

Document Notes:

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Introduction

The first discussion of a charter emerged during the shadow council period before the unitary changes went live. Whilst a number of hours had been spent discussing the charter no document reached agreement or publication. In the early days of Dorset Council there were potentially more pressing priorities in the first 6/12 months and then the COVID pandemic diverted resources on to other priorities. Work on the charter lapsed.

Challenges and Opportunities

Now that the COVID pandemic challenges have shifted and with an ever-present issue of bridging the perceived gap in relations and communication between the tiers of local government; it would seem appropriate to re-look at the opportunities a charter might offer.

It's important not to be weighed down by any previous barriers to establish a charter to focus on some of the excellent collaboration over the last two years and how that helped support our communities at a crucial time.

Important

When reading this document, the following points need to be considered:

1. A core group of stakeholders need to be consulted in the development of the final version. This will need to be agreed and include representatives from all parties. Ownership of the content is vital for it to stand a chance of succeeding.
2. The headline sections have been created by reviewing a number of 'charters' that already exist in the local government sector and they provide a useful start to which those involved in the development of a 'charter' can take a lead.
3. The content below is for illustrative and discussion purposes and in no way is intended to be read as 'set in stone'. The ideas can be developed, edited and deleted by those reviewing and developing the 'charter'.
4. Consideration needs to be given to wider engagement in Dorset Council, parish and town councils with an opportunity for consultation and formal approval. For example, DAPTC AGM Nov 2022?
5. Thought needs to be given as to how key groups are engaged and on-boarded to the final version of the 'charter'. These groups could include;
 - a. Dorset Councillors
 - b. Political Parties
 - c. Dorset Council colleagues
 - d. Parish and Town Council elected members
 - e. Parish and Town Council employees
 - f. Communities and community groups in Dorset
 - g. Dorset Branch of SLCC
 - h. Dorset CCG / Integrated Care Board

There will be other considerations to be factored in above, this document may initiate some discussion. There will also be a need to annual review the final charter to ensure it remains current.

Headline Structure and Framework

On the following pages is a headline structure followed by potential charter content.

HEADLINE CHARTER STRUCTURE

1 - FOREWORD

Potential Contributions from:

Leader of Dorset Council or Portfolio Holder for Culture, Communities and Customer Services

Chair of Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils or President of Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils

Potentially include some supportive statements from some town council chairs and smaller parish chairs or councils from different parts of Dorset..... "we welcome the new charter....."

2 – CONTENTS

Schedule of sections within the charter and completed once all content has been approved.

3 – INTRODUCTION

Any relevant background and supporting information to assist the reader to understand how the charter was developed and why.

This next section sets out the headline aims and objectives that all parties have signed up to

4 – CHARTER AIMS

This section sets out the broad aims and how an effective charter will be evidenced across the Dorset Council area.

- ❖ Description of 'Effective Partnership Working' – using potentially '*Working Together*' as the identifiable branding
- ❖ Shared principles that all parties sign up to and apply to both

Potential Charter content for illustration and discussion purposes

These next statements set out the headline aims and objectives that all parties may sign up to:

Parish / town councils and Dorset Council will endeavour to work in partnership for the benefit of the local community while respecting their mutual rights as separate democratic bodies.

Improve, develop and maintain positive relationships between Dorset Council and parish and town councils across the principle authorities area.

Set out clear expectations of both Dorset Council and parish and town councils.

Respect the constraints and acknowledge the dynamic roles delivered by Dorset Council officers and parish and town clerks.

These next statements set out the headline aims and objectives that specific parties may sign up to:

Dorset Council will...

Recognises the importance of parish / town councils as the grass roots of local democracy and work with them to promote active citizenship and participation.

Will provide information / briefings to ensure that staff have a good understanding of the role and function of the parish / town councils and key contacts via an A to Z on their website.

Recognise and understand that the work of parish / town councils is heavily reliant on volunteering and good will.

Recognise the difference between smaller parishes and larger parishes and town in terms of ability to handle information and resources at their disposal.

Recognise the importance of engaging parish and town councils early with changes, projects and events potentially impacting their community.

Hold regular liaison meetings and briefings.

Parish and Town Councils will.....

Actively promote their work and achievements.

Encourage active citizenship and participation across all age groups.

Identify local needs and consult with local communities and groups within those communities.

Be seen as an active 'outpost' of Dorset Council in their community to ensure the 'working together' intent is delivered locally.

The following sections all parties are agreed to, but there may be specific statements that are only relevant to one or more of the parties under the charter.

5 – EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION & ENGAGEMENT

Dorset Council will:

Provide online and in person engagement and liaison meetings throughout the year which will include:

Working Together Webinars hosted by DAPTC

In person events and consultations as and when appropriate

Larger Parishes and Towns Officer Meeting

Parish and Town Councils Newsletter

Ensure funding updates and opportunities are communicated promptly

Encourage all teams to understand and working with parish and town councils across the Dorset Council area.

Ensure that consultations undertaken and completed have a feedback mechanism to parish and town councils so that the potential outcomes are shared widely.

Avoid the use of jargon and abbreviations to ensure parish and town council colleagues and elected members are engaged effectively.

Liaise with DAPTC to ensure that key parish and town council information is maintained and that there is a dedicated webpage to assist with this aim.

Encourage effective ward member updates at parish and town council meetings and if unable to attend provide a short format report in advance of the meeting date.

Parish and Town Councils will:

Ensure their representatives attend any communication, briefing or engagement events as well as receive key communications by email or newsletter.

Ensure the representatives report back to their councils sharing key updates and communications.

