

STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL

THURSDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2022

Report Title	Parish and Town Council Charter			
Purpose of Report	To adopt the Parish and Town Council Charter between Stroud District Council and Parish and Town Councils within the Stroud district.			
Decision(s)	The Council RESOLVES to: a) Adopt the Parish and Town Council Charter; and b) Give delegated authority to the Strategic Director of Resources to make minor amendments to the Charter as necessary and based on feedback from Town and Parish Councils and SDC officers.			
Consultation and Feedback	All Town and Parish Councils in the Stroud district, The Leadership and Management Team and District Councillors.			
Report Author	Hannah Barton, Policy & Projects Officer Email: hannah.barton@stroud.gov.uk			
Options	An alternative option is to not adopt the Charter and SDC and Parish and Town Councils continue to work together on an ad hoc basis, without a framework that provides support and guidance, and without any centralised monitoring and review.			
Background Papers	None.			
Appendices	Appendix A – Parish and Town Council Charter Appendix B – Annual schedule of events Appendix C – Protocol for using Parish and Town Council Hub Appendix D – Equality Impact Assessment			
Implications (further details at the end of the report)	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	No	Yes	No

1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 There are 51 Parish and Town Councils and two Parish Meetings in the Stroud district. They are responsible for an array of services to meet local needs ranging from litter bins to community safety schemes. Parish and Town Councils have a depth of insight into their local communities that may not be achievable for Stroud District Council (SDC), whilst SDC can provide the scale and resources to bring local goals to fruition.
- 1.2 One of the key activities outlined in the Council Plan (CW3.3) is to ‘work with Town and Parish Councils to develop, agree and implement a new strategic approach for partnership working between district, towns and parishes, including specific support for rural communities.’
- 1.3 The importance of this piece of work was reinforced by the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge as one of the recommendations from their March visit was to ‘consider the pace of working with town and parish councils.’

PARISH AND TOWN COUNCIL 'WORKING BETTER TOGETHER' WORKING GROUP

- 1.4 At the beginning of this year all Parish and Town councils in the district were contacted to join a working group to explore how we can work together more effectively in partnership. 23 Parish and Town Councils registered an interest in joining the working group, and the first working group meeting took place on 10 February 2022.
- 1.5 There have been six working group meetings in total, with the agendas set in collaboration with working group members and including topics highlighted by Parish and Town Councils as being of particular importance and relevance. Alison Robinson, the Chief Executive of the Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils (GAPTC) has also attended all the working group meetings.
- 1.6 During the initial working group meetings, a 'Consideration Log' was maintained which consisted of feedback and comments from working group members on the way in which Parish and Town Councils and SDC work together.
- 1.7 The feedback collated using the Consideration Log was largely across five key themes:
 - consultation,
 - communication,
 - working in partnership,
 - engagement, and
 - resources.

This feedback has been used to inform the development of the Parish and Town Council Charter (Appendix A and section 2).

- 1.8 Other key outcomes from the working group have been the annual schedule of events (Appendix B and section 4) and the Parish and Town Council Hub (section 3).

2. PARISH AND TOWN COUNCIL CHARTER

- 2.1 The Parish and Town Council Charter has been developed to provide a clear and mutual understanding of roles and expectations of officers and members of both SDC and Parish and Town Councils. It promotes partnership working and co-operation between SDC and Parish and Town Councils beyond statutory frameworks and will assist with developing improved working relationships between councils.
- 2.2 By creating a Charter that sets out how SDC and Parish and Town Councils will work effectively in partnership, the challenges faced by local communities can be better addressed, local decision making can be strengthened, and engagement with residents can be improved.
- 2.3 The Charter includes commitments that are split into the five key themes listed in paragraph 1.7. The commitments are set out so that for each commitment SDC makes to Parish and Town Councils, there is an equivalent commitment that Parish and Town Councils make to SDC. The working group felt it was important to use this layout to demonstrate that the commitments are reciprocal and have been developed collaboratively.

CONSULTATION

- 2.4 The Charter was initially presented to the Parish and Town Council working group in May, where feedback was received and incorporated into a second draft. This version received positive feedback from the working group and was agreed upon as the version to be put out for wider consultation.
- 2.5 This version of the Charter was presented to the Leadership and Management Team (LMT) in the summer to confirm that the SDC commitments within the Charter could be met, to ensure the Charter was not missing anything, and to seek general feedback. LMT were given several weeks to take these questions and the draft Charter back to their teams for consideration and input, and questions and concerns raised through this process were discussed at the three directorate manager meetings in September. Following this, feedback from officers was incorporated, and it was confirmed that all the SDC commitments included were achievable.
- 2.6 The revised version of the Charter was then consulted on with all SDC Members and all Parish and Town Councils, including those not involved in the working group. The four-week consultation period with SDC Members included a member briefing on 13 October, where questions and feedback were discussed. The Charter was positively received by SDC Members, with only one amendment to the Charter arising from this consultation. This was the addition of the commitment regarding copying District Councillors into important communication regarding their respective ward/s.
- 2.7 Consultation with all Parish and Town Councils took place over a six-week period, with responses being requested via a short survey. The questions included in the survey were:
- Are there any Town and Parish Council commitments that you think will restrict you from adopting the Charter because you are unsure whether or not you will be able to meet or deliver on these requirements?
 - Do you think there are any additional commitments Stroud District Council or Town and Parish Councils should be making in the Charter?
 - Do you think your Town or Parish Council will adopt the Charter?
 - If not, what changes would need to be made before your Town or Parish Council considers adopting the Charter?
 - Do you think there is anything else missing from the Charter that you would like to see included?
 - Do you have any other feedback on the Charter or is there anything that is unclear or requires further clarification?
- 2.8 27 Parish and Town Councils responded to the consultation. Of those who responded, 85% said they thought their Council would adopt the Charter. The remaining 15% said they were unsure, and no respondents said they thought their Council would not adopt the Charter.
- 2.9 The Parish and Town Councils who said they were unsure if they would adopt the Charter provided specific feedback on the reasons for this, and suggested changes that would encourage them to adopt it. Where possible these changes have been implemented. If there are still any Parish and Town Councils who are uncertain whether to adopt the Charter, the Corporate Policy and Governance team will be arranging a meeting with each Council individually to discuss concerns and questions and provide clarification and reassurance where necessary.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 2.10 The Charter will be reviewed annually with Parish and Town Councils and SDC officers to ensure the Charter remains fit for purpose and adaptable to the changing local government landscape. The annual review will include an invitation to all Parish and Town Councils to attend a meeting of the working group to provide their feedback.
- 2.11 Parish and Town Councils will monitor the effectiveness of the Charter and decide whether the Charter has been upheld by SDC. The working group will consider views put forwards by Parish and Town Councils as part of the annual review.
- 2.12 The annual review will also include a monitoring exercise conducted by SDC, who will review their relationship with Parish and Town Councils and their performance against the commitments set out in the Charter. The Alliance Leadership Team will be made aware of any feedback and changes made to the Charter through the annual review process.
- 2.13 The Charter will be updated to reflect the outcomes of the annual review and to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CHARTER

