties will meet to agree the process by which delegation may be applied for or offered. The monitoring process to be agreed also. The monitoring process should be seen to be less for Quality Councils as recognition of their status. The aim should be for the parties to have an agreed process within three months of the first meeting.
- 2 As a part of the process in 1 immediately above the parties must also agree a process for handing back the service to District Council.
- 3 As a part of the process in 1 immediately above the parties must also agree a process whereby the delegated service delivery can be challenged by the District Council. The aim should be to rectify any shortcomings and leave the service delegated but if the correct solution is for a return of the service to District Council then that should be done as soon as is practicable.