

East Hampshire Parish Charter 2017

Introduction

Parish and Town Councils have an important role to play in the local government system. They are the most local level of government and can influence decisions that affect the local area and bring life to their communities.

We feel now, more than ever, it is important that both East Hampshire District Council and Parish and Town Councils within the district continue to work closely together in partnership for the benefit of our residents.

Working with representatives of Parish and Town Councils within the East Hants area we developed a Parish Charter in 1997 and a Compact Code of Good Practice in 2008 these documents represent a mutual agreement between the Two Tiers of local government. This updated Charter acknowledges the role of Parish and Town Councils and provides a framework which enables us to develop and promote local needs and aspirations. This newest version has been created in partnership with the East Hampshire Association of Parish and Town Councils.

Signed

On behalf of
East Hampshire District Council

On behalf of
East Hampshire Association of Parish
and Town Councils

1. Mutual Agreement

Successful partnership working at the parish level can only be achieved if the partners – the District Council and the Town and Parish Councils – understand and respect each other's roles and work to complement those roles in serving the community.

East Hampshire District Council recognises that Town and Parish Councils

- a) Are a vital part of democratic local government, representing communities' at the most local level
- b) Are an important primary source of information about community aspirations and opinion
- c) Provide an opportunity to foster greater community empowerment
- d) Are to be respected, treated equally and recognised as diverse in their size and in the resources available to them
- e) Are affected by the financial and political decisions of other tiers of government and often have to work with certain constraints when fulfilling their responsibilities

2. Information, Social Media and Communication

In Hampshire there are three tiers of local government, additionally a proportion of East Hampshire sits within the South Downs National Park. This can make it challenging to ensure that communication is effective between each organisation. Securing good communication and liaison between the parish tier and the district tier is a cornerstone of this Parish Charter and involves communication from the most strategic level right down to liaison on specific local projects.

East Hampshire District Council undertakes to:

- a) 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.
- b) Provide written confirmation of receipt of written communication (including emails) from a Local Council within 3 working days and aim to reply in full within 10 working days. If a full reply cannot be delivered within 10 working days the District Council will provide a holding reply saying when a full reply will be available and which officer is dealing with the matter.
- c) Require the attendance of District Councillors at Town and Parish Council Meetings. For all occasions where the District Councillor is unable to attend, apologies will be tendered.
- d) Provide links to Town and Parish Councils' websites on the relevant page of the District Council's website.
- e) During the Community Forum meetings the District Council will allocate the first 30 minutes of the meeting to allow both Town and parish Councillors to meet informally along with any members of the public who may have local issues they wish to discuss.
- f) During times of emergency such as severe weather and other emergency, where possible, the District Council will make all efforts to communicate information and intelligence to the Town and Parish Councils in as near real time as possible.
- g) During District Councillor inductions, a representative from the Town and Parish Councils will be invited to provide information on the role and importance of positive liaison between the two tiers of local government.
- h) Advise the relevant Parish Council of any District Council led events taking place within their parish
- i) Provide a media platform to share relevant matters affecting the District Council or the district as a whole to the Parish and Town Councils.
- j) Ensure that links to Parish and Town Council websites are made available on the EHDC website via an interactive online map.
- k) Provide space on the EHDC website for Town and Parish councils to present the latest version of their newsletter.
- l) Provide a space on the EHDC website for Town and Parish Councils to present key decisions, Council minutes and other important information.
- m) Continue to communicate information and exchanges within the local government sector – such as devolution.

Town and Parish Councils undertake to:

- a) Be represented at liaison meetings convened by the District Council and the Association of Town and Parish Councils.
- b) Provide written confirmation of receipt of written communication (including emails) from the District Council within 3 working days and aim to reply in full within 10 working days, if a full reply cannot be delivered within 10 working days, the Local Council will provide a holding reply stating when a full reply will be available.
- c) Provide the relevant ward councillor(s) with copies of the Parish Agendas and papers either by the parish website, email or hard copy.
- d) Inform the District Council of any Parish Council led events taking place within the Parish.
- e) Make the various links as required in order for the EHDC website to accurately reflect Town and Parish Council details.
- f) Ensure information relevant to the Town/Parish area is available to residents via the most suitable media available.

