

CHARTER

**Between Leeds City Council and the Parish and
Town Councils within the administrative area of
Leeds City Council**

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SECTION ONE – SHARED GOALS

Introduction

- 1.1 Leeds City Council and the local councils within its area share the common belief that working closely together plays a vital contribution to the well being of the communities they serve
- 1.2 To this end, Leeds City Council and the local councils in the Leeds City Council area as set out in Appendix A, have agreed to publish a Charter which sets out how they aim to work together for the benefit of local people. This Charter is the result of discussions locally to establish a new way of working and to confirm existing good practice.
- 1.3 Leeds City Council and the local councils shown in Appendix A are committed to the principles of democratic local government. They are keen to see continued efforts made to improve our system of local democracy and to see greater public participation in and appreciation of this system.
- 1.4 Leeds City Council acknowledges that, where they exist in Leeds, local councils are the grass-roots level of local government. By working with them, and in particular through its own Area Committees, Leeds City Council aims to act in partnership with local communities, while balancing the needs of the wider community.
- 1.5 In their role as democratically accountable bodies, local councils offer a means of shaping the decisions that affect their communities. Parish and town councillors and officers possess local knowledge which can help decision makers in the City Council to make more informed decisions and parishes have made it clear that they would like more influence on services which affect their communities. They offer a means of decentralising the provision of certain services and of revitalising local communities. In turn, the local councils recognise the strategic role of the Leeds City Council and the equitable distribution of services which it has to achieve.

Sustainability

- 1.6 Leeds City Council will work in partnership with local councils in its area to promote sustainable economic and environmental wellbeing for the social progress of local communities.

Quality Parish Councils

- 1.7 The parties to this Charter recognise the Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme as providing a demonstrable statement that a local council:
 - is representative of, and actively engages with, all parts of its community, providing vision, identity and a sense of belonging;
 - is effectively and properly managed; and
 - has the ability and capacity to take on the enhanced role and responsibility that Quality status is likely to bring

- 1.8 In particular, local councils recognise the value of striving towards acquiring Quality status, and the City Council recognises that it can have increased confidence in dealing with a local council which has achieved it.

SECTION TWO – PRACTICAL SUPPORT

General

- 2.1 Leeds City Council will, where practical, offer local councils access to their 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 helping to meet the training needs of local councils.

Specific arrangements

- 2.2 The following arrangements are in place to support and assist local councils:

By Democratic Services

- Nominated parish and town council liaison officer
- First point of contact for parish clerks and councillors
- Organisation and co-ordination of city wide liaison with other Council departments on parish issues/queries
- Co-ordination of city wide Parish Forum Meetings
- Liaison with YLCA
- Liaison with other Council departments on parish issues/queries
- Provision of training and development opportunities for local councillors (subject to administrative charge).

By Elections and Electoral Registration

- Support and administration of local council elections
- Advice on electoral issues and legislation
- The administration of the establishment of new parish councils
- The administration of the review of parish electoral arrangements

By Financial Management

- Letters and forms sent out to parishes in October each year requesting details of precepts for the following year, to be returned by the end of January
- Letters sent to parishes in the latter half of January informing them of their tax base for the coming financial year (enables them to assess the impact on their council tax of their precept) (see below *)
- Arranging for payment of precept to local councils

By Leeds Revenue Services

- Maintain council tax records, including which properties fall in which parish so that bills can be calculated correctly (so need to be kept informed about boundaries of new parishes or about changes in existing parishes) and so that correct information can be supplied to Financial Development Division for calculation of tax base (see below*)
- Send out council tax bills and collect council tax

By Financial Development

- Calculation of tax base for each parish and submitting figures to Council for approval (January Council meeting if there is one) (see above*)
- Calculation of amount of council tax including for parishes and submitting figures to Council for approval (February Council meeting)
- For **new** parishes, calculate amount of anticipated precept and consult about that (e.g. with local City Council ward members) before the figure is incorporated in an appropriate report for approval

SECTION THREE – WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Provision of information

- 3.1 Leeds City Council will publish details of all agendas and minutes of meetings and of all delegated decisions by officers, together with associated reports which will indicate any electoral wards of the City Council which are specifically affected.
- 3.2 Leeds City Council will aim to acknowledge e-mails within one working day and provide a full response as early as possible, but certainly within 10 working days.
- 3.3 Leeds City Council will respond to all letters and faxes as soon as practicable, having regard to any schedule of meetings of the relevant local council and, in any event, within 10 working days.

Consultation

- 3.4 Consultation will be used to involve local councils in decisions of the City Council that affect local communities. Consultation between the partners of this Charter is a two-way process, which can only be effective where there is a sense of partnership and mutual trust. Consultation will not be used as a form of advance warning or of public relations.
- 3.5 In some cases, consultation is a statutory requirement and, carried out carefully, it ensures that good decisions are taken based on the best information.
- 3.6 In other cases consultation is used to seek local information and views to establish whether a new service or policy will achieve what is intended. It tests the technical or policy basis of a proposed development to ensure its relevance and suitability in a locality.

- 3.7 Sometimes it will be necessary for the City Council to take decisions based on considerations which extend beyond an individual community. In these cases the decisions may not reflect the local council view, even though suggestions and opinions will have been considered.
- 3.8 Leeds City Council will maintain and publish a forward programme of key decisions to be taken by the Council together with details of consultation arrangements applicable to each decision. In taking key decisions, the Council will, where applicable, have regard to Parish Plans and will include parish and town councils within the consultation arrangements for all key decisions with specific implications for them
- 3.9 To help achieve the objectives laid down in this Charter, liaison and consultation (both formal and informal) will be further developed at city wide Parish Forum Meetings which will be held on a quarterly basis and at which the local councils will be updated on Leeds City Council initiatives and have the opportunity of discussing Leeds City Council policies and procedures.
- 3.10 Officers and councillors of Leeds City Council will attend meetings as requested by local councils (or groups of such councils) at a mutually agreed time to discuss matters of common interest.
- 3.11 On request, local councils will send copies of their agendas and papers to Leeds City Council and to councillors for their area. Officers and councillors of Leeds City Council will be given an opportunity to speak, at their request, at local council meetings on matters of mutual interest.

