

PARISH CHARTER

1. INTRODUCTION

- (i) This Charter has been agreed between the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (the Royal Borough) and _____ Parish Council (the Parish) as a guide to the process of consultation and liaison between the two authorities.
- (ii) The Royal Borough has recognised the need for effective consultation in its Community Consultation Strategy 2007-2010 adopted on 13 December 2007 which clearly states that consultation will be a ‘first thought’.
- (iii) This Charter is intended to provide the basis for effective consultation and liaison, to assist the Royal Borough and the Parish to maintain good working relationships and to develop an effective partnership to the benefit of _____ all residents. It is intended to assist the Parish in helping to ensure the effective delivery of Royal Borough services in the Parish through monitoring of service delivery.
- (iv) All levels of government are dedicated to the wellbeing of the population, although each has different powers, duties and responsibilities. The duty of Parish or Town Councils is to their parishioners, not only in the services which they provide, but also in ensuring that local views are taken into account by the Royal Borough. At times this will support the activities of the Royal Borough and at other times, it may oppose them.
- (v) The status of this Charter is that of a good practice guide, which sets out the wishes of the parties to foster good working relationships. **It is not a legally binding agreement which can be enforced by one party against the other.**

2. CONSULTATION PRINCIPLES

- (i) Borough Councillors have an important role in representing their local area and in the consultation and liaison process with Parish Councils. It is therefore important for Borough Councillors to be well briefed about what is happening in their local area, and also for Borough Officers to be given the opportunity to brief Parishes on specific projects, legislation and initiatives. .
- (ii) As part of the development of local relationships the Parish will:
 - (a) invite Royal Borough Councillors for the Parish area to attend Parish Council meetings, together with relevant Officers when necessary and appropriate.
 - (b) provide the Borough Councillors with meeting agenda, minutes, relevant reports and correspondence with the authority.
 - (c) allow Borough Councillors, at the Parish’s discretion, to speak at the meetings.
- (iii) The Royal Borough will:
 - (a) encourage its Members for the Parish area to attend Parish Council meetings.
 - (b) provide those Members with correspondence with the Parish on any significant matter.

- (c) make available agenda for meetings of the Royal Borough on its Web Site for access from the Parish.
 - (d) organise a conference, currently held three times a year, at which Members and officers of the Royal Borough will meet with representatives from all Parishes to discuss matters of a generic and common interest.
- (iv) The Parish.Liaison@rbwm.gov.uk e-mail address has been established for all parish and town councils for use as an initial contact point by parish and town councils when seeking information from the Borough Council or in response to any queries. This e-mail is monitored and tracked by the Council's Democratic Services Team.
- (v) The Borough will consult with the Parish on **significant** matters affecting the Parish area, in accordance with the principles set out in the Consultation Strategy and this Charter.
- (vi) The Borough will brief the Parish on a specific matter of local significance and provide appropriate briefing material.
- (vii) Requests for consultation from the Parish on other matters will be treated **sympathetically**, with the presumption that the request will be agreed.
- (viii) Reasonable consideration will be given to requests from the Parish for enhancements in a specific service provision in the area. In line with adopted Council policy, such enhancements would be on a partnership basis between the Parish, the Royal Borough and any relevant contractor, with appropriate **funding provision being secured by the authority requesting the service enhancement**.
- (ix) Equally the Royal Borough is keen to make wider use of its facilities and buildings across the Borough and consideration will be given to proposals from Parishes to avail themselves of appropriate opportunities.
- (x) Consultation will be carried out as soon as practicable to allow the Parish time to respond before decisions are taken. In this regard it is recognised that:
- (a) the Parish Council will usually meet about once a month.
 - (b) the Borough is delivering services on a day to day basis and much of this decision making is delegated to officers who have a duty to act fairly and swiftly within the policy framework laid down by the Council.
 - (c) **the Parish must have in place arrangements for a rapid response where necessary, particularly as few issues fit neatly into pre-arranged meeting timetables.**
 - (d) many of the services operated by the Borough are provided on a Borough wide basis therefore **individual consultation with the Parish may not always be appropriate**. The Royal Borough's objective is to ensure the Parish is kept fully informed of all developments affecting services within the Parish.
 - (e) the views of the Parish will be made known to Royal Borough Members and officers, where a decision has been delegated, before a decision is taken on the issue in question.

