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A Parish and Town Council Charter for West Lancashire

Introduction

1. The Parish Councils of West Lancashire and West Lancashire ~~District Borough~~ Council (~~hereinafter referred to as the District Borough~~ Council) have agreed to publish a Charter which sets out how we aim to work together for the benefit of local people, whilst recognising our respective responsibilities as autonomous democratically elected, statutory bodies.

This Charter is the result of discussions locally to establish a new way of working and to confirm existing good practice. It is underpinned by the shared principles of:

- Openness
- Respecting each other's opinions
- Honesty
- Being ~~apolitical~~non political

2. The ~~District Borough~~ Council acknowledges that Parish and Town Councils are the grass roots level of local government. By working with them the ~~District Borough~~ Council aims to act in partnership with our local communities, while balancing the needs of the wider community. This Charter recognises that Parish and Town Councils are different in size and aspiration and develop at different rates and seeks to accommodate this diversity.

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 (signatory) Parish Councils recognise the strategic role of the ~~District Borough~~ Council and the equitable, efficient and cost-effective distribution of services which it has to achieve.

4. Without wanting to exclude any Parish or Town Council, this Charter reflects the increasing importance attached by central government to partnership working and the development of 'Quality Status' for Parish and Town Councils.

Part 1: All Parish and Town Councils and ~~the~~ Lancashire County Council

~~It is envisaged that this Charter will be completed with inclusion of Lancashire County Council's text once this had been agreed with Parish and Town Councils in West Lancashire.~~

Parish Champion

~~5. Lancashire County Council's Champion for Parish and Town Councils is County Councillor Paul Rigby. The role of Parish Champion is to assist the Leader of the County Council and appropriate portfolio holders by advising on ways to sustain and improve effective working relationships between the county council and parish and town councils in Lancashire.~~

~~County Councillor Rigby can be contacted in the following ways:~~

~~Telephone: 07779 596592~~

~~Email: paul.rigby@lancashire.gov.uk~~

Parish Champion grant

~~6. Parish and town councils are encouraged to bid for a grant from the Parish Champion to support projects and initiatives in their locality. Each year the Parish Champion has a budget of £10,000 for a range of projects and initiatives such as the purchase of a defibrillator, a life belt, picnic tables, playground equipment and memorial stones.~~

~~Contact email: parishcouncils@lancashire.gov.uk~~

Part 2: All Parish and Town Councils and the DistrictBorough Council

Sustainability

~~75. The DistrictBorough Council will work in partnership with all Parish and Town Councils in its area to provide sustainable social, economic and environmental development for the benefit of local communities.~~

~~**Community strategies and Local Strategic Partnerships**~~ One West Lancs Partnership

~~86. The former duty for a local authority to District Council will involve Parish and Town Councils in the processes of preparing and implementing the a Sustainable Community Strategy was repealed in 2014. The West Lancashire Sustainable Community Strategy, agreed through the Local Strategic Partnership, ran until 2017. The One West Lancs partnership, which aims to promote or improve the quality of life for everyone in West Lancashire, was formed in April 2013 with partners of the local voluntary, public and business sectors and is administered by West Lancashire Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) - the key infrastructure charity for the voluntary, community and faith sector in West Lancs. The Lancashire Association of Local Councils (LALC) appoint a Parish Council representative to the One West Lancs Board, economic, social and environmental well-being of the area, incorporating the role of adopted Parish Plans, and discuss the role which Parish and Town Councils should take. 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~~

Local governance

97. The Town and Parish Councils and DistrictBorough Council are committed to ensuring effective liaison arrangements are in place in order to promote sustainable development and improve the well-being of the area.

These arrangements include:-

- ~~Representation on the West Lancashire Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The District Council will work with Parish and Town Councils to seek to ensure that these arrangements are regarded as suitable and sufficient.~~
- The DistrictBorough Council will hold liaison meetings with Parish Clerks representatives of all Parish and Town Councils that wish to take part. ~~These include meetings with Parish clerks several times a year; an annual celebration, update and networking event to which the chairmen of all Parish Councils and their clerks are invited; topic groups arranged on an ad hoc basis where similarity of interest is expressed by a number of Parish or Town Councils.~~
- By agreement with the relevant Parish and Town Councils, DistrictBorough Ward Councillors will attend meetings and make themselves available to the local Council, in order to develop good communications between the two tiers of local government.
- Attendance by DistrictBorough Council officers where appropriate and with appropriate notice, at meetings of ~~Parish and Town Councils and the West Lancashire Association~~ of Local Councils (LALC) by request to provide information, for specific agenda items.
- A commitment from the Parish and Town Councils who are signatories to this Charter to involve themselves in the above liaison arrangements.
- ~~Representation from local Parish and Town Councils on the District Council's Standards Committee, and on overview and scrutiny commissions of the District Council where appropriate. Representatives will be chosen in line with democratic principles agreed with the signatories to this Charter.~~

108. The DistrictBorough Council will administer the holding of Parish and Town Council elections. The respective authorities will work together to limit the costs of holding such elections.

