

# Parish and Town Council Charter

**A model for the working relationship between  
Lancashire County Council and the parish and town  
councils of Lancashire.**

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# Section 1

## Introduction and background

### Introduction

Parish and town councils are the foundation of local government. They are the level of government closest to the people and have a vital role to play in improving local quality of life. They can influence decisions that affect local people, help bring life to local communities and offer a way of making sure services meet the needs of residents.

Lancashire County Council plays an important role across the county and delivers services in a fair and efficient way, keeping in mind the varied communities in Lancashire.

This charter sets out how Lancashire County Council can work with local parish and town councils to provide high-quality services for the people of Lancashire. It aims to improve our working relationship by focusing on:

- improving communication (including consultation activity);
- the ways in which parish and town councils can influence county council services; and
- the support in place to help parish and town councils.

### Background

In 2007, Lancashire's parish and town councils and the county council agreed to publish a charter setting out how we will work together to improve services for local people. This document is the foundation of that agreement and is the result of over 12 months' joint activity.

The charter has been influenced by several initiatives, including:

- test parish and town council workshop sessions with the county council on the main themes of the charter;
- the Whitworth Quality Parish Pilot – developing a model for the three levels of local government to work together;
- the Ribble Valley Local Strategic Partnership Pilot – developing a consultation framework and process in line with local strategic partnerships, local area agreements, sustainable community strategies and local development frameworks; and
- local area agreement pilots in Pendle, Wyre and Chorley – involving people at neighbourhood level in meeting the aims of the local area agreement.

It takes into account:

- the differences between parish and town councils in Lancashire;
- experience of working with district councils and town and parish councils;
- the model charter drawn up by the Department for Communities and Local Government;
- our locality focus framework, which makes a commitment to work as closely as possible with local communities; and
- the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act (2007) and associated documents.

It is based on:

- openness;
- respect for the roles, responsibilities and opinions of each level of local government;
- honesty; and
- avoiding party politics.

The process of developing the charter began with a series of workshops in each district. All parish and town councils were invited to the workshop in their area. Following the workshops, we invited all parish and town councils in Lancashire to work with us to develop the charter.

In November 2007, we met representatives from parishes who had expressed an interest in being involved in the charter. A work plan was developed and four working groups were set up, made up of parish representatives and Lancashire County Council officers, who worked to develop the charter over 12 months.

In August 2008, the draft charter produced by the working groups was sent out for comment to all the parish and town councils of Lancashire. The draft was also

sent to all district councils and local strategic partnerships, and presented to all Lancashire Local committees, the Lancashire Association of Local Councils Conference, and the District Lancashire Association of Local Council meetings.

The working group examined the feedback gained during the consultation period and made several changes to the draft in line with comments received. A final version of the charter was then produced.

We would like to thank all the parish and town councils who gave their time and commitment to create this joint charter.

## **Working across the three levels of local government in Lancashire**

Our three levels of local government are the county council, the district councils and the parish and town councils.

This charter focuses mainly on the relationship between the county council and parish and town councils. However, it also seeks to build on arrangements between district councils and their parish and town councils. We have encouraged district councils to take part in developing the charter as it applies across all three levels of local government.

Together, Lancashire County Council, the district councils and the parish and town councils will develop a single charter on a district-by-district basis where there is shared interest.

## **What happens next?**

Following the formal launch of the charter at the Lancashire County Council Parish and Town Council Conference 2008, we will use the principles of the charter to guide the way we work together.

Lancashire County Council will develop a work plan to take forward the actions agreed in the charter. We will use this plan to establish the charter as a central consideration in all that we do, and to raise its profile with our officers and councillors.

The county council and the parish and town councils of Lancashire will work together to raise awareness of the principles of the charter and take forward the 'work in progress' sections.

# Section 2

## Communication, information and consultation

### **Communication and information**

The county council and parish and town councils recognise that communication is the key to good relationships and understanding.

Lancashire County Council will:

- help county councillors to work with parish and town councils in their area;
- provide access to services and named officers through a centrally-managed Customer Service Centre (phone 0845 053 0000 /01772 254868 or email [enquiries@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@lancashire.gov.uk));
- provide a district partnership officer in each of the districts to help parish and town councils with more complex issues that cannot be dealt with through the Customer Service Centre;
- make sure its district partnership officers keep parish and town councils up to date with their contact details;
- respond to written communication;
- work towards using email only to communicate with all parish and town councils by 2010, and support the councils with this changeover;
- respond appropriately to invitations from parish and town councils to attend meetings when there are issues of mutual interest;
- continue to send someone to area meetings of the Lancashire Association of Local Councils and other district-based liaison meetings;
- send parish and town councils copies of or an email link to the relevant Lancashire Local committee agenda;
- continue to hold a Parish and Town Council Conference each year; and
- promote ways of working with parish and town councils, including through Lancashire Local committees and county council consultations (see below and section 4 of this charter).