- (f) the Parish Council recognises that, in a limited number of circumstances the existence of an emergency or a shortage of resources (on the Borough's part), **full compliance with the principles set out above may be unachievable.**

A list of strategic and operational consultation items is set out in the schedule attached as an appendix to this Charter

(xi) **Consultation on strategic issues** relates to those issues which normally result in policies and strategies that will direct the Royal Borough over a number of years. Consultations will take place at various stages in the development process when input from the Parish may be appropriate to affect the outcome. It is recognised that Parish Councils rarely have expert resources and the Royal Borough will provide briefing where appropriate.

(xii) **Consultation on operational issues** relates to day to day matters and will normally be either by contact with the Royal Borough members or by a copy of an agenda or report, e-mail, letter, fax, or telephone (to be confirmed in writing via e-mail) or a combination of these methods and, where appropriate, the use of new IT based communication methods.

(xiii) **Service User Forums** In addition to the provisions outlined in this Charter, the Council has introduced a system of consultation by means of Service User Forums across all areas of the Council which ensure that the views of residents, users of the services and key interest groups are put at the heart of the Council business and given more consideration in the development of future policies and strategies. When new Forums are created, or where existing ones are considering items of strategic importance to a Parish, then consideration will be given to ensuring appropriate representation at a Forum meeting.

3. PROCEDURES AND TIMESCALES FOR CONSULTATION

(i) Under the Local Government Act 2000 the Council is required to publish a 'Forward Plan' of key decisions to be taken. This list will be published on a monthly basis and will outline decisions to be taken four months ahead. The Plan will include details of the responsible Member and officer to whom representations can be made. Parishes are sent via e-mail a copy of the latest version of the Forward Plan on a monthly basis.

(ii) The presumption is that the Parish will be consulted about **important matters** specifically affecting the Parish at the earliest opportunity and preferably before a solution is proposed. The Royal Borough will aim to seek **mutually acceptable solutions** or an agreed approach **but it is recognised that on occasions this may not be possible.**

(iii) Timescales for formal consultation will vary to reflect the nature of the issues involved and the Council's service delivery requirements. Nonetheless, on significant matters, the Council will:

- (a) aim to provide a period of six weeks whenever possible (**although it is recognised that this may be difficult to achieve for consultation on**

organisational issues) or will agree a different timescale within which the Parish can consult within its area and respond.

- (b) provide sufficient information to enable the Parish to identify the nature and location of the matter on which consultation is taking place, the general policies affecting the issue, the decision maker (Cabinet, Council, Panel, Member or Officer), the deadline for response and when the decision will be taken.
- (c) ensure the views of the Parish, when submitted in writing, are communicated to the decision maker before the decision is taken.
- (d) identify to the Parish a named officer of the Council who is dealing with the issue and with whom contact can be made by telephone, fax or e mail.

4. SERVICE MONITORING

- (i) It is recognised that the Parish is well placed to monitor the services provided by the Royal Borough in its area and Parish representatives can report deficiencies and incidents at an early date.
- (ii) It is agreed that, to allow effective service monitoring, there must be:
 - (a) service specifications against which monitoring can take place.
 - (b) procedures for reporting service failures or any developing service delivery problems.
 - (c) statements on actions to be taken by the Royal Borough upon matters being reported to it under any agreed arrangements.
 - (d) escalation procedures which can be activated by the Parish should expectations not be met.
- (iii) The Royal Borough will agree service monitoring arrangements as appropriate with the Parish, as and when service specifications and standards are approved and implemented. These will be added to the attached Schedule as and when agreed.
- (iv) The operation and effectiveness of this Charter will be monitored by both parties and reviewed on an annual basis.
- (v) The Royal Borough nominates the Interim Head of Democratic Services as the senior manager with responsibility for resolving issues arising from any difficulties on consultation and liaison arrangements set out in the Charter. The Parish will notify him promptly any matters arising from the monitoring of the operation of the Charter.

This good practice guide is signed by the Leader of the Council of the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and by the Chairman of _____ Parish Council.

Leader of the Council _____ Date _____

Chairman of the Parish Council _____ Date _____