- 2.14 If the Charter is adopted by Council, it will be circulated to all Parish and Town Councils to adopt. Through the consultation period it can be assumed that at least 23 Parish and Town Councils will adopt the Charter straight away. For the Parish and Town Councils who may be unsure if they would adopt the Charter, it is hoped that individual meetings to discuss how their concerns are being addressed and to provide reassurance will encourage them to also adopt the Charter. The Parish and Town Councils who have not engaged with the working group or the consultation on the Charter will be encouraged to adopt the Charter through communications that will outline the benefits of the Charter and the other outcomes of the working group. Meetings with these Parish and Town Councils will be arranged where requested or where further explanation or clarification is required.
- 2.15 SDC Members will be encouraged to be ambassadors of the Charter to encourage adoption in their area.
- 2.16 A comprehensive communications campaign will be rolled out to ensure all officers and Members are aware of the Charter and understand the commitments within it. This will include posts on the officer Hub, Members Hub and Parish and Town Council Hub, an item on an upcoming Proud of Stroud agenda, and information briefings. Awareness of the Charter has already been raised through the extensive consultation that has taken place.

3. PARISH AND TOWN COUNCIL HUB

- 3.1 From the outset of the working group meetings, one of the main issues raised by Parish and Town Councils has been the inconsistency in communication from and with SDC. To address this and to easily share information tailored for Parish and Town councils, an online 'Hub' has been created.
- 3.2 The Parish and Town Council Hub is a website, accessed via a logon, that functions similarly to the Members' Hub. It will host information such as contact details, mapping tools, press releases and other relevant information and resources. It also includes the ability to post comments on posts and news items, enabling Parish and Town Councils to interact with each other and share knowledge, information, and good practice.

- 3.3 The Hub should enable collaboration and communication between SDC and Parish and Town Councils, as well as between Parish and Town Councils. It has been very well received by the working group, and two Parish Councils have tested the site and their feedback has been incorporated.
- 3.4 The Hub has been built internally using Sharepoint. As this is a product already used by SDC there is no cost associated with setting up this new site.
- 3.5 A protocol for using the Hub (Appendix C) has been developed which includes some principles and 'dos and don'ts' for using the Hub. By accessing the Hub, Parish and Town Councils agree to be bound by this protocol.
- 3.6 The Hub will be managed by the Democratic Services team in the same way as the Members' Hub is currently monitored and managed.

4. ANNUAL SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- 4.1 The annual schedule of events has been developed to provide a useful resource that outlines key events and training opportunities relevant to Parish and Town Councils over the course of the year.
- 4.2 It is designed to be a useful tool to clearly show Parish and Town Councils all the events that are relevant for them over the year. This includes existing meetings like the Community Services Information Network meetings, and the new Strategic Forum meetings which will be an opportunity to showcase upcoming opportunities for SDC and Town and Parish Councils to work together, for example on policies or funding bids.
- 4.3 Training has been one of the most requested things from the Parish and Town Council working group meetings as Parish and Town Councils would like SDC to share their knowledge and expertise where possible. A list of requested training topics was compiled by the working group and cross-referenced with the training already provided by GAPTC to ensure topics were not duplicated.
- 4.4 At the beginning of each calendar year, service areas will be asked to consider what training from these topics their service area can provide, and if there are other training topics Parish and Town Councils could benefit from. These training opportunities will be included on the annual schedule of events that will be published at the beginning of the municipal year. Parish and Town Councils will also periodically be asked if there is any other training they would like provided, and the feasibility of providing training on these topics will be explored as they arise.
- 4.5 The Parish and Town working group have agreed they would be willing to pay a nominal fee for training, to cover the time and resources required to provide training. This would also put SDC in line with other training providers like GAPTC and South Gloucestershire Council.

5. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications from this decision. All of the work has been supported through existing budgets and resources.

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4.2 Legal Implications

There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

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4.3 Equality Implications

Parish and Town Councils work closely with and have a depth of insight into the needs of their local communities. Strengthening relationships between the District Council and Parish and Town Councils will assist with fulfilling the Public Sector Equality Duty including by eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and fostering good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Section 6 of the Charter includes a statement on the Council's and Parish and Town Council's commitment to promoting equality and tackling discrimination.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and can be found at appendix D.

4.4 Environmental Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.