

# PARISH CHARTER



Greatham  
Parish  
Council



# FOREWORD

Hartlepool Borough Council recognises the significant role that Parish Councils play in the lives of Hartlepool's diverse communities.

This Charter has been developed in partnership with Hartlepool's Parish Councils and represents a mutual agreement to improve joint working between Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) and Parish Councils so that high quality services are delivered efficiently and meet the needs of local communities.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Hartlepool Parish Liaison Group, which comprises the Chairmen of all the Parish Councils in Hartlepool, together with the Leader and Managing Director of Hartlepool Borough Council, have agreed to publish this Charter, which sets out how they aim to work together for the benefit of local people.

The Charter is designed to support parishes in retaining their distinctiveness, provides a framework that ensures opportunities are embraced and recognises the need to build the ability to withstand external forces.

Hartlepool Borough Council acknowledges the important role that Parish Councils play as the first tier of local government and believes that Parish Councils can be very effective in influencing and shaping the decisions that affect their communities in the following ways:

- Representing the views of their area and effectively influencing the development of policies and services;
- Offering a means of devolving certain services and of revitalising local communities; and
- Providing valuable feedback on how Council services are working in their area and how changes in policy are likely to affect the local community.

Hartlepool Borough Council wishes to:

- Strengthen and maintain the relationship with Parish Councils and the local communities they serve in the spirit of partnership and consultation; and
- Encourage the creation of new Parishes where there is resident support.

In turn, Parish Councils recognise the strategic role of Hartlepool Borough Council and that HBC must achieve a fair distribution of services across the borough as a whole. This Charter sets out the broad principles upon which Hartlepool Borough Council and Parish Councils will work together. All parties agree to develop and support a process for how the relationship will work in practice.

## **2. CHARTER PRINCIPLES**

### **2.1 Respect Parish Councils as the first tier of Local Government, often closest to their local community.**

- 2.1.1 Engagement is constructive, built on trust and mutual respect, and includes long term dialogue between HBC and Parish Councils, ensuring issues that may affect parishes are raised in a respectful way.
- 2.1.2 HBC Elected Members, Parish Councillors and Clerks to be proactive in identifying HBC proposals that may affect Parish communities and that all parties engage in meaningful consultations before any decisions are made.
- 2.1.3 HBC and Parish Councils commit to the signing and adoption of the NALC/SLCC joint 'Civility and Respect Pledge'.

### **2.2 Deliver the best possible services to our communities.**

- 2.2.1 HBC to be transparent in explaining budgetary constraints, including financial figures, priorities and reasons for these, including the need to provide universal services. Parish Councils to acknowledge that resources must be directed toward areas with evidence of the most pressing need.
- 2.2.2 Parish Councils to respect the confidentiality of financial information provided by HBC.
- 2.2.3 HBC to support and encourage Parish Councils to develop local projects benefitting the local community. Where appropriate, HBC to signpost Parish Council's to government/other funding to deliver these and any devolved services in their parishes, recognising they may need extra officer hours, i.e., Parish Clerk, to manage these.
- 2.2.4 Both parties to agree a list of services provided from the 'concurrent services' payment and Parish Councils to advise HBC of additional services provided using the Parish Council budget.
- 2.2.5 HBC to respond to requests from Parish Councils for action on matters of community interest.
- 2.2.6. HBC to give consideration to the views of parish councils when making decisions on matters that affect any or all parishes.
- 2.2.7 HBC and Parish Councils to work collaboratively on projects within parished areas.
- 2.2.8 Parish Councils and HBC to work together to explore potential options for either:
  - (a) Further devolution of services or
  - (b) Services that could be delivered from the Parish Council budget, recognising the legal and financial constraints involved.
- 2.2.9 Parish Councillors and/or Clerks, with appropriate knowledge and experience, to be encouraged to contribute to discussions on spending and priorities with HBC Officers.

## **2.3 Communicate effectively and consult meaningfully upon matters that impact parished areas.**

Effective communication and consultation are critical to achieving a positive relationship between tiers of local government. For the purposes of this Charter, these are defined as follows:

- Effective communication is that which is clear and ensures the intention behind the information is understood.

- Consultation is a request for feedback/information on a proposal which should be understood by both parties and lead to relevant actions, with a will on both sides to reach purposeful outcomes.

