

### ***Introduction***

The County, District and Borough, Town and Parish councils in Dorset which we jointly represent are all committed to the principles of democratic local government. We are all keen to make continuing efforts to improve, and see greater public participation in our system of local democracy and we are committed to working together for the benefit of all the people of Dorset, to provide them with the best possible public services within the constraints of public finance.

In this Charter 'Principal Councils' refers to the County, District or Borough councils. 'Local Councils' refers to Parish and Town councils. Local Partnerships refers to District and Town Partnerships

### ***Recognition***

We recognise and have mutual respect for the different roles of the different types of local government as well as the roles of the community bodies including the Dorset Strategic Partnership, Local Community Partnerships and other forms of community engagement.

In their role as democratically accountable bodies, Local Councils not only offer a means of shaping the decisions that affect their communities, but of representing the grass-roots of local government, decentralising the provision of certain services and of revitalising local communities. In turn, they recognise the strategic role and powers of the Principal Councils and the equitable distribution of services that they have to achieve, bearing in mind the need to secure best value for services.

The Principal Councils: by working with Local Councils, the Dorset Association of Parish & Town Councils (DAPTC), and local partnerships where they exist: aim to act in partnership with local communities, while balancing the needs of the wider locality.

### ***Governance***

We recognise that the basis for liaison between Principal and Local Councils can differ and that engagement in local governance arrangements may vary between Districts and Boroughs, but appropriate arrangements are, and will be made for liaison and representation between all the parties to this Charter. Appropriate protocols will be mutually agreed for these more local arrangements, such as development control or licensing.

The District and Borough councils will help organise the administration of Local Council elections. The respective authorities will work together to limit the costs of holding such elections.

### ***Engagement & Consultation***

All parties recognise the benefit of partnership whether in the provision of all services or community planning. Coupled with this is the importance of wide consultation of both citizens and, in all directions, between areas of local government, whether in respect of parish/community planning, or other matters such as the Regional Spatial Strategy, Local Development framework, development control, licensing, crime and disorder, transport, roads and other specific issues.

Whenever possible adequate time will be given for consultations, say a minimum of six weeks, (except in the case of Development Control where more rigid timescales have to be imposed) and consultees will strive to respond in a clear, timely and professional manner.

### ***Communication***

Both Principal and Local Councils will try their best to achieve an effective two way flow of communication, using electronic communication when possible and appropriate, supported by written communication as necessary and by providing sufficient copies of relevant newsletters, leaflets and other publications as may be appropriate within the spirit of this Charter.

Both Principal and Local Councils will acknowledge letters and provide substantive answers to communications which need a reply in accordance with the provisions of their customer care procedures.

Above all the objective is to provide a constructive dialogue, and to help achieve this objective, communication (both formal and informal) between Principal and Local Councils will be developed further through regular meetings or specific service consultative groups and, at officer level, individually or through working parties and groups.

Whenever possible and appropriate elected members or officers will be given an opportunity to speak at meetings of other authorities

Whilst the contact point for Local councils is invariably the clerk, DAPTC often fulfils an intermediary or collective role on their behalf, whilst the Principal Authorities will provide at least one main contact point for Local Councils.

All parties accept the need to resolve any potential disputes at an early stage by positive and constructive dialogue to avoid escalation.

### ***Ethics***

It is recognised that all parties are subject to the Audit Commission and the Code of Conduct and will strive to uphold the spirit as well as the letter of Accountability and the Code to ensure that the general public has the highest regard and confidence in all levels of local government.

The local councils will work with the District and Borough councils' Standard's Committees to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. The District and Borough councils have made arrangements with their Local Councils, through DAPTC, to appoint representative(s) from the Local Councils to the relevant Standards Committees or Standards Sub-Committees.

### ***Support***

The importance of training is accepted by all parties. Principal Councils usually arrange this "in house", and Local Councils through the Dorset County Training Partnership. (Of which all parties are members) However co-operation in training activities will be promoted whenever appropriate, such as that regarding the Code of Conduct, Development Control and other areas of mutual interest to help achieve the highest levels of professionalism. Some generic training activities may also be extended to other community groups.

Support may be provided in other ways such as by giving access to each others newsletters and other forms of communication. The Principal Councils will, where practicable, offer Local 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.

### ***Empowerment/Diversity***

There is mutual recognition of each others ambitions for the community, and means of fulfilling these ambitions, and the principle of subsidiarity will be applied.

Local Councils should recognise the rigour of the inspection, to which Principal Authorities are subject. A Quality Local Council should also be recognised by Principal Councils as one which may be able to do more with and on behalf of its citizens and the Principal Councils, thereby making services more responsive to local needs. The Principal Councils will recognise this in the operation of their best value arrangements by considering the delegation of functions. Whenever delegation is considered, funding for the service will be subject to negotiation.

At the same time the vast difference in the size, sustainability and geographical composition of Local Councils will be recognised by Principal Councils.

### ***Application & Monitoring***

The Principal and Local Councils acknowledge that failure to follow the principles of this Charter, including requests for information, or their failure to consult, may result in the instigation of a council's formal complaints procedure.

This Charter to be reviewed every two years as a minimum to ensure that it is fit for purpose.