Consultation

119. The DistrictBorough 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 DistrictBorough Council will circulate electronically, a list of its public reports to Parish clerks at the same time as they are sent to members of the DistrictBorough Council. Parish and Town Councils ~~can request a copy of any public report and~~ are encouraged to comment directly to members of the DistrictBorough Council. The DistrictBorough Council will inform Parish Councils of decisions by sending ~~them~~ minutes of decisions relating to its public reports. In particular, the DistrictBorough Council will provide:-

- Weekly lists of planning applications electronically to all clerks, ~~who can receive electronic versions. The paper service will continue by exception but will be phased out by April 2008.~~
- Weekly lists of licensing applications electronically to all clerks ~~who can receive electronic versions. The paper service will continue by exception but will be phased out by April 2008.~~
- Information relating to the proposed disposal of land within the Council's ownership.
- Consultation on street naming.
- Consultation on individual planning applications as appropriate.
- Encouragement to those submitting major planning applications to consult with local communities and Parish Councils.

1210. It is our aim that only in exceptional circumstances will appropriate consultation not take place, in which case a written explanation will be given on request.

134. To help achieve the objectives laid down in this Charter, liaison and consultation (both formal and informal) will be further developed at Parish and Town Council level through regular meetings or specific service consultative groups and, at officer level, individually or through working parties and groups.

142. Councillors and officers of the DistrictBorough Council, wherever practicable, will attend meetings with the Parish and Town Councils (or groups of such Councils) by request and at a mutually agreed time to discuss matters of common interest.

153. Parish and Town Councils will send copies of their agendas, ~~papers and minutes to the District Council. They will send copies of the same~~ to DistrictBorough Councillors for their area, on request. Officers and Councillors of the DistrictBorough Council will be given an opportunity to speak at Parish and Town Council meetings on matters of mutual interest.

Information and complaints

164. When the DistrictBorough 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.

175. The DistrictBorough Council will ~~communicate with Parish and Town Councils and others in the community, by publishing 'The Voice' regularly and making it available to the local community. It will also~~ keep Parish and Town Councils informed by sending them electronic copies of:

- The Chief Executive's Newsletter, West Lancs Now7 Days, in ~~hard or~~ e-mail format on request.
- Copies of all Council press releases, in ~~hard or~~ e-mail format, on request.
- Copies of public Cabinet, Council and other Committee papers and decisions, in ~~hard or~~ e-mail format.
- The provision of these papers, and the decisions made, on the Council website.
- The internal ~~short~~ members contact card for guide to telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of relevant officers, as and when it is updated, by e-mail.
- ~~A copy of the Council's service standards leaflets, as and when they are updated.~~
- ~~A copy of the annual Citizens' Guide, incorporating a list of emergency numbers.~~
- By provision of an outline service delivery plan for street scene services posted on the website.

186. The DistrictBorough Council and Parish and Town Councils will acknowledge e-mails and letters sent by the other partner and both will aim to provide substantive answers to letters which need a reply, if possible, within two weeks, i.e. 10 working days.

197. The Parish and Town Councils will communicate with the DistrictBorough Council by sending representatives to attend clerks liaison meetings and by sending the DistrictBorough Council copies of minutes-of meetings, Parish Plans (where these exist) and newsletters (where these are produced). The Parish and Town Councils and DistrictBorough Council will work together to ensure that, as much use as possible is made of electronic communication. Where a Parish or Town Council has a website, it will ensure this is linked to the DistrictBorough Council website.

~~18. The District Council will provide advice on request to Parish and Town Councils on establishing a website via the Lancashire Community Portal.~~

Complaints

1920. If either the DistrictBorough Council or a Parish or Town Council is dissatisfied with the other's actions, the responses to a request for information, or failure to consult, the matter will be dealt with informally in the first instance and in accordance with the relevant organisation's complaints procedure.

~~Standards committee~~Councillors' Code of Conduct

210. Both the DistrictBorough 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 DistrictBorough Council's ~~Standards Committee~~Monitoring Officer to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. The ~~Borough District~~ Council has consulted and agreed the following arrangements with the Parish and Town Councils for the appointment of representatives to the Standards Committee.

All Parish Councils are invited to submit the name of a member that they would wish to see appointed to serve on the Standards Committee. The Member nominated should not be a District Borough Councillor and ideally should not be a close friend of any member or officer of the District Borough Council.

The nominees will be asked to prepare a brief personal profile set out on a standard proforma.

Parish Councils will then be contacted to vote for two candidates from the list of nominations. The two candidates with the highest number of votes will then be formally appointed by the Council ~~at its Annual Meeting~~, to serve on the Standards Committee for a three year~~the period specified~~.

~~The Council Secretary and Solicitor will write to the~~ Parish Councils will be e-mailed with the following the Annual Meeting, giving details of the appointments made.

The Borough Council will invite all Parish Clerks and Councillors to the annual Code of Conduct training event on the Code of Conduct.

The Borough Council will publish on its website copies of each Parish Councillor's Register of Interests Form, unless the Parish has specifically advised that they will publish its own forms on the their own website.