3. Consultation and Joint Governance

Town and Parish Councils and the District Council share many statutory functions and share the desire to deliver integrated local government services to the public. This requires appropriate governance arrangements to ensure that all tiers of local government can work together and share accountability. Consultation is one of the key components of local government and can lead to better informed policies and a more engaged public. Consultations with local councils require careful preparation if all parties are to benefit from the exercise.

East Hampshire District Council undertakes to:

- a) Seek the participation of, and consult with, Town and Parish Councils on District Council policies that affect Parishes and Towns collectively or individually.
- b) Provide a minimum of 4 weeks for consultation on District Council policies other than in cases where the District Council is bound by other statutory requirements e.g. in the case of planning applications.
- c) Discuss with the Town or Parish Council concerned at the earliest possible stage, any District Council prompted plan or scheme that affects a parish specifically and invite them to attend any relevant meetings and public exhibitions and also take Town and Parish Council views into account prior to making any decisions.
- d) 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.
- e) 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.
- f) Report back to the Town or Parish Council on the outcome of consultations.
- g) Work with the Parish Councils to explore opportunities for commissioning local services.

Town and Parish Councils undertake to:

- a) Respond where possible to invitations to attend consultative committees, working groups and meetings.
- b) Respond within consultation deadlines set by the District Council unless otherwise agreed with the District Council.
- c) Work with the District Council to seek mutually acceptable solutions to contentious issues.
- d) Respect any Confidential or sensitive information provided to them by the District Council or other agencies at consultative meetings, committees or working groups.
- e) Work with the District Council to explore opportunities for commissioning local services.

4. Practical Support and Training

Town and Parish Councils rely on varying degrees on the professional support that can be provided by others. There are times when the assistance of the District Council can be particularly useful to them.

East Hampshire District Council undertakes to:

- a) Provide training events for Town and Parish Councils on topics that relate to the District Councils statutory functions notably the code of Conduct and Town and Parish planning.
- b) 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.
- c) Ensure staff are aware of the role, responsibilities and functions of the Town and Parish tiers.
- d) The District Council reserves the right to charge Town and Parish Councils depending on the type and complexity of the training.

Local Councils undertake to:

- a) Provide strong participation (where appropriate) in training courses offered by the District Council, this is particularly relevant for planning training and will enable Town and Parish Councils to respond responsibly.

5. Sustainability and Planning

The opportunity to become involved in the sustainability and planning systems are of keen interest to most Town and Parish Councils. Planning policies and procedures can seem very complex and this requires active partnership working by the District and Town and Parish Councils to ensure community interests are properly served.

East Hampshire District Council undertakes to assist Town and Parish Councils to participate in the statutory planning system by;

- a) Providing a minimum of 21 days (14 days for consultation on amended plans) whenever practicable for the submission of representations by Parish and Town Councils on applications within or immediately adjacent to the parish or town boundary;
- b) Will make every effort to ensure Parish and Town Councils are given every opportunity (beyond statutory minimum requirements, where possible) to participate in the preparation of the local plan and comment on any planning applications that are likely to be major or contentious.
- c) Consulting Town and Parish Councils on all planning applications in accordance with statutory procedures and informing them which Planning Officer is handling the application and who should be contacted with any enquiries;
- d) Supporting Parish Councils to use the Public Access System in order for them to search applications in their area and view any comments made, The Council will also provide refresher training on this and for newly appointed Clerks.
- e) Responding to enquires by individual Town and Parish Councils for further information on planning applications and changes in revised plans;
- f) Organising regular planning forums.
- g) Giving due consideration to comments on services such as Planning from Parish Councils such as, local views as expressed in Parish/Town Councils comments, particularly when backed up by an adopted document such as a Town, Parish or Neighbourhood Plan .
- h) Support and signpost Town and Parish Councils throughout the neighbourhood planning process.

Town and Parish Councils undertake to:

- a) Respond to all consultations in relation to planning applications and the Local Plan within the District Council's deadlines;
- b) Adopt procedures that enable a response to consultations on planning applications and Local Plans within the District Council's deadlines;
- c) Arrange meetings to enable Local Councils to respond to achieve planning deadlines.
- d) Acknowledge that the District Council will not always grant or refuse planning permission in line with the comments of the Parish or Town Council.