Parish and town councils will:

- make full use of information technology (IT) to communicate with Lancashire County Council and work towards using email only by 2010;
- let the county council know how it can support them with this changeover;
- let their district partnership officer know about any changes to parish clerk contact details;
- use the Customer Service Centre to contact the county council about day-to-day issues;
- let local county councillors know about any significant decisions and changes they make;
- provide local county councillors with a copy of the agenda before each council meeting;
- pass on minutes of council meetings to their local district partnership officer, if the minutes involve issues which affect the county council;
- give local county councillors and officers reasonable notice if they would like them to come to a parish or town council meeting;
- let the county council know about any issues they would like to discuss at the annual Parish and Town Council Conference; and
- aim to pass on relevant information from the county council to local residents when they feel this is appropriate.

## Work in progress

The county council and parish and town councils will:

- **explore opportunities for developing electronic systems to communicate with each other, including a web-based system;**
- **agree on a target for how quickly the county council will answer letters, calls and emails; and**
- **find out whether it is possible to hold a meeting of parish clerks from across Lancashire.**

## Consultation

Consultation allows parish and town councils to influence our decisions and give their views on policies and plans.

Lancashire County Council will:

- invite parish and town councils to comment on important issues which affect their local community and take their views into account before making decisions;

- consult organisations that are part of parish and town councils separately, for example the Lancashire Association of Local Councils and the Society of Local Council Clerks;
- give parish and town councils at least six weeks to respond to any formal consultations which affect them, unless this is impractical or specified differently by law;
- provide feedback on responses received through consultation;
- carry out joint consultations with partner organisations where appropriate;
- make sure consultation documents for parish and town councils are print friendly and include an executive summary and details of someone to contact; and
- make its directorates aware of the need to consult parish and town councils on issues that affect their local communities.

Parish and town councils will:

- do all they can to give the county council their views in a practical way that represents the views of as many people as possible;
- appreciate that Lancashire County Council decisions are made democratically and respect the final decision; and
- consult the county council and other parish and town councils about important decisions which affect those councils.

## Work in progress

The county council and parish and town councils will:

- **draw up a list of issues they will consult each other on; and**
- **develop a consultation framework which includes giving warning to other councils about important decisions and timescales for how long they have to give their views.**



# Section 3

## Parish plans and sustainable community strategies

### Parish plans

We know that parish plans can be useful. For parish plans to make a difference, they need to be reflected in public, private and voluntary sector priorities for the area. There are two main ways in which parish plan priorities can influence our activity.

- Parish plans can be included in the district local strategic partnership's sustainable community strategy. This in turn will feed into the county's sustainable community strategy.
- The Lancashire Local Parish and Town Council Protocol sets out how each Lancashire Local will acknowledge the priorities in parish plans. In addition, the Lancashire Local Constitution allows Lancashire Locals to include priorities from parish plans in their annual locality plans if they are also a priority for the district that year.

### Sustainable community strategies

The Lancashire Sustainable Community Strategy (Ambition Lancashire) sets out the economic, social and environmental priorities for the county. Parish and town councils can play an important role in developing this document.

We will involve parish and town councils in future reviews of Ambition Lancashire following the consultation procedure set out in section 2 of this charter.

Parish and town councils will do their best to give their views on Ambition Lancashire within the time available.

### **Work in progress**

**Lancashire County Council will:**

- consider and share national best practice for how local authorities and local strategic partnerships include parish plans; and
- raise awareness about the role of parish plans in relation to Lancashire Locals and locality plans.

**The county council and parish and town councils will:**

- work with district councils and local strategic partnerships to share good practice and include parish priorities in district sustainable community strategies, locality plans and service delivery plans.

# Section 4

## Local governance

We want parish and town councils to be able to influence our decisions and services.

Together we have developed a protocol to involve parish and town councils in Lancashire Local committees. The Lancashire Local Parish and Town Council Protocol is part of the Lancashire Local Constitution and is available by clicking on your district's page at [http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/atoz/a\\_to\\_z/service.asp?u\\_id=1773&strSL=L](http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/atoz/a_to_z/service.asp?u_id=1773&strSL=L).

Lancashire County Council will:

- work with parish and town councils to raise awareness of their role as set out in the protocol;
- encourage parish and town councils to get involved in Lancashire Local committees;
- involve parish and town councils when the Lancashire Local initiative is reviewed; and
- work with partners and parish and town councils to identify and share good practice for involving parishes in local strategic partnerships.

