

Local Councils' Charter 2023 – final draft document April 2024

A Charter for Warwickshire County Council and Borough, District, Parish and Town Councils within Warwickshire. There are currently no Parish and Town Councils in the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough.

Introduction and background

The overall aim of the Charter is to improve relationships between the tiers of Local Government in Warwickshire, by improving both consultation and communication about policies and decisions that may affect local communities.

There are three levels of Local Government in Warwickshire: Warwickshire County Council, the five District and Borough Councils and the Parish and Town Councils. Warwickshire County Council, and the District and Borough Councils who have signed up to this Charter are together referred to as **Principal Councils**. The Parish and Town Councils are referred to as **Local Councils**. This document is a framework to support a mutually beneficially working relationship between these different levels of Local Government in Warwickshire. Working better in partnership will benefit local people.

Principal Councils deliver a wide range of services across the county. Services are either for everyone (universal), targeted or specialist but all are there to meet people's needs.

Local Councils are the level of government where decisions are made or influenced at the most local level. There are 204 parishes in Warwickshire including 35 Parish Meetings.

The Principal Councils recognise that Local Councils are the grass-roots of local government bringing the voice of their local community into local decision-making. Likewise, the Local Councils understand the strategic role that Principal Councils play in ensuring services are delivered fairly and equitably across their areas. Whilst nothing in this Charter can be used to bind the individual councils where they should be exercising their discretion, the aim is to recognise the value that each tier of Local Government brings and make a commitment to work together for the benefit of the people of Warwickshire.

All Councils' values and behaviour will adhere to the Nolan Principles in public life - Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty, and Leadership. All of the Councils are required by law to adopt a Member Code of Conduct, which is consistent with these Principles which all Councillors are expected to abide by. Local Councils will work with the Monitoring Officer at the Borough and District Councils to promote and maintain compliance with their adopted Code. When an alleged breach of the Code is reported, members of Borough and District Councils and Local Councils will comply with the procedure set out for dealing with alleged breaches of the Code and assist the Monitoring Officer at the Borough and District Councils in any investigation.

Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils (WALC) Ltd is a membership organisation for Local (Parish and Town) Councils.

- WALC offers advice, support, and training to all member Councils.

- WALC's mission is to support Local (Parish and Town) Councils to deliver and improve services in the communities where they live and work.
- WALC works in partnership with all tiers of Local Government to support Local (Parish and Town) Councils.
- WALC encourages good working relations, acting as the bridge between the tiers and communicates important information to member Councils and County/Borough/District partners.

County, Borough & District Councils deliver a wide range of services that are either for everyone (universal), targeted or specialist.

Decisions are taken at all levels; Parish and Town Councils are the level of government where decisions are made or influenced at the most local of levels, closest to the residents.

Working better and together is demonstrable by:

1. Improving communication
2. Consulting with each other
3. Giving support and help
4. Measuring how well we are doing

1. Improving Communications

Principal Councils will where practical and possible:

- a) Encourage and support their Councillors and officers to work with Local Councils in the area they are elected to serve.
- b) Respond to all forms of contact in line with locally determined customer care standards.
- c) Provide appropriate information and links on websites for important information (such as access to information about committee meetings and published consultations).
- d) Allow for Local Council representation on relevant Forums and Committees as set out in relevant constitutions.
- e) Respond to invitations from Local Councils to attend meetings of mutual interest.
- f) Respond to invitations to attend Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils (WALC) Area Meetings and other Local Council liaison meetings as appropriate.
- g) Include awareness of this Charter in Councillor and staff induction programmes.
- h) Where appropriate, provide names/positions of officers in relevant departments to liaise with Local Councils
- i) The Principal Councils will appoint 'Parish Champions' to provide a link with Local Councils (see *Appendix 1 Parish Champion Role Profile*).

Local Councils will,

- a) Use email and other appropriate digital channels where possible to contact the other Councils.
- b) Provide their local Councillors with agendas and minutes of meetings, and to allow Principal Council councillors to attend meetings, where appropriate and speak on matters of mutual interest. Let their local ward and division councillors know about the decisions and changes they make.
- c) Share information from the ward and division Councillors with their residents subject to any restrictions such as data protection and confidentiality and Code of Conduct protocols adopted by the Council.
- d) Let the ward and division councillors know about any issue they would like discussed at the Area Meetings arranged by WALC.
- e) Be encouraged to appoint a representative to attend Area Meetings.
- f) Include awareness of this Charter in Councillor and staff induction programmes.

2. Consulting with each other

Principal Councils will:

- a) Engage with Local Councils on issues affecting their community.
- b) Engage with WALC on issues of collective interest to Local Councils.
- c) Give Local Councils required time to respond to engagement or any relevant consultations, subject to any statutory deadlines.
- d) Where practicable, inform Local Councils in advance about relevant consultations that are going to be issued.
- e) Where practicable, give feedback on responses to consultations, for some consultations we will not be able to respond in detail to every point raised but will seek to respond to the main issues.
- f) Carry out joint consultations with partners when appropriate.
- g) If necessary, ensure any communication documents to Local Councils include an executive summary and details of someone to contact.
- h) Have regard to the views of Local Councils when making decisions following engagement or consultation activity.
- i) Make sure service managers know when they should consider consulting or engaging with Local Councils and are aware of this Charter.

Local Councils will,

- a) Give views to the Principal Councils that represent as many local people as possible.
- b) Acknowledge that Principal Council decisions are made democratically and respect decisions.
- c) Consult the Principal Councils and other Local Councils about decisions which affect those councils.
- d) Recognise that the Principal Councils frequently have limitations and constraints when working on consultations, most notably timescales that cannot be influenced.

