

The Gloucestershire Charter

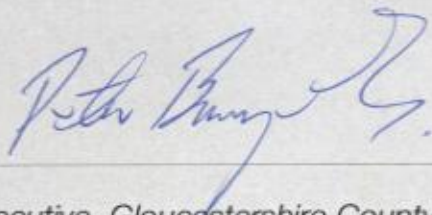


Local Councils working together for local people

A Charter between Gloucestershire County Council
and the Parish and Town Councils of Gloucestershire

SIGNATURES

We the undersigned declare our commitment to the Gloucestershire Charter and in so doing, aim to encourage the improvement of our good working practices and embrace the spirit of the agreement.



Chief Executive, Gloucestershire County Council

Chair /Clerk /Councillor for

Parish /Town Council

April 2006

INTRODUCTION

1. This first edition of the revision of the Charter is the result of discussion between the County Council and parish and town councils to establish effective collaborative working.
2. The overall aim of the Charter is to improve relationships between the tiers of local government in Gloucestershire, with particular attention to improving consultation and communications about policies and decisions which may affect communities.
3. There are two hundred and sixty three parishes within Gloucestershire, all playing a valuable role in the fabric of local life. Parish Councillors and Clerks possess unique knowledge which can help decision makers make more informed decisions.
4. This Charter does not contain a mechanism by which services may be devolved to parish and town councils as it is acknowledged that the majority may not wish to take on extra responsibilities. However, as local councils obtain 'Quality Parish' status this aspect will be reviewed.
5. This Charter has the full approval and commitment of Gloucestershire County Council, parish and town councils of Gloucestershire and the Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils.
6. This Charter will be monitored and evaluated during its first year with a view to making further amendments as necessary. Priorities within the commitments have been identified and these will be used to monitor performance by a 'test-group' of parish and town councils and form the baseline from which we will be able to establish performance measures for the following year.



GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S COMMITMENTS TO PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

1. Local Governance

- 1.1 Our staff will endeavour to make themselves available to parish or town council clerks and councillors by phone or in meetings. A request to attend a meeting would need a reasonable period of notice (preferably one month) wherever practicable except, in the case of emergencies.

2. Community Planning

- 2.1 We will promote the inclusion and involvement of representatives of parish and town councils in Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) whilst endeavouring to ensure that those LSPs are robust and useful mechanisms.
- 2.2 We will ensure that parish and town councils are consulted and are involved in the substance and direction of community strategies as they affect the local communities they represent, and that they have the opportunity to take an active part in the formulation of policy and service delivery.

3. Land Use and Local Plan Issues

- 3.1 We will engage with parish councils at their request or invitation when a parish is undertaking a community planning process such as Parish Planning or Health Checks.
- 3.2 We will also consider Parish Plan proposals in Community Strategies where applicable.

4. Consultation and Communication

- 4.1 Statutory Matters:- For some matters, parish and town councils are statutory consultees, but there are also a number of other matters which may also be referred to them. A list of all these different types of issues is found at Appendix 1.
- 4.2 Planning applications and consultation on the new style of development plans, for instance, are covered by national regulations, which set out a timetable for the processes, responses and notifications of decisions. The length of consultation period can differ with different stages in the procedures and will be clearly set out in the material sent to parish and town councils.
- 4.3 When looking at Planning applications, the parish or town council will be invited to attend any Member site visits and given an opportunity to point out site related issues, which they consider important. (If a parish or town council makes a request for a site visit an officer from the County Council will attend at an appropriate time). In addition, there will be a further opportunity to make representations when applications are considered at Planning Committee. Representatives of parish or town councils will be allowed to make a short address before the Committee debates the proposal. Slightly different arrangements apply when the applications straddle parish and town boundaries.
- 4.4 Non-Statutory matters:- There is more flexibility on non statutory consultations. On these issues, we will provide a copy, on request of any public report and background papers on the items on which consultation is taking place.

- 4.5 We will aim to provide parish and town councils with a period of eight weeks to encourage good working relationships and allow for opportunity to discuss and respond before making a decision which affects their local community. We will invite parish and town councils to awareness raising and stakeholder forums where these are used as an alternative way of engaging communities.
- 4.6 We will provide timely feedback on the outcomes of awareness raising and stakeholder forums.
- 4.7 We will let parish and town councils know when a decision will be taken by the appropriate decision-making body. They will be invited to attend and, at the Chairman's discretion, to speak.
- 4.8 Where a parish or town council has been consulted, we will seek to inform them within five working days of the decision having been taken and the reason behind the decision, if appropriate.
- 4.9 We will accurately report parish and town council views to those Councillors making decisions.
- 4.10 County Councillors will attend parish and town council annual council meetings and other meetings wherever practicable.
- 4.11 We will inform the local county councillor and parish or town council of a lead member visit to a parish or town.
- 4.12 We will annually notify parish and town councils of bus shelter grants and any major bus route schemes proposed in their parish or town. Parishes or towns that take up the grant then own the shelters. Where a grant has been allocated but not used, parishes and towns will receive a follow-up letter from the Integrated Transport Unit.
- 4.13 Changes to a subsidised bus route (one that GCC funds) will be notified to affected parishes and town councils by a consultation letter. The letter will include the proposed timetable(s) and will allow for a six week consultation period, in order to fit in with the tight tender process necessary to avoid breaks in service.
- 4.14 All parish and town councils will be informed of changes to bus services in their area following the above consultations or resulting from changes to commercially run services.
- 4.15 The County Council will facilitate the use of their area office notice boards by parish and town councils for the publicity of issues and information of local interest and concern.

