



Northumberland Town, Parish & Community Council Charter

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

Foreword

This Charter is a key ingredient in this partnership, and I am grateful to everyone who has worked on it.

But actions are stronger than words and I want to see a genuine and trusting relationship grow and develop over the coming years.

Glen Sanderson

Leader, Northumberland County Council

I am delighted to recommend this revised Charter all to Northumberland's Parish, Town and Community Councils, to the County Council and to all Councillors and the staff working at all levels of local government within Northumberland as only working together can we achieve our equitable aim - a better local service for all our residents.

Revisions have been made to underline the importance of collaborative and partnership working between our Member Councils and the County Council. I am particularly pleased to see the increased emphasis on the role of the County Councillors as being a very good conduit for information to pass in both directions, as was apparent from the results of the survey which has informed the changes.

Cllr Alex Wallace

Chair, Northumberland Association of Local Councils

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1. Introduction

Within Northumberland, there are currently 147 Town, Parish and Community Councils (TPCCs), comprising one or more civil parishes^[1]. TPCCs are the first tier of Local Government in England, with Members elected every four years. TPCCs 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 the 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 TPCCs. It was designed to enable effective partnership working between the two tiers of local government within Northumberland at a time of significant change. Reviews of the principles within the Charter were undertaken in 2011, 2014 and 2019.

This revised Charter includes only minor amendments to the 2019 edition and has been prepared following consultation with Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC); it defines joint principles to enable NCC and TPCCs to work effectively together to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of Northumberland.

The implementation of the Charter, and its effectiveness, will continue to be monitored by regular joint meetings of the Town, Parish & Community Councils Liaison Working Group and, as a minimum, the document will be updated after every County Council election. The annual TPCC Conference will also address issues relating to the implementation of the Charter.

[1] There are 164 Civil Parishes in total within the County – 8 Civil Parishes (Snitter, Bewick, Roddam, Ilderton, Earle, Akeld, Kilham, and Ewart) are presently without a Parish Council.

2. Effective Joint Working

Successful partnership working between NCC and TPCCs can only be achieved if both partners understand and respect each other's roles and work cooperatively to serve the community. It is recognised that both NCC and TPCC Councillors volunteer their services for the benefit of their diverse communities, it is also acknowledged that many TPCCs have very limited resources. This Charter therefore sets out how NCC and TPCCs will work in partnership to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.

NCC recognises that TPCCs 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.

TPCCs recognise the strategic role of NCC.

3. Shared Principles

Northumberland County Council and Town, Parish and Community 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 are 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, together with their respective staff, 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 and encouraging adequate training and briefing.

4. Communication

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 (NALC) has an important role in facilitating communication and providing coordinated feedback.

Northumberland County Council will:

- Use a variety of methods to communicate with TPCCs – selecting the most effective method, dependent on the issue and which TPCC it impacts upon.
- Identify a Community Regeneration Officer to act as a point of contact to provide help and information.
- Make best use of the information technology available to promote quick and efficient communication.

Town, Parish & Community Councils will:

- Make every effort to attend and be represented at NCC meetings and events which are relevant to their Council.
- Make best use of the available information technology to deliver communication with NCC.
- Provide up to date contact details for both TPCC Clerks and Chairs.

4. Communication (continued)

Northumberland County Council will:

- Assist NALC with maintaining up to date NCC information relevant to TPCCs.
- Respond to enquiries and reported issues from TPCCs in a timely manner.
- Ensure working arrangements with TPCCs are reviewed regularly via the TPCC Liaison Working Group and information is published online.

Town, Parish & Community Councils will:

- Use a variety of appropriate methods to communicate and consult with their communities.
- Ensure all Clerks have access to a computer and email account.
- Assist and encourage their Councillors to have access to and use of electronic communication.

5. Engagement

It is essential that NCC and TPCCs 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 TPCCs on all issues that are likely to affect their area.
- Engage regularly with TPCCs through the five Local Area Councils.
- Support the engagement process through Ward Councillors.
- Consult TPCCs in planning and highways matters.
- Take account of the views of TPCCs during the NCC budget setting process, providing information in a timely manner.

Town, Parish & Community Councils will:

- Endeavour to attend NCC engagement meetings where the agenda contains items relevant to their Council and where TPCC Councillors can contribute to discussions in a meaningful manner.
- Support the engagement process through TPCC Councillors.
- Recognise the strategic role of NCC in tackling issues that look beyond individual TPCC boundaries.

5. Engagement (continued)

Northumberland County Council will:

- Provide briefing or training sessions to groups of TPCCs on complex consultation issues and where capacity allows.
- Provide feedback to TPCCs on the results of consultation.
- Consult TPCCs for a minimum period of 6 weeks on all non-statutory consultations affecting them.
- Provide TPCCs with an up to date 'Who's Who' of local services managers, including contact details.
- Provide data, information and reasonable support to assist TPCCs undertake their statutory role.

Town, Parish & Community Councils will:

- 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.

6. Finance

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

Northumberland County Council will:

- Consult TPCCs on proposed changes to service provision and on budget implications in a timely manner.
- Provide information to support TPCCs in determining their precepts.
- Subject to budgetary provision, meet the administration and staff costs associated with ordinary elections and Neighbourhood Plan referenda.
- Agree a protocol for determining election costs, from which TPCCs will be able to calculate what they will be expected to contribute at ordinary, re-run and by-elections.

Town, Parish & Community Councils will:

- Provide precept information by the mutually agreed deadline.
- Contribute to the costs of any TPCC election that is held in conjunction with an ordinary and re-run election
- Be responsible for the full cost of any TPCC by-election within their parish.

7. Local Services & Assets

TPCCs are able to provide some local services and organise activities which take place within their area. Many TPCCs across Northumberland already provide and operate a range of services, including parks, playing fields, some public toilets, cemeteries, closed churchyards and allotments. Most TPCC services formerly provided by NCC have already transferred to the relevant TPCC.

Northumberland County Council will:

- Manage, maintain and resource the provision of universal services and facilities – including cemeteries, closed churchyards, parks and playing fields in consultation with TPCCs.
- Support TPCCs to maintain their own local services and assets if they wish to do so.

Town, Parish & Community Councils will:

- Manage, maintain and resource, the provision of local services and facilities – such as allotments, annual planting, play parks, bus shelters, public seating, Christmas lighting and war memorials in consultation with NCC.

7. Local Services & Assets (continued)

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 NCC, they should as a general rule (and following consultation) be transferred to the relevant TPCC.
- Where services are deemed to be of greater than purely local relevance, they would normally be operated by NCC however, in some cases, TPCCs 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 TPCCs in some cases also provide a local cemetery. Where a TPCC wishes to explore the possibility of transferring a local cemetery to NCC, NCC will consider such requests on a case-by-case basis.
- Where a TPCC 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 made available to ensure transparency, equality and openness.

NCC will not agree to developers and other third parties providing facilities which would normally be the responsibility of the TPCC to provide, maintain and insure, unless the TPCC has given its prior consent to such provision and the conditions associated with this.

8. Implementation, Monitoring & Review

Implementation of the Charter will be monitored by the TPCC Liaison Working Group, and any revisions will be highlighted at the Annual TPCC Conference.

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

9. Key Contacts

Iain Hedley – Community Regeneration Officer

- Iain.Hedley@northumberland.gov.uk
- 07747 473687

Neil Quinn – Partnerships Manager - Town Regeneration

- Neil.Quinn@northumberland.gov.uk
- 07966 330467

Graeme Popay – NALC Chief Officer

- graemepopay@northumberlandalc.uk
- 01670 500810