

Final Draft (5)

**The Councils' Charter**

**for**

**The Three Tier Councils in Worcestershire**

**MARCH 2005**

*logos of signatory partners*

# PARISH CHARTER FOR WORCESTERSHIRE

## Introduction

1. The Councils in the county of Worcestershire who are signatories to this Charter have agreed how they aim to work together across the three tiers. This Charter is the result of discussions between these Councils to establish a new way of working and to confirm existing good practice. There are 151 Parish and Town Councils (Local Councils) in the county, all playing a valuable role in local democracy and service provision.
2. The Principal Councils acknowledge and recognise that Local Councils are the grass-roots level of government. By working with them and Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils (CALC) and through Area Forum and other arrangements, the Principal Councils aim to work in partnership with local communities, while balancing the needs of the wider locality.
3. In their role as democratically accountable bodies, Local 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, they recognise the strategic role of the Principal Councils and the equitable distribution of services that they have to achieve.
4. It is recognised that communication is central to the relationship between all partners and is better achieved through the appropriate investment in electronic means of communication.
5. This Charter reflects the increasing importance attached by Central Government to partnership working and to the development of Quality Status for Parish and Town Councils. Part 1 of this Charter applies to all Parish and Town Councils. Part 2 applies to Quality Parish and Town Councils only.
6. This Charter will only be successful if it is continually monitored and improved, and any dissatisfaction between partners addressed directly by them. The Charter Working Group of Officers representing the three tiers in Worcestershire, has prepared this Charter and will continue as the Charter Monitoring Group, meeting at least once a year.
7. The following are signatories to this charter:

Malvern Hills District Council

Redditch Borough Council

Worcester City Council

Worcestershire County Council

Wyre Forest District Council

Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils (CALC).

Parish / Town Council of .....

Date

## **Part 1 All Parish and Town Councils**

### **Community Strategies and Local Strategic Partnerships**

8. Principal Councils will work in partnership with all Local Councils to promote sustainable social, economic and environmental development for the benefit of all local communities.
9. Principal Councils and relevant Local Strategic Partnerships will involve Parish and Town Councils in the processes of preparing and implementing the Community Strategy to improve the economic, social and environmental well being of the area and the role which Local Councils should take. They will consult with and involve Local Councils accordingly about the content and direction of their community strategies as it affects the local communities they represent. They will consult with CALC on arrangements for the appointment of Parish and Town Council representatives to LSP Boards.

### **Participation and Consultation**

10. Principal Councils will maintain their close working relationship with Local Councils through CALC area meetings and other local Forum arrangements.
11. Principal Councils will attend meetings with Local Councils (or groups of Local Councils) at a mutually agreed time to discuss matters of common interest. Officers and Councillors of the Principal Councils will be given an opportunity to speak at Local Council meetings on matters of mutual interest.
12. All partners will have in place a code of practice for Principal Councillor liaison with Local Councils, ref CALC good practice model.
13. The respective authorities will work together to limit the costs of holding elections, and will work with CALC to develop good practice in the filling of casual vacancies and co-option of Parish and Town Councillors.
14. Principal Councils will endeavour to give Local Councils the opportunity to comment before making a decision that affects a local community.
15. It should be recognised that in some circumstances the timescales set for receipt of comments on consultation documents are imposed externally. Local Councils will be flexible with their meeting arrangements in endeavouring to meet these timescales and will make suitable delegation arrangements. Only in exceptional circumstances will appropriate consultation not take place, in which case a written explanation will be given on request.

### **Information and Complaints**

16. Information exchange between Principal and Local Councils will be better achieved by the development of electronic means of regular and timely communications and access to all public documents including committee papers.
17. When Principal Councils consult Local Councils, they will endeavour to provide them with sufficient information to enable them to reach an informed view on the matter, having regard to the statutory timescale for responses.
18. Principal Councils are encouraged to publish a newsletter and make it available to all residents and Local Councils. Where practicable, Local Councils will assist in their circulation to remote households. Where appropriate, CALC will assist in the dissemination of information from Principal to Local Councils.
19. Principal and Local Councils will acknowledge communications from each other, and provide substantive answers in accordance with the provisions of any local Customer Charter, or as follows. The recipient Principal Council will send a full substantive reply or an acknowledgement within seven days. If an acknowledgement is sent, the full substantive reply will be sent within 28 days or an explanation as to why this is not possible. Local Councils will endeavour to meet these same provisions.
20. All partners will have in place a complaints procedure, ref CALC good practice Model Complaints Procedure.