Community strategies and local strategic partnerships

- 3.12 Leeds City Council will involve local councils in the processes of preparing and implementing the community strategy to promote or improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the whole area administered by the City Council, and the role which local councils should take. Leeds City Council will consult and involve local councils accordingly about the content and direction of strategies as they affect the local communities they represent.

Ward Members

- 3.13 Members of the City Council represent the interests of the wards for which they are elected and deal with constituents' enquiries and representations. All City Councillors sit on the Area Committee which covers their individual ward, in addition to which they may sit on a wide range of Council and outside bodies
- 3.14 Local councils recognise the key community engagement role fulfilled by City Councillors and the benefit of working closely with City Councillors on matters of mutual interest.

Area Committees

- 3.15 Each Area Committee of Leeds City Council will establish a mutually acceptable consultative and/or liaison arrangement with the local councils in its area. Area Committees will seek to maintain and promote partnership working and funding arrangements with their local councils as appropriate for the sustainable social, economic and environmental wellbeing of their local communities.
- 3.16 The Leeds City Council Area Committees each agree an annual 'Area Delivery Plan' that sets out the committees' priorities for action over the coming year. As appropriate, local councils will be consulted on the draft Area Delivery Plan, as it may affect their community, and their comments reported to the relevant Area Committee.

Council Departments

- 3.17 Leeds City Council will maintain on its Internet site, details of key contacts within departments for local councils. Additionally, individual departments will provide details of their service standards to each local council, in either a manual or electronically accessible format.
- 3.18 The Parish and Town Council Forum, and individual Council departments which have particular significance in relation to local councils, will work together in establishing clear arrangements describing the operational relationships which exist between them.

SECTION FOUR – MAINTAINING HIGH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Standards Committee

- 4.1 Both Leeds City Council and the local councils have adopted codes of conduct, based on the national model code of conduct.
- 4.2 The Leeds City Council Standards Committee comprises City and local councillor representatives together with independent members.
- 4.3 The local councils will work with the Council's Monitoring Officer and the Standards Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct.

SECTION FIVE – ALLOCATING RESPONSIBILITIES

Double taxation and concurrent functions

- 5.1 "Concurrent functions" is the term used to describe services which both Leeds City Council and the parish and town councils within its area have the legal power to provide.

- 5.2 Where Leeds City Council and one or more local councils agree that a particular concurrent function will be provided by the parish or town councils in their own areas instead of by Leeds City Council, then Leeds City Council commits itself to ensuring that double taxation does not occur in financial arrangements it makes with the local councils”

Delegating responsibility for service provision

- 5.3 If a local council (or group of local councils) wishes to discharge functions on behalf of the principal authority, Leeds City Council will consider this where it provides best value (taking account of cost, quality, local preferences and practicability). Where it is not good value or practicable, Leeds City Council will, in consultation with the local council, explore alternative solutions to encourage more local-level input into service delivery.
- 5.4 The first step towards devolution of a service currently provided by Leeds City Council to a local council is for the Clerk of that local council to notify the Chief Executive of the City Council. The Chief Executive will then ensure that the local council is able to have discussions with a service manager of appropriate seniority to consider the feasibility of devolution of a service.

SECTION SIX – MANAGING THE RELATIONSHIP

Complaints

- 6.1 If a local council is dissatisfied with the actions of Leeds City Council then, in the first instance, it should raise their concern with the relevant Council department and, if remaining dissatisfied, may submit a complaint to the department in accordance with the Council’s published procedure for dealing with complaints and compliments. The Council will provide a response within 15 working days.
- 6.2 If a local council is dissatisfied with actions of Leeds Council arising from this Charter, but which are not specific to a Council department, the local council may make a formal complaint to the Chief Democratic Services Officer who will investigate the complaint and arrange for an appropriate response to be submitted by the Council, within 15 working days.

Performance, monitoring and review

- 6.3 This Charter is intended to be flexible and adaptable to the changing circumstances and arrangements for local government. This will be achieved by an annual review of the Charter by the Parish and Town Council Forum, to keep pace with developments.
- 6.4 The local councils each May at their annual council meeting will monitor the effectiveness of the Charter. The local council will decide whether or not, on balance, the Charter has been upheld by Leeds City Council and will, as they consider appropriate, submit views for consideration by the Parish and Town Council Forum as part of the annual review.

- 6.5 Leeds City Council will also conduct an annual monitoring exercise, reviewing from their perspective, their relationship with their local councils and the performance of local councils compared to the standards set out in the Charter.

COUNCILS INCLUDED WITHIN THE CHARTER

Leeds City Council

Aberford & District

Allerton Bywater

Arthington

Bardsey cum Rigton

Barwick in Elmet & Scholes

Boston Spa

Bramham cum Oglethorpe

Bramhope & Carlton

Clifford

Collingham with Linton

Drighlington

Gildersome

Great & Little Preston

Harewood

Horsforth (Town Council)

East Keswick

Kippax

Ledsham

Ledston

Micklefield

Morley (Town Council)

Otley (Town Council)

Pool in Wharfedale

Scarcroft

Shadwell

Swillington

Thorner

Thorp Arch

Walton

Wetherby (Town Council)