5. Practical Support

- 5.1 We will, where practical, offer parish and town councils access to our own support services, to enable them to take advantage of facilities such as printing and purchasing, at a mutually agreed price. In particular, assistance will be offered in identifying and helping to meet the training needs of parish and town councils by supporting the Gloucestershire Training Partnership.
- 5.2 We will actively support the SID (Speed Indicator Device) scheme which has twelve parishes participating initially (Norton, Sandhurst, Twigworth, Tirley, Maisemore, Down Hatherley, Longford, Highnam, Coln, Hatherop, Quenington and Minsterworth). Training for the scheme is being provided by our Road Safety Unit (see contact details - Road Safety Unit).

6. Delegation of Responsibility for Service Provision

- 6.1 Where a parish and town council (or group of parish and town councils) wishes to take on delegated responsibility for the delivery, management or monitoring of services provided by us, we will discuss opportunities for devolution where it is lawful and best value (taking account of cost, quality, local preferences and practicability).

7. Financial Arrangements

- 7.1 Where the provision of a service is devolved or transferred to a parish or town council, funding is also transferred with the amount involved being agreed by us and the parish or town council. Functions which may be offered to parish and town councils by us are covered in Appendix 2.

8. Information and Complaints

- 8.1 When we consult with parish and town councils we will provide them with sufficient information to reach an informed view on a matter.
- 8.2 We will communicate with parish and town councils by distributing, free of charge, sufficient copies of all editions of our in house produced newsletters etc.
- 8.3 We will produce a parish and town council specific Newsletter twice yearly relating to Environment matters.
- 8.4 We will acknowledge all written communications from parish and town councils (including letters, faxes and emails) and provide a substantive reply to all written communications which need a reply as follows:
- We will answer all phone calls within five rings;
 - We will acknowledge all letters within five working days. We will provide a full response within 20 days, unless there are special circumstances which we will explain in the acknowledgement;
 - We will acknowledge all external e-mails within five working days, and provide a full response within 20 days; and
 - all customers of the council will be seen by the right person within 10 minutes of an appointment. We will see callers who just drop in within 5 minutes, and call the right person to see them within 30 minutes.

If something goes wrong, we will act quickly and efficiently to put it right and, if necessary, will help customers to use our complaints procedure (see contact details - Complaints Procedure).

9. Sustainability

- 9.1 The county council will work in partnership with parish and town councils to promote sustainable social, economic and environmental development for the benefit of local communities.

Appendix 1 –

Issues which the County Council will refer to Parish and Town Councils for information or consultation.

Statutory	Non Statutory
Bridge maintenance, closure and diversion	Area Schools Reviews (Invitation to public consultation meetings)
Pedestrian Crossings	Opening, change of use and closure of county Council facilities in the area
Public Rights of Way amendments	
Regional Spatial Strategies which are likely to affect parishes	Changes to Childrens' and Young People/Community and Adult Care services
Roads new and improved: ie. the need for them, their alignment and the standard of road under consideration (consultation from the earliest stages)	Complaints procedure changes
School Closure	
Traffic Regulations (<i>e.g. speed limits, waiting orders, weight restrictions, one-way streets, parking restrictions</i>)	Customer Services Standards
Waste Management Strategy (This will include joint strategies for recycling and composting and how biodegradable municipal waste will be diverted from landfill)	Derelict Land Reclamation and Landscaping Schemes
Waste and Minerals proposals and the County Council's own development applications (County matter and County Council Planning Applications). (Statutory issue with specific regulations)	Design of Improvement Schemes (<i>e.g. traffic calming, cycle routes, safety schemes</i>)
Waste and Minerals Local Development Framework (Statutory issue with specific regulations)	Highway Structural Maintenance (<i>e.g. surface dressing (tar and chippings), resurfacing, road closures</i>)
	Landscape Projects
	Libraries – mobile routes, opening hours, buildings issues
	Local Transport Plan (invitation to stakeholder forums)
	Registration Service changes
	Winter maintenance (changes to treatment routes)

Appendix 2 –

Functions which may be offered to Parish and Town Councils following agreement between the County Council and Parish/Town Council.

Discussions prior to the letting of the 2006 Highways and Transport contract showed little desire to extend current levels of devolution of services, but an opportunity to review this will occur again in 2011. However, if parish or town councils approach the County Council we will be open to negotiating arrangements for devolving services.