### **Standards Committees**

21. Local and Principal Councils have adopted codes of conduct, based upon the national Model Code of Conduct. CALC and Local Councils will work with relevant Principal

Councils' Standards Committees to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. The relevant Principal Councils have agreed with CALC arrangements for the nomination of Parish and Town Council representatives to their Standards Committees.

### **Delegating Responsibility for Service Provision**

22. If a Local Council (or group of Local Councils) wishes to take on delegated responsibility for service delivery, the Principal Councils will consider this, taking into account Value for Money (including cost, quality, local preferences and practicability). Where it is not Value for Money or practicable the Principal Council will, in consultation with the Local Council, explore alternative solutions to encourage more local-level input into service delivery.

### **Financial arrangements**

23. Principal Councils will develop financial arrangements for Local Councils governed by the following principles which are, in effect, among those underlying the concept of Value for Money:
- a. Fairness between council tax bills in parished and non-parished areas, and between different Local Councils.
  - b. Local services provided by Principal Councils are delivered in a fair and equitable manner.
  - c. Simplicity: to keep administrative costs of operation to a minimum.
  - d. Transparency: to help understanding.
  - e. Democratic control and accountability: to let Councils support additional services with additional expenditure while ensuring accountability to all those responsible for funding. This means distinguishing between funding by Principal Councils (for a service carried out by a Local Council) and funding raised by Local Councils themselves, eg using their precepting powers.
  - f. Finance following function: where provision of a service is devolved or transferred from a Principal Council to a Local Council, funding is also transferred, with the amount involved being agreed by the Principal Council and the Local Council.
24. Where a Local Council takes on the provision of concurrent services, the level of funding will be agreed by the Principal Council and the Local Council.

### **Community Grant Aid**

25. Principal Councils have powers to promote the social, economic and environmental well being of their local communities. These may be facilitated through capital grants, loans and other initiatives.

### **Training Support**

26. Principal Councils will offer support to the County Training Partnership in identifying and helping to meet the training needs of Local Councils, and, where practicable, offer access to their own services.

### **Parish Plans and Community Strategies**

27. Principal Councils and CALC will encourage Local Councils to develop Parish (and Town) Plans in consultation with relevant Principal Councils which will provide advice and support where practicable.
28. Principal Councils, in collaboration with Local Strategic Partnerships, will take account of proposals and priorities contained within Parish Plans in developing and implementing community strategies as they affect the local areas concerned, provided that each Parish Plan conforms to the policy framework of the relevant Principal Council(s) and has been subjected to a rigorous local consultation and participation process.
29. Local Councils are encouraged to precept adequately in order to fund the action plan developed through the Parish Plan process.

### **Parish Plans and Development Planning**

30. Where a Parish Plan has been developed with the active involvement and support of the relevant Principal Councils, and includes proposals concerning land use and development

planning issues (e.g. a Village Design Statement), the Principal Council will consider adopting appropriate elements of this as a Supplementary Planning Document provided:

- a. they have met the requirements for consultation as set out in regulations relating to Local Development Documents
- b. they are in conformity with policies in the existing Development Plan
- c. they have undergone sustainability appraisal and requisite community involvement.

31. Where Parish Plan proposals imply some changes to the current Development Plan for the area, the Principal Council will consider and discuss the proposals with the Local Council(s) as part of preparing its Annual Monitoring Report and on-going review of the Principal Council's Local Development Scheme, provided the Local Council(s) make representations within the statutory timescales. Local Councils will be encouraged to contribute to the preparation of Local Development Documents contained within the Principal Council's Local Development Framework.

### **Member-Officer Relationship**

32. All partners will have in place a Member-Officer Protocol, ref CALC good practice Model Member-Officer Protocol.



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

33. Principal Councils and CALC will encourage Local Councils to attain Quality Parish status. In addition to the above, Principal Councils have agreed to work in the following ways with those Local Councils that have attained Quality Parish Status.



### **Information and Access Points**

34. Quality Councils are encouraged to explore, in collaboration with Principal Councils, opportunities for providing local information and/or access points where these meet with the aims of the Worcestershire Hub in providing joined-up public services.

### **Delegation of Functions and Service Provision**

35. Quality Councils are encouraged to consider enhancing their role in the community by providing and funding additional services.

36. The relevant Principal Councils agree to consider a request from a Quality Local Council (or group of Quality Local Councils) to take on one or more services and functions or parts of them, in accordance with agreed practical, financial and Value for Money arrangements. Individual Principal Councils shall have discretion to indicate the specific services and functions that are appropriate for delegation.

37. As part of its Value for Money arrangements, relevant Principal Councils will give a Quality Council (or group of Quality Councils), the opportunity to put forward proposals to take on aspects of the delivery, management and monitoring of services provided by Principal Councils.