- e) Look for flexible ways to progress consultation responses such as holding a special meeting or forming a task and finish group.
- f) Involve Principal Councils in the preparation of Community Led Plans.
- g) WALC will manage a database of Local Council contact details which can be used for consultations and correspondence purposes.

3. Giving Support and Help

Principal Councils will where relevant:

- a) As required by the Localism Act 2011 assist Local Councils to develop community led plans including Neighbourhood Plans, Parish and Town Plans and Community Appraisals and respond to issues raised in these plans.
- b) Subject to statutory limitations consider opportunities to devolve services to Local Councils currently provided by Principal Councils on a case-by-case basis. Each case will be the subject to its own formal agreement for which a business case will be drawn up enabling an assessment of value, cost, accountability, practicality, and any other relevant issues, such as relevant legal issues.
- c) Promptly provide early notification of information requirements for the collection of the Council Tax on behalf of Local Councils and promptly pay precept payments in line with legislation and mutually agreed arrangements.
- d) If practicable consider how Local Councils can have access to Principal Council's procurement process where this is appropriate, lawful and feasible to help keep costs down. For example, by undertaking a joint procurement or by undertaking the procurement in a way that would enable them to access contracts.
- e) Where practicable and appropriate, attempt to resolve complaints from Local Councils informally prior to them being progressed formally through the Principal Council's relevant complaints process.
- f) Where practicable, Borough and Districts Councils provide support (with assistance from WALC) to Local Councils around governance and standards issues including free of charge briefing sessions.
- g) If resources permit the Borough and District Councils support the process for the development of new Local Councils on request, where practical, via Community Governance Reviews
- h) If practical work with WALC to support and encourage training and development of Councillors and Clerks.
- i) The Borough and District Councils shall if practical and possible, offer their assistance to enable Local Councils to deliver their services when their own resources / expertise are insufficient to meet their needs. Where legal or contractual arrangements and resources permit assist Local Councils for example with equipment for community events, to provide information and advice on such issues as fire safety, health and safety, landscape and community enhancement projects and assistance with encroachment/trespass onto Local Councils' land; and any other reasonable assistance as requested. It is recognised that there may be a charge for this service.
- j) The County Council will provide support to WALC and where necessary the Districts and Boroughs will assist with Community Governance Reviews as reasonably required.

Local Councils will:

- a) Encourage the involvement of residents in Local Government, including encouraging electors to participate in all elections, and adhere to good practice and legislation when filling Local Council casual vacancies.
- b) Help residents influence decisions and services, particularly those who have difficulty getting involved.
- c) Contribute to the development of a business case for the local delivery of services provided by Principal Councils, in conjunction with neighbouring Councils where appropriate.
- d) Work with the relevant Monitoring Officers to promote and maintain high standards of conduct of its Councillors.
- e) Put in place a Code of Practice for Handling Complaints against the Council. A model is available from WALC.
- f) Accept training opportunities offered by Principal Councils that are relevant to Local Councils.

4. Measuring how well we are doing - Signatories to this Charter will ensure that:

Delivering these commitments will need openness, transparency, honesty and a willingness for self-appraisal by all parties to find out what is working well and what needs to be improved.

Progress will be reviewed every 12 months by officers from the Principal Councils and representatives from WALC and the parish and town Area Meetings arranged by WALC (which are grouped geographically under each District or Borough in Warwickshire) as appropriate. Representatives will be invited from the County Council and the relevant Borough and District Councils and Parish and Town Councils.

A report of this annual review will be included within the agendas for the annual Area Meetings.

It would be for each individual organisation to decide whether to take a report of this annual review to an appropriate meeting. Parish and Town Councils may wish to consider inviting the relevant Parish Champions to such meetings.

LIST OF SIGNATORIES TO THE LOCAL COUNCIL CHARTER:

NORTH WARWICKSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

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RUGBY BOROUGH COUNCIL

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STRATFORD ON AVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

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WARWICKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

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WARWICK DISTRICT COUNCIL

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WARWICKSHIRE AND WEST MIDLANDS ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

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Website links to all Councils be included here

Appendix 1: Principal Councils' Parish Champion's Role Profile

Parish Champion – Role Profile

Purpose

The Charter is a framework to support mutually beneficial working relationship between tiers of authority within Warwickshire. Within the Charter is the commitment that each Principal Council will appoint a “Parish Champion” to act as a link with Local Councils . This document identifies the role and the commitment that is expected from this “Parish Champion”.

Main Responsibilities:

- To raise awareness and have regard of issues affecting Local Councils within the Principal Council.
- To respond to invitations from Local Councils to attend meetings of mutual interest.
- The first point of contact for Local Councils should be the local ward/division member, however, in the event of on-going concerns relating to dealings with the Principal Council they should refer to the Parish Champion.
- To ensure that Local Councils' views are taken into account when the Principal Council undertakes consultation.
- To facilitate discussions in relation to the possibility of devolving services to Local Councils.
- To encourage joint training events including Councillors from the Principal Councils and Local Councils
- Where requested to do so, to respond to invitations to attend Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils (WALC) Area Meetings.
- To attend other Local Council liaison meetings as appropriate.
- To liaise with the Parish Champions from the other Principal Councils as required.

In order for the role to have a meaningful impact it is suggested that the role should be undertaken by a Member of the Cabinet, or senior Councillor within the Principal Councils.