



Charter for Better Working Between
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
and Parish and Town Councils

October 2013

There are two levels of local government in the area covered by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council:

- One Borough Council;
- 15 Parish and Town Councils.

All provide important and often vital services to people. Here the focus is on how Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and Parish and Town Councils can better work together where there is shared interest and better working through partnerships will benefit local people.

Both Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and Parish and Town Councils values and behaviour will adhere to the Nolan Principles in public life.

Parish and Town Councils are the level of government where decisions are made or influenced at the most local level.

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council delivers a huge range of services across the borough. Services are either for everyone (universal), targeted or specialist but all are there to meet people's needs.

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and Parish and Town Councils can work together to provide better services. This can be done by:

1. Improving communication
2. Consulting each other
3. Giving support and help
4. Measuring how well we are doing

1. Improving Communication

This is what we will do.

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

- Encourage and support Borough Councillors and Officers to work with Parish and Town Councils in the area they are elected to serve.
- Build further on the successes of the Neighbourhood Co-ordinators.
- Provide a Customer Service Centre (Connect).
- Respond to letters, emails and phone calls.
- Provide appropriate links on our website to let councils know important information.
- Continue to develop additional information via our website that is useful to Parish and Town Councils where practicable. Respond to invitations from Parish and Town Councils to attend meetings of mutual interest.
- Attend Solihull Area Committee and other borough-based liaison meetings as appropriate.
- Host an annual Parish and Town Council meeting.
- Invite all Parish and Town Councils to send representatives to the Strategic Partnership Forum covering their area and to other relevant Partnership events.
- Include awareness of the Charter in councillor and staff induction programmes.

Parish and Town Councils

- Use email and the internet, where possible, to contact the Borough Council.
- Use and locally promote the Borough Council's Customer Service Centre (Connect) to resolve 'day-to-day' issues.

- Let local Borough Councillors know about the decisions and changes they make.
- Provide local Borough Councillors with agendas and minutes of meetings, and allow Borough Councillors to attend meetings and speak on matters of mutual interest.
- Give Borough Councillors and officers as much notice as possible if they would like them to come to a meeting.
- Let the Borough Council know about any issues they would like to discuss at the annual Parish and Town Council meeting.
- Help share information from the Borough Council with local residents.
- Ensure that Parish and Town Council representatives on the Solihull Area Committee disseminate information to their respective councils and other interested groups in the community.
- Encourage participation in the Solihull Partnership Forum meetings, including attending the Annual Forum
- Include awareness of the Charter in councillor and staff induction programmes.

2. Consulting Each Other

This is what we will do.

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

- Ask Parish and Town Councils to comment on issues affecting their community.
- Ask the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils, Solihull Area Committee and the Society of Local Council Clerks to comment on issues of collective interest to Parish and Town Councils.
- Whenever we can, or are allowed to, give at least six weeks to respond to consultations.
- Whenever we can, or are allowed to, set deadlines that consider Parish and Town Council meeting cycles.
- Where possible, inform Parish and Town Councils in advance when a consultation is going to be issued.
- Give feedback on responses to consultations.
- Carry out joint consultations with partners when appropriate.
- Ensure consultation documents for Parish and Town Councils include an executive summary and details of someone to contact.
- Make sure our service managers know of the need to consult Parish and Town Councils and have awareness of the Charter.

Parish and Town Councils

- Give views to the Borough Council that represents as many local people as possible.
- Acknowledge that Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council decisions are made democratically and respect decisions.
- Consult the Borough Council and other Parish and Town Councils about decisions which affect those councils.
- Recognise that the Borough Council frequently has limitations and constraints when working on consultations, most notably timescales that cannot be influenced.
- Look for flexible ways to help progress developing consultation responses, eg a special meeting or task and finish group.
- Solihull Area Committee will provide a summary of Parish and Town Council cycle of meetings and contact list of SAC members and their Clerks.

3. Giving Support and Help

This is what we will do.

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

- Work with Parish and Town Councils to include parish priorities through Neighbourhood Plans, Parish and Town Plans and Community Appraisals in Borough strategies and areas of joint or shared working.
- Through the Localism Act, provide a 'delegated services protocol' which provides the parameters for Parish or Town Councils to deliver some services on our behalf.
- Designate the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer as 'Parish Champions' to provide a link with Parish and Town Councils.
- Ensure Parish and Town Councils' views are taken into account as part of the Council's decision-making process through successful consultation and communication.
- Let Parish and Town Councils have access to the Borough Council's purchasing process where this is appropriate and lawful to help keep costs down.
- Resolve complaints informally whenever possible and if need be, formally through the Borough Council's complaints process.
- Borough Council will designate an officer to liaise with Solihull Area Committee on matters connected to the Charter.

Parish and Town Councils

- Encourage the involvement of residents in local government.
- Help residents influence decisions and services, particularly those who have difficulty getting involved.
- Identify training or awareness raising needs to do with Borough Council services.
- Try to take up any training opportunities offered by the Borough Council to Parish and Town Councils.
- Make sure capacity and resources are secured before delivering services on behalf of the Borough Council.
- Solihull Area Committee will designate a parish councillor to liaise with the Borough Council on matters connected to the Charter.

4. Measuring How Well We Are Doing

To deliver these commitments will need openness, transparency, honesty and willingness by all parties to self appraisal so we can see what is working well and what needs to be improved. Each commitment can, by itself or with supporting indicators, be measured to show both the level and quality of activity. Progress will be reviewed every six months by named Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council Officers and by Solihull Area Committee meetings for general and specific matters and by individual Parish and Town Councils when appropriate.

Local government, at all levels, is faced with unprecedented change, whether this is from the challenges posed by reduced financial resources or the opportunities provided by the devolution and delegation of decision making to the most local level practicable. It is now often the case that changes happen quickly, which soon leads to the dating of hard copy documents. When updates are made, these will be posted on the Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council website and individual Parish and Town Council websites, as will information on achieving commitments. Each year an Action Plan will be jointly agreed.