Parish and town councils will work with their Lancashire Local committee in the most practical way possible.

### Work in progress

Lancashire County Council will:

- **share good practice for involving parish and town councils in Lancashire Local committees with Lancashire Local chairs and vice chairs; and**
- **look at ways of involving parish and town councils in developing locality plans.**

# Section 5

## Adapting our services to local areas

We are committed to making our services meet the needs of the diverse communities of Lancashire. We need effective relationships with parish and town councils to do this.

We will continue to promote local services for local needs through our locality focus framework. The locality focus framework is a programme of activities which aims to bring us closer to the community and to deliver services which are relevant, accessible and responsive to communities.

Our locality focus activities are organised into the following four strands;

1. Involving people at an appropriate local level
2. Supporting councillors as community advocates
3. Opening ourselves up to the public
4. Working effectively with partners and stakeholders

Parish and town councils will:

- help residents influence our decisions and services, particularly members of the community who have difficulty getting involved; and
- share relevant county council information with local residents.

# Section 6

## The National Quality Parish Scheme and delegated responsibility for services

### **The National Quality Parish Scheme**

The county council and the parish and town councils recognise the potential benefits of the National Quality Parish Scheme. We will encourage efforts to achieve national quality status.

### **Delegated responsibility for services**

We realise that not all parish and town councils want to manage services on our behalf. However, some want more influence and control over the way we deliver services in their area.

We are working with parish and town councils to find out whether they could provide some of our services. The Whitworth Quality Parish Pilot has helped us to explore several ways of achieving this. Based on this, the councils have agreed the following.

- If a parish or town council (or group of local councils) wants to provide a service on our behalf, we will consider this as long as:
  - it provides best value, taking into account cost, quality, what local people prefer and whether it is practical; and
  - the council providing the service can meet the requirements of the service level agreement (the government standards for local services).
- If a parish or town council cannot provide best value or meet the requirements of the service level agreement, we will discuss other ways to encourage them to influence the service.

- If we enter into a service level agreement with a parish which does not have quality status, we will encourage the parish to achieve quality status.
- We will agree in advance any funding and terms for parish and town councils who provide services on our behalf.

### **Work in progress**

The county council and parish and town councils will:

- see whether the county council can delegate services using the findings from the Whitworth Quality Parish Pilot;
- aim to develop a framework on delegating services, using the findings from the Whitworth Quality Parish Pilot, and national best practice;
- look into producing a list of services that could be delegated;
- consider standards for delegated services and how these standards need to be reflected in future service level agreements; and
- look at how parish and town councils could have more influence over county council services.

# Section 7

## Support mechanisms

We are committed to supporting parish and town councils. Some ways in which we will do this are set out below.

### **Your county councillor**

Your county councillor can provide information about county council issues in your area and take your community's views into the council's decision-making process. They can also put forward your issues to be included in the Lancashire Local committee agenda. You can find your local county councillor at <http://www3.lancashire.gov.uk/council/councillors/myCouncillorFind.asp?sysredir=y>.

### **Your county council 'parish champion'**

County Councillor Albert Atkinson has been appointed as parish champion to provide an important link with parish and town councils and let the councils know about funding opportunities. You can contact County Councillor Atkinson by phone on 01772 533359 or by email at [albert.atkinson@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:albert.atkinson@lancashire.gov.uk).

### **Your district partnership officer (DPO)**

We have a district partnership officer in each of the 12 districts. They are responsible for improving links between us and the district councils, and are also involved in all partnerships in their district. If you have a query about a specific county council service, your DPO will be able to point you in the right direction for more information.

### **Print-buying services**

We commission all our printing and copying services through a central team. This saves money and makes things more straightforward. Where possible, we will let parish and town councils use these services to help keep your costs down.

### **Work in progress**

- **Lancashire County Council will work with parish and town councils to develop new ways of supporting them.**



# Section 8

## Training

Parish and town councils can provide training for their staff in a variety of ways, including the County Training Partnership and through district councils. As a county-wide organisation, we can also play an important role in sharing good practice between parish and town councils.

Lancashire County Council will:

- share its experience with parish and town councils through the Parish and Town Council Conference; and
- work with its officers to raise awareness of the parish charter and the important role of parish and town councils.

Parish and town councils will:

- work out the training they need to give to staff to do with county council services; and
- make the most of the training opportunities offered by the county council – for example, by sending a representative to the Parish and Town Council Conference.

### Work in progress

Lancashire County Council will:

- find out whether it can provide officers to carry out training organised by the County Training Partnership;
- find out whether it can invite parish clerks and councillors to its ‘bite-sized briefings’ training programme for county councillors; and
- set up an induction to the county council for new parish clerks.