Respond to consultations from Dorset Council within the allocated timescales.

Encourage their elected members to access information on the Dorset Council website and other communications.

Share information from Dorset Council in their communities through their websites, newsletters and social media accounts.

Keep their websites up to date with key contact information for Clerks and councillors.

Keep meeting records including agendas, minutes and annual reports updated and accessible on their website.

Use the preferred and dedicated escalation route for parish and town councils to raise an issue that is proving difficult to resolve or progress.

Ensure Clerks have use of and access to technology and online profiles to be able to engage fully with Dorset Council.

Work with Dorset Council to seek mutually agreeable and acceptable solutions to issues.

Recognise the strategic role Dorset Council plays in tackling issues beyond individual town and parish council boundaries.

6 – SERVICE PROVISION

Dorset Council will....

Provide prompt responses to requests for information from parish and town councils.

Provide comprehensive information to allow parish and town councils to decide whether to take on functions/services currently provided by Dorset Council.

Parish and Town Councils will....

Make available to Dorset Council their meeting/event spaces for the public, community or partnership meetings in which they have an interest.

Consider whether they wish to take on any functions when enabled to make an informed decision.

7 – TRAINING & BRIEFINGS

Dorset Council will....

Provide officers to help support any training and briefings on central government policies and initiatives that have an impact on parish and town councils in conjunction with DAPTC under the 'Working Together' approach.

Encourage officers and members to attend training and briefings to understand what parish and town councils do for their local communities and the benefits of working together.

Parish and Town Councils will....

Encourage staff and members to attend relevant training and briefings supported by Dorset Council and DAPTC. Where appropriate ensure updates are provided to their council and community.

8 – FINANCE

Dorset Council will....

Consult parish and town councils on proposed changes to service provision with any budget implications in a timely manner.

Provide information to support parish and town councils to understand any changes in key data that impacts the determination of precepts.

Meet the administration and staff costs with ordinary elections and Neighbourhood Plan referenda.

Provide a detailed breakdown in a timely manner of elections costs to which parish and town councils are expected to contribute.

Parish and Town Councils will....

Provide precept information by the mutually agreed deadline each year.

Contribute to the costs of any parish and town council by-election in their parish.

9 – PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Dorset Council will....

Undertake the formal period of public consultation prior to deciding a planning application (this may vary for listed building and conservation area consent).

Issue required planning consultation to the relevant town or parish council.

Publish information online in an open data format so that it is available to anyone who wishes to comment.

Make planning applications available for comments for no less than 21 days or 14 days where a notice is published in a newspaper.

Notify parish and town councils of the outcome of planning applications when determined.

Ensure there is clarity for Dorset councillors and parish/town councils about the procedure for having applications determined by committee.

Parish and Town Councils will....

Respond to planning applications within the 21 days consultation period; if they wish to respond. (No representation will be reported as ‘no comments received’).

Extensions requests to the 21 days consultation period will be made on an exceptional basis by parish and town councils.

Respond to amended plans within the 14 days consultation period; if they wish to respond.

Ensure the Clerk has the capacity and is trained to handle planning applications electronically, to then circulate amongst their parish or town councillors.

10 - LICENSING

Dorset Council will....

Inform the parish and town councils of any licence applications listed, providing 28 days to respond under the following:

Licensing Act 2003 – Premises Licence (New)

Licensing Act 2003 – Premises Licence (Variation)

Licensing Act 2003 – Premises Licence (Interim Authority)

Licensing Act 2003 – Club Premises Certificate (New)

Licensing Act 2003 – Club Premises Certificate (Variation)

Gambling Act 2005 – Premises Licence (New)

Gambling Act 2005 – Premises Licence (Variation)

Sexual Entertainment Venue – New

Sexual Entertainment Venue – Renewal

Inform the relevant town and parish councils of any Street Trading Consent (new or renewal), providing 28 days to respond.

Provide awareness and training to parish and town councils for any portal for licensing consultations.

Provide updates, briefings and general awareness training for parish and town councils on licensing laws and procedures.

Parish and Town Councils will.....

Attend any briefings, updates and training provided by the Licensing Team at Dorset Council.

Respond to licensing applications within the 28 days timeframe, if they wish to comment.

11 – DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

Dorset Council will.....

Following each contested or uncontested election, the Returning Officer will give notice to the Proper Officer at each parish or town council the names of each candidate elected. In the absence of a Proper Officer the names will be provided to the parish Chair.

The Returning Officer will share the ‘statement of the persons nominated’ to the Proper Officer.

The Monitoring Officer will maintain a register of members’ interests which will be published to Dorset Council website.

The Monitoring Officer will support DAPTC in the delivery of training to support upholding the standards of elected members.

Parish and Town Councils will....

The Proper Officer for parish and town councils will help administer the registration of members’ interests within 28 days of their election or appointment to office through the self service portal on the Dorset Council website.

The Proper Officer will remind members to keep their details up to date and will also remove any councillor’s information should they no longer be a member of council.

The Proper Officer will notify the elections team when a casual vacancy arises to ensure the correct procedures are followed to fill a vacancy.

Headline Charter Draft & Explanatory Notes for Discussion

Encourage members to attend training to uphold Standards of Conduct in Public Office and the Code of Conduct.

Review and ensure that the adopted Code of Conduct is up to date and where possible aligned to the Local Government Association Model Template.

CONSIDER ANY OTHER MAJOR SECTION HEADINGS WHERE SETTING OUT EXPECTATIONS WOULD BE BENEFICIAL

End of Draft Content for Discussion

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