

PARISH CHARTER PROPOSAL

There is a need for closer working between Winchester City Council and the parish councils to create partnerships to help better serve the interests of residents. A Parish Charter would set out how Winchester District would share information and have a relationship with mutual respect for each other's position.

It is important that Winchester City Council consult more with the Parish and Town Councils who have a much deeper knowledge of their area and the needs of their residents. There needs to be consultation, engagement and participation in the decision-making process. A Focus group has been formed, including parish representatives, to work on reviewing a new local enforcement plan which will form part of the planning section of the Charter.

It was suggested at the meeting that the parishes should be involved far more in the pre-planning process as they have the local knowledge and can work via Village Design Statements and other documents to suggest the way that development should take place. This involvement should not, however, preclude the parish being able to put in negative comments with regard to possible development following discussion with local residents. However, if a parish does make a negative comment and the application goes before the Planning Committee, it should be made clear that a representative of the parish should attend the meeting to make a representation to ensure that time is not wasted for all parties.

It should be set down that Town and Parish Councils:

- Are a vital part of democratic local government, representing communities at local level.
- Are an important primary source of information about community aspirations and opinion.
- Provide an opportunity to foster greater community empowerment.

Winchester City Council should:

- Provide an appropriate contact officer for each Parish Council within the Community Team in order to promote partnership working, check Parish and Town views on policies and initiates and facilitate Town and Parish Councils in resolving any difficulties with the District Council.
- Seek the participation of, and consult with, Town and Parish Councils on District Council policies that affect Parishes and Towns collectively or individually.
- Encourage appropriate officers to attend Town and Parish Council meetings in order to explain policies and plans, especially when particularly contentious issues cannot be resolved in any other way.
- Make every effort to write consultation documents in plain English and to provide access to any information necessary to enable the Town and Parish Councils to reach an informed view.
- Report back to the Town or Parish Council on the outcome of consultations.
- Work with the Parish Councils to explore opportunities for commissioning local services.
- Provide training events for Town and Parish Councils on topics that relate to the District Councils, e.g. statutory functions notably the code of Conduct and Town and Parish planning.
- Accept approaches from Parish and Town Councillors and Clerks for the District Council to provide training sessions on issues where the District Council has a professional knowledge that would be beneficial to Town and Parish Councils e.g. Human Resources.
- Ensure staff are aware of the role, responsibilities and functions of the Town and Parish tiers.