- 2.3.1 Parish Councils to provide information to HBC Members Services such as an up-to-date list of Parish Councillors, contact details of at least the Chairman and Clerk of each parish and meeting dates for each municipal year.
- 2.3.2 HBC to provide Parish Councils (via the Parish Clerk) with names and contact details of key officers and an annual calendar of HBC Council and Sub-committee Meetings.
- 2.3.3 HBC to send to Parish Clerks links to Committee agendas and supporting documents, save only where these are confidential due to personnel matters.
- 2.3.4 Parish Clerks to check HBC agendas for items that may impact on the residents of their parish and forward these to Parish Councillors and add, if appropriate, to the next Parish Council agenda.
- 2.3.5 Parish councils to keep residents informed of relevant information, when appropriate, respecting confidentiality at all times.
- 2.3.6 'Hartbeat', and other relevant HBC publications, to include information on Parish Councils, for example Parish Clerk contact details, websites, dates, times and venues of Parish Council meetings and articles on parish news and issues.
- 2.3.7 HBC and Parish Councillors to be able to demonstrate a good understanding of the Hartlepool Local Plan, any Neighbourhood Plans and Village Design Statements. This will ensure that decisions affecting rural areas are made with a good understanding of the issues covered in these documents and are carefully balanced when taking in the needs of the wider borough.
- 2.3.8 Where consultation periods are set by statute or regulations, Parish Councils recognise this and comply within the timeframes set.
- 2.3.9 Parish Councils consult with Ward Councillors on schemes/projects/works that will be carried out by the Parish Council from their own budget, using the same timeframes as HBC.
- 2.3.10 Parish Council's speak on behalf of their communities and, where an appropriate Ward Councillor is not speaking, will have the automatic right to speak at Planning Committee meetings in response to Planning Consultations. The Parish Council will also have the right to request (in writing and within 21 days of the publication date) that any application concerning land within their area is referred to the Planning Committee where their views and those of the planning officer are opposed. The Terms of Reference, and procedure rules, of the Planning Committee to be amended to reflect this.

- 2.3.11 Parish Councils to acknowledge the duty of Planning Committee members as outlined in Part 4 (page 84) of the HBC Constitution). The basis of the planning system being to consider private proposals against wider public interest and any opposing views. HBC Elected Members, whilst considering such views, should not favour any person, company, group or locality.
- 2.3.12 When responding to planning consultations Parish Councils will consider and propose any actions (obligations) that could make an otherwise unacceptable development, acceptable in planning terms i.e., actions that can be contained within a Section 106 agreement.
- 2.3.13 The Parish council to be consulted when HBC are making Section 106 agreements with landowners/agents and developers for a development within a parish.
- 2.3.14 HBC to provide Parish Councils with sufficient time to respond to consultations, within statutory timeframes, recognising that they may meet only once a month and that only at a formal Parish Council meeting can a decision/recommendation be lawfully made.
- 2.3.15 HBC to work with Parish Councils when agreeing Section 106 requirements on a development within a parished area, and not allow variations to be agreed without consulting the parish council beforehand, especially when this may result in less monies being paid by the developer.
- 2.3.16 Resolution of issues and the challenging of decisions are encouraged via existing mechanisms (Parish Liaison group, informal conversations, escalate to senior offices, complaints or LGO).

## **2.4 Attendance at Parish Council Meetings and Parish Liaison Meetings**

- 2.4.1 A seminar to be held at the beginning of each Municipal year to introduce Ward and Parish Councillors; HBC Senior Officers and Parish Clerks to be in attendance.
- 2.4.2 Parish Chairmen (or in their absence another elected Parish Councillor), to be encouraged to attend Parish Liaison Meetings to raise strategic level issues affecting parishes.
- 2.4.3 HBC Constitution to be amended to remind Elected Members in parished wards that attendance at Parish Council meetings is important, and ensures they are aware of local issues and concerns, and that the Parish Council is similarly informed on relevant HBC matters.
- 2.4.4 Parish Councils to invite their Ward Councillors to Parish Council meetings, providing them with agendas and minutes in a timely manner.
- 2.4.5 Parish Councils acknowledge that HBC cannot mandate Ward Councillors to attend Parish Council meetings and that the onus should always be on individual Parish Councils and Ward Councillors to build productive and lasting relationships.
- 2.4.6 Parish Councils to invite HBC Officers to attend Parish Council meetings, where it may be of mutual benefit to discuss an issue, giving reasonable notice and an outline of the subject matter(s) to be discussed.
- 2.4.7 When present at Parish Council meetings, Ward Councillors are to be provided the opportunity to question the Parish Council and be questioned by Parish Councillors and the public. Ward Councillors to be invited to raise concerns in a timely manner with Parish Councils.

## 2.5 HBC to host Parish Liaison meetings

- 2.5.1 HBC to host a minimum of quarterly Parish Liaison meetings between the Leader and Managing Director of HBC and Parish Council Chairmen / Vice Chairmen to discuss strategic level matters.
- 2.5.2 The Parish Liaison meetings to be held more frequently, if needed, to allow Parish Council Chairmen to consult colleagues on strategic issues raised and then to provide an informed response to the Leader and Managing Director of HBC.
- 2.5.3 All parties to recognise and acknowledge that Parish Liaison meetings are for strategic matters. Any operational issues raised incidentally at Parish Liaison meetings must be dealt with in the same way as any other issue that is logged with HBC, and will not automatically take priority. Issues or concerns are to be raised as early as possible to enable both sides to work on positive solutions.

## 3 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- 3.1.1 HBC and Parish Councils to agree that Parish Liaison Meetings are the most appropriate forum to monitor issues arising from Charter once agreed
- 3.1.2 The Charter will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Parish Liaison Group.

This Charter is signed by:

Chair of Dalton Piercy Parish Council .....

Chair of Elwick Parish Council.....

Chair of Greatham Parish Council.....

Chair of Hart Parish Council .....

Chair of Headland Parish Council.....

Chair of Wynyard Parish Council (Hartlepool) .....

Managing Director, Hartlepool Borough Council.....

Leader of the Council.....

**Date - 21<sup>st</sup> March 2023**