Delegating responsibility for service provision

224. If a Parish or Town Council (or group of local Councils) wishes to discharge functions on behalf of the DistrictBorough Council, the DistrictBorough Council will consider this where it provides best value (taking into account cost, quality, local preferences and practicality). Where it does not offer best value the DistrictBorough Council will, in consultation with the Parish or Town Council(s), explore alternative solutions to encourage more local-level input to service delivery. In particular the DistrictBorough Council will offer each Parish and Town Council up to two meetings a year to discuss and influence street scene issues with the Unit Service Manager, the Director of Leisure & Environment or her/his representative.

Financial arrangements

232. The DistrictBorough Council has put in place a set of ~~ut its~~ financial arrangements for its relations with Parish and Town Councils at Appendix 4 in accordance with the principles and good practice guidance. The DistrictBorough Council will keep these arrangements under review and will consult with Parish Councils as and when changes are proposed on them ~~the financial arrangements~~.

243. Where a Parish ~~or Town~~ Council takes on the provision of certain services, the level of funding and terms will be agreed by the DistrictBorough Council and the Parish Council.

Local community life

254. The DistrictBorough Council will promote local community life through:

- The capital grants scheme for Parish and Town Councils.
- Working in partnership with Parish and Town Councils to develop local facilities and services (e.g. activities for young people) and attract external funding for these.
- Providing advice on the development of Parish Plans.

Practical support

265. The DistrictBorough Council will, where practical, explore with Parish and Town Councils areas where they can offer access to its own support services enabling them to take advantage of these at a mutually agreed price. In particular, assistance will be offered:

- By helping to meet any training needs identified by Parish and Town Councils, by offering access to appropriate parts of the Council's ad hoc seminar and training programmes (if this is wanted by Parish and Town Councils).
- By providing advice, information and enabling access to ~~the LSP, and~~ DistrictBorough Council's Departments/divisions to help in the preparation and delivery of Parish Plans.
- By 'signposting' to services outside the DistrictBorough Council's remit and where Parish and Town Councils would find this of assistance, e.g. in relation to mediation.
- By facilitating joint approaches to issues involving several agencies.
- By providing named officer(s) as the first point of contact for Parish and Town Councils if they do not know who to go to within the DistrictBorough Council.
- By providing space for Parish and Town Council use, if appropriate and practicable, within Council publications.
- Through the provision of mail franking and address labels for mailings (subject to rules around releasing such information and at the expense of the Parish or Town Council).
- By offering new clerks access to the Council's induction Video DVD and an opportunity to meet with relevant officers and members.
- ~~By providing advice on establishing Parish and Town Council websites through the Lancashire Community Portal.~~
- By providing access to suppliers lists.

Land use planning

276. Where a Parish or Town Council (or group of Councils) has prepared a Parish or Town Plan which includes proposals concerning land use and development planning issues (e.g. a village design statement) the DistrietBorough Council will consider the proposals as part of the preparation of any new relevant Local Development Framework (LDF) documents.

287. Therefore Parish or Town Councils are strongly advised to seek advice from the DistrietBorough Council before embarking on the development of Parish Plans or design statements, and involve themselves in the production of LDF documents.

Quality Parish and Town Councils

298. The Parish and Town Councils and DistrietBorough Council recognise the potential benefits, in terms of the quality of service offered to local people, of Parish and Town Councils working towards and gaining, quality status. Efforts to achieve quality status are encouraged.

Parish Plans

2309. The Parish and Town Councils and DistrietBorough Council also recognise that the development of a Parish Plan can have a benefit in its own right and can provide a useful input to the community planning process for the whole DistrietBorough and that such plans can be developed independently of a policy in relation to seeking quality status. Consequently the DistrietBorough Council will encourage the production of Parish Plans by:-

- Providing advice and information to assist the production of Parish plans.
- Ensuring the criteria of the DistrietBorough Council's capital grants scheme provide an incentive for those Councils preparing and/or having a Parish Plan in place or having 'adopted' the same.
- ~~• Encouraging the Local Strategic Partnership to take account of the proposals and priorities within Parish and Town Plans in developing and implementing the community strategy.~~

- Encouraging strengthened links between Parish and Town Councils and the One West LancsLocal Strategic Partnership in order to improve the delivery of local priorities.

Monitoring and Review

310. The Parish and Town Councils and DistrietBorough Council want this Charter to be a living document which helps to enhance communication and arrangements between the two layers of local democracy. Consequently, the operation of the Charter will be regularly monitored through the liaison arrangements described at paragraph 97 of this document. The Charter will be reviewed approximately every three years or sooner if required.

342. In between reviews, any Parish or Town Council within West Lancashire may give notice of its wish to become a signatory, or resign as a signatory, from the Charter.

Conclusion

332. The ~~following undersigned~~ Parish and Town Councils of West Lancashire and West Lancashire DistrietBorough Council are committed to the principles and statements within the Charter, for the benefit of local people.

September 2019

Useful contact details:

(To be completed once the new structures are in place from 4 November 2019)

Appendix 1 (See clean version for insert)