

# **Northumberland Town and Parish Council Charter**

A joint Charter between Northumberland County Council  
and the Town and Parish Councils of Northumberland

**June 2014**

## **Foreword**

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Northumberland County Council recognises the significant role that Town and Parish Councils have in the lives of Northumberland's diverse communities. By working together we can deliver more to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of our communities.

This revised Charter has been developed in partnership with all Northumberland Town and Parish Councils and represents a mutual agreement between the two tiers of local government.

The Charter will be accompanied by an Action Plan which identifies ways in which all Councils can deliver the commitments within the Charter.

I am confident by working together with fewer resources, we can jointly make Northumberland a better place in which to live, work, study and enjoy.

**Grant Davey**  
**Leader, Northumberland County Council**

NALC welcomes this revised Charter. Northumberland County Council and local Town and Parish Councils are jointly responsible for providing services to the residents of Northumberland and particularly to the residents of each individual town or parish.

We support closer working between NCC and local councils and recognises there can be advantages for local residents, when Local Councils and the County Council work together. NALC is happy to play its part in facilitating the relationship between local councils and the County Council.

NALC accepts that it is the right of each individual Town or Parish Council to decide whether or not it wishes to support the principles identified within the Charter, however the potential benefits to local communities should encourage local councils and NCC to work collaboratively.

We will continue to work with the County Council to develop the Action Plan and the more detailed appendices that will sit alongside the Charter.

**Cllr Ray Butler T.D., B.A., M.Ed.**  
**Chair Northumberland Association of Local Councils**

## 1. Introduction

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There are 148<sup>1</sup> Town and Parish Councils (T&PCs) within Northumberland. T&PCs are the first tier of Local Government in England, with Members elected every four years. T&PCs have a range of powers, and are principally funded by an annual precept.

In 2009, following Local Government Reorganisation in Northumberland, when the former County Council and six District Councils were abolished and replaced by one unitary authority, the new unitary Northumberland County Council (NCC) adopted a Local Council Charter. The purpose of the Charter was to define the relationship between NCC and T&PCs. It was designed to enable effective partnership working between the two tiers of local government within Northumberland at a time of significant change. A review of the principles within the Charter was undertaken in 2011.

This revised Charter has been prepared following consultation with all Northumberland T&PC's, it is a shorter framework document; it defines joint principles to enable NCC and T&PCs to work effectively together to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of Northumberland. It will be accompanied by an Action Plan that will be developed with input from T&PCs and this will be updated annually. In addition supporting documents will be prepared to cover key issues, such as training, communication, ICT and purchasing. Others will be developed when a need is identified.

The implementation of the Charter, and its effectiveness, will continue to be monitored and, as a minimum the document will be updated after every County Council election. The annual T&PC Conference will also discuss the effectiveness of the Charter and identify whether an early review is required.

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<sup>1</sup> These cover 165 Parish areas – 129 un-warded “whole” parishes & 36 warded parishes (112 parish wards between them. 8 are presently without a Parish

## 2. Effective Joint Working

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Successful partnership working between NCC and T&PCs can only be achieved if both partners understand and respect each other's roles and work co-operatively to serve the community. It is recognised that both NCC and T&PC Councillors volunteer their services for the benefit of their diverse communities, it is also acknowledged that many T&PCs have very limited resources. This Charter therefore sets out how NCC and T&PCs will work in partnership to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.

NCC recognises that T&PCs across Northumberland are:

- The community's hub, engaging with all parts of the community, a parliament which draws on its democratic legitimacy and expertise to reach conclusions and take decisions, generating new opportunities, resolving local differences, and helping the community to look-forward;
- The community's voice, articulating local needs and aspirations to, and collaborating with, the responsible bodies;
- Key providers of local public services, as authorised by statute; and
- Facilitators and supporters of action by the wider community, providing resources, encouragement and a 'stamp of approval' to community initiatives.

T&PCs recognise the strategic role of NCC.

### **Shared Principles:**

Northumberland County Council and Town and Parish Councils will work together in partnership to deliver their statutory roles and responsibilities to:

- Promote and protect social, economic and environmental well-being for the benefit of our local communities, to ensure vibrancy and future sustainability;
- Strive to eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote equality of opportunity;
- Promote an active democracy to ensure all members of every Northumberland community is able to have a say in our future and feel able to help to develop a shared vision, identity and sense of belonging;
- Welcome all feedback and aim to act quickly and efficiently to address issues within their power;
- Respect and promote the role of both elected and co-opted councillors as representatives of their communities through positive communication, leadership and engagement, all undertaken to high ethical standards;
- Give importance and recognition to issues and ideas raised at each level of local government; and
- Ensure efficient, effective and value for money management, supported by adequate training

### 3. Communication

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Effective communication is the basis for any successful working relationship, it needs to be a two way process and utilise a variety of methods. The Northumberland Association of Local Councils has an important role in facilitating communication and providing coordinated feedback.