# Section 9

## Complaints, monitoring and review

### **Complaints**

If the county council or a parish or town council are not satisfied with the other council's actions, the matter will be brought to the attention of the other council. If the matter cannot be resolved, it will be dealt with using that council's complaints procedure.

Lancashire County Council's complaints procedure can be found at <http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/corporate/complaints/index.asp>.

### **Monitoring and review**

This charter will be updated as necessary to help improve and develop our relationship with parish and town councils. With this in mind, we will work together to monitor and review the charter after it has been in use for a year and then every three years (or sooner if needed).

# Glossary

## **Ambition Lancashire**

The Lancashire Partnership's sustainable community strategy for Lancashire. It looks to the future and describes what we want to achieve for the county by the year 2025. Ambition Lancashire can be found at <http://www.lancashirepartnership.co.uk/content.asp?siteid=3813&pageid=13695&e=e>.

## **Bite Size Briefings**

These short and snappy sessions provide Lancashire County Council councillors and officers a briefing on different services, latest initiatives, progress and achievements. The sessions are held regularly at lunch times and last for one hour. The programme aims to bring county councillors up to speed with current issues and provide an opportunity for them to find out what is happening in their division.

## **County councillor**

The elected representatives for Lancashire County Council. They are elected every four years and answer to residents in their constituency. They have a duty to the whole community of Lancashire, but a special duty to their constituents, including those who did not vote for them.

## **County Training Partnership**

The County Training Partnership is made up of the Lancashire Association of Local Councils, Lancashire County Council and the Society of Local Council Clerks. The aim of the partnership is to develop a long-term training programme for parish and town councils throughout Lancashire. The partnership provides training for clerks and councillors. Several courses are held throughout the year and training can also be provided to individual councils.

## **Delegated services**

Services which the county council is responsible for but which are transferred to parish and town councils because they can provide better value.

## **District partnership officer**

A Lancashire County Council officer based in each of the 12 districts, they provide a link between the district council, other district partners and the county council.

## **Locality plan**

A document produced jointly by a district council and the county council which sets out how the two councils will work together in the coming year. Locality plans are about solving difficult issues and developing a shared vision and sense of purpose for each district.

## **Lancashire Local committee**

A joint committee made up of all the county councillors from a district and an equal number of borough councillors from the district. (Hyndburn Lancashire Local is an exception as it is made up of county councillors only). Lancashire Local committees help councillors to use their detailed local knowledge to make decisions and influence services in their district.

## **Lancashire Local Constitution**

The Lancashire Local Constitution sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Lancashire Local committees.

## **The Lancashire Partnership**

This is the county-wide local strategic partnership. It is made up of public, private, voluntary and community organisations that are working together to improve the quality of life for people who live, work in and visit Lancashire.

## Local area agreement

An agreement between Lancashire County Council, its partners and central government about how priorities for Lancashire will be measured and how much improvement will be made from 2008 to 2011. More information can be found at <http://www.lancashirepartnership.co.uk/content.asp?siteid=3813&pageid=18181&e=e>.

## Locality focus framework

This sets out how we aim to deliver our locality focus agenda in response to the government's modernisation programme. Locality focus in Lancashire is about how we can make ourselves and our services relevant, accessible and responsive to our diverse communities. A copy of the locality focus framework is available on request.

## Local strategic partnership

A local strategic partnership (LSP) has been set up in each district to help organisations in the area work together to increase the social, environmental and economic wellbeing of their community and provide a single vision. Each LSP is made up in a slightly different way to reflect the make-up of the community it serves.

## National Quality Parish Scheme

The National Quality Parish Scheme was launched in 2003 following the government's Rural White Paper 2000. The aim of the scheme is to provide minimum standards for parish and town councils.

## Parish champion

A county councillor with specific responsibility for parish and town council issues.

**Print friendly**

Documents presented in a way which makes them easy to print off most machines.

**Ribble Valley LSP pilot**

The Ribble Valley LSP pilot will consider how community plans have contributed to developing the district's Sustainable Community Strategy. This review will identify good practice and put forward recommendations on how community plans can play a greater part in influencing sustainable community strategies and the work of local strategic partnerships in the future.

**Sustainable community strategy**

A key long-term planning document for improving the quality of life and services in an area. Each local authority must have its own sustainable community strategy, agreed by its local strategic partnership. Taken together, these strategies form the basis of the local area agreement.

**Whitworth Quality Parish Pilot**

Whitworth Town Council was selected as a pilot to explore the potential for delegating county council services to town and parish councils. The findings from the pilot will be used to further develop the county council's position on delegated services.