Functions :

- Recycling provisions
- Some aspects of mobile library planning
- Some aspects of bus and rail pass issuing
- Some road safety measures
- Pothole filling
- Gritting
- Minor repairs/erection of signs, litter picking
- Information Access Point provision
- Grass cutting
- One stop shops

PARISH AND TOWN COUNCIL COMMITMENTS TO THE COUNTY COUNCIL

1. Local Governance

- 1.1 The parish or town council will provide its County Councillor with a copy of the Agenda for each formal meeting three clear days before the meeting. Any parish or town council which requests the presence of an officer from the county council to attend a meeting should do so one month beforehand.
- 1.2 The parish or town council will provide a space on its meeting agenda for the county councillor to provide a relevant report. It should be noted however that, if the parish or town council resolves to exclude the press and public for an item this will include the County Councillor unless specifically invited to remain.

2. Community Planning

- 2.1 Parish and town councils may respond to community planning consultations and invitations to participate either individually or may choose to respond collectively through the Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils (GAPTC).

3. Consultation and Communication

- 3.1 Parish and town councils will endeavour to inform the County Council (see contact details - Highways Maintenance), when emergency action is needed e.g. dangerous or fallen trees, non functioning and displacement of traffic signals, road flooding, potholes, loose or uneven flagstones and kerbs, bollard knock-downs and fallen or unsafe lighting columns. (Once reported this will be fixed or made safe within twenty four hours).
- 3.2 Parish and town councils will endeavour to report the following to the County Council:- (see contact details - Highways Maintenance), damage to traffic signs and other street furniture, street lighting failures and non-functioning lights in traffic signs, blocked gullies and broken gully grids or man-holes, loose cat's eyes and road studs and ragwort outcrops and other noxious weeds. (Once reported this will be fixed or made safe within forty eight hours).
- 3.3 Parish and town councils will nominate snow, snow plough and flood wardens and inform the County Council of any changes. (See contact details - Highway Local Areas).
- 3.4 Parish and town councils who have signed up to the 'Lorry Watch' scheme will continue to report the misuse of weight restricted routes by heavy goods vehicles in local towns and parishes to Trading Standards. The following Parish and Town Councils are currently involved in the scheme: Chipping Campden; Cainscross; Stoke Orchard; Upper Swell; Lower Swell; Fairford; Tetbury; Lydney; St. Briavels; Mitcheldean; Tewkesbury; Brockworth; Brookthorpe with Whaddon; Shab Hill; Winchcombe; Chalford (see contact details - Trading Standards).
- 3.5 Changes to bus services in parishes and towns will be reported where possible, in parish or town magazines.

- 3.6 The parish or town council will respond to consultations by the County Council on planning and any other matters within the time limit specified in the consultation. It will put in place mechanisms such as delegation to a committee or the convening of extra council meetings to meet the consultation deadline.
- 3.7 Parish and town councils will endeavour to keep their local County Councillor informed where decisions particularly affecting parishes in the County Councillor's area are to be considered.
- 3.8 Parish and town councils will seek to keep the public in their parish or town informed on local government matters and seek to assess public opinion where appropriate, through meetings, surveys and newsletters, and may make the results of major surveys available to the County Council.
- 3.9 The parish or town council will provide the county council with the contact details of the Clerk to the council. Bearing in mind that the clerk may only be employed by the parish or town council on a part time basis, the Clerk will inform the County Council of the most convenient times /days when contact can be made.

4. Information

- 4.1 The parish or town council will inform and involve the County Council when it is undertaking a community planning process such as Parish Planning or Health Checks.
- 4.2 The parish or town council will endeavour, through the clerk, to facilitate the use of their notice boards by the County Council for the publicity of issues and information of local interest and concern.
- 4.3 The parish or town council will inform the County Council when it is working towards achieving 'Quality' status.





COUNTY COUNCIL CONTACT DETAILS (as at 31 March 2006)

Complaints Procedure	01452 505345 or e-mail speakout@gloucestershire.gov.uk
The Gloucestershire Charter Hester Hunt	01452 426563 or e-mail hhunt@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Highway Local Areas Forest	01594 860777 or e-mail forest@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Northern	01452 712942 or e-mail northern@gloucestershire.gov.uk
South Cotswold (Cirencester)	01285 653231 or e-mail cotswold@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Southern	01453 822193 or email southern@gloucestershire.gov.uk
Cheltenham Borough	08000 514514 or e-mail enquiries@cheltenham.gov.uk
Gloucester City	08000 514514 or e-mail enviro@gloucester.gov.uk
Highways Maintenance* Reporting a Pothole	08000 514514
Reporting a Street Light problem	0800 5421890 Gloucester: 0800 281181 Cheltenham: 0800 220735
Reporting a Traffic Signal problem	01452 425607 (9am- 5pm) 0845 6677788 (24 hours)
Reporting spillage on a road	08000 514514 (9am-5pm) or 0845 6677788 (24 hours)
Reporting a problem on the highway	08000 514514 (9am-5pm) or 0845 6677788 (24 hours)
Road Safety Unit Speed Indicating Devices (SID's)	01452 583400
Trading Standards Lorry Watch Scheme (Karen Smith)	01452 426227
Council Direct For general council enquiries	01452 505345 www.councildirect.info

* Highway Maintenance contact information will be routed through the Contact Centre number (01452 425500) eventually.