<b>Northumberland County Council will:</b>	<b>Town and Parish Councils will:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use a variety of methods to communicate with T&amp;PCs - selecting the most effective method, dependent on the issue and which T&amp;PC it impacts upon;</li><li>• Identify a Locality Development Officer to act as first point of contact to provide help and information;</li><li>• Establish a schedule of meetings to enable all T&amp;PCs to meet regularly with senior NCC officers;</li><li>• Make best use of the information technology available to promote quick and efficient communication;</li><li>• Create a new T&amp;PC website which is frequently updated with relevant and useful information, including providing links to T&amp;PCs websites;</li><li>• Clarify and monitor service standards for responses to enquiries from T&amp;PC;</li><li>• Ensure working arrangements with T&amp;PCs are reviewed regularly via the T&amp;PC Liaison Working Group and information is published online.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make every effort to attend and be represented at relevant NCC meetings and events;</li><li>• Make best use of the available information technology to deliver communication with NCC;</li><li>• Provide up to date contact details for both T&amp;PC Clerks and Chairs;</li><li>• Use a variety of appropriate methods to communicate and consult with their communities;</li><li>• Ensure all Clerks have access to a computer and e-mail account;</li><li>• Assist and encourage their Councillors to have access to and use of electronic communication.</li></ul>

## 4. Engagement

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It is essential that NCC and T&PCs work together when making decisions to shape services and policies that affect Northumberland communities. In order for this to be effective, engagement needs to be a genuine two way listening process; positive and constructive and built upon a foundation of trust.

### **Northumberland County Council will:**

- Engage with T&PCs on all issues that are likely to affect their area;
- Support the engagement process through Ward Councillors;
- Consult T&PCs as statutory consultees in planning, licensing and highways matters;
- Take account of the views of T&PCs during the NCC budget setting process, providing information in a timely manner;
- Provide briefing or training sessions to groups of T&PCs on complex consultation issues and where capacity allows;
- Provide feedback to T&PCs on the results of consultation;
- Consult T&PCs for a minimum period of 6 weeks on all non-statutory consultations affecting them;
- Provide T&PCs with contact details for personnel responsible for their area, including a FAQ guide on who to contact and when;
- Provide data, information and reasonable support to assist T&PCs undertake their statutory role.

### **Town and Parish Councils will:**

- Endeavour to attend NCC engagement meetings;
- Recognise the strategic role of NCC in tackling issues that look beyond individual T&PC boundaries;
- Take responsibility for engaging with their local community on matters of particular relevance to their area;
- Respond within consultation deadlines set by NCC, unless otherwise agreed;
- Work with NCC to seek mutually acceptable solutions to issues.

## 5. Finance

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Financial arrangements will be informed by the overarching principles of fairness, efficiency and transparency.

<p><b>Northumberland County Council will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consult T&amp;PCs of proposed changes to service provision and on budget implications in a timely manner;</li><li>• Provide information to support T&amp;PCs in determining their precepts;</li><li>• Meet the administration and staff costs associated with ordinary elections and Neighbourhood Plan referendum;</li><li>• Provide a detailed breakdown of election costs, to which T&amp;PCs are expected to contribute.</li></ul>	<p><b>Town and Parish Councils will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide precept information by the mutually agreed deadline;</li><li>• Contribute to the costs of any T&amp;PC election that is held in conjunction with an ordinary election;</li><li>• Be responsible for the full cost of any T&amp;PC by-election within their parish.</li></ul>
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## 6. Local Services and Assets

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T&PCs are able to provide some local services and organise activities which take place within their area. Many T&PCs across Northumberland already provide and operate a range of services, including parks, playing fields, cemeteries, closed churchyards, and allotments. Where a Town, or Parish, service is currently provided by NCC, steps are underway to transfer that service to the relevant council.

<p><b>Northumberland County Council will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Manage, maintain and resource the provision of universal services and facilities – including cemeteries, closed church yards, parks and playing fields in consultation with T&amp;PCs;</li><li>• Support T&amp;PCs to maintain their own local services and assets if they wish to do so.</li></ul>	<p><b>Town and Parish Councils will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Manage, maintain and resource, the provision of local services and facilities – such as allotments, play areas, bus shelters, seats, Christmas lighting and war memorials in consultation with NCC.</li></ul>
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It should be recognised that the above principles are general and there can be local variations. For example:

- Where services are deemed to be purely local in nature but are currently provided by the County Council, they should as a general rule (and following consultation) be transferred to the relevant local council;
- Where services are deemed to be of greater than purely local relevance they would normally be operated by the County Council however, in some cases local councils may wish to continue to operate such services;

- NCC will continue to provide a cemetery and crematorium service that is universal and available to all, while T&PCs in some cases also provide a local cemetery. Where a T&PCs wish to explore the possibility of transferring a local cemetery to NCC, NCC will consider such requests on a case by case basis;
- Where a T&PC wishes to take over the management of a park or playing field that is currently managed by NCC, NCC will give positive consideration to such requests on a case by case basis.

The results of such requests will be available to ensure transparency, equality and openness.

## **7. Implementation, Monitoring and Review**

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An annual action plan will be developed and will sit alongside the Charter to ensure that it is a living document and that key priorities are identified for action. Implementation of the Charter action plan will be monitored by the T&PC Liaison Working Group and discussed at the Annual T&PC conference.

The Charter will be reviewed following each County Council election, as a minimum, to ensure that it remains relevant.

### **Key Contacts**

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