

A Charter for Herefordshire's Councils

Introduction

This charter is an agreement between Herefordshire Council, Herefordshire City Council and Town and Parish Councils to strengthen partnership working. It builds on existing frameworks and responsibilities, aiming to enhance collaboration for the benefit of Herefordshire.

Strategic Aims of the Charter

The strategic aims of this charter are to develop stronger partnership working between councils and enabling community action.

Principles of Partnership Working

Our shared principles for partnership working set the foundation for achieving this charter's strategic aims. These principles guide how we work together and treat each other as partners.

Mutual respect

- We recognise our shared goals and respect each other's roles.
- We follow codes of conduct and democratic processes.
- We acknowledge different councils may operate differently but act in good faith.

Communication

- We respond to information requests promptly.
- Communication is clear, jargon-free, and accessible.
- We use multiple channels to ensure effective two-way dialogue.
- We address communication issues early and engage proactively.
- Consultations are open, accessible, and followed up appropriately.
- Parish Summits serve as forums for collaboration and feedback.

Transparency

- We openly share information and decision-making processes.
- We signpost services and resources efficiently.

Strengths-based

- We foster constructive relationships between councils, officials, and communities.
- We leverage our collective strengths to benefit residents.
- We support and empower communities to engage in local democracy.

Measuring Success

Success will be measured by how well we:

- Share best practices and challenges to improve services.
- Identify and take advantage of opportunities to work together.
- Remove barriers to effective partnership working.
- Use our resources to support residents and communities.
- Encourage participation and ensure all voices are heard.

Performance and Resolution

If there are any issues with meeting the expectations in this charter, we will address them as follows:

- Initially, the concerned parties will discuss the issue directly to try and resolve it amicably.
- If the issue remains unresolved, the relevant Herefordshire Council Service Director and Parish or Town Clerk will work together to propose a suitable resolution within five working

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days, or within five working days after the next Parish or Town Council meeting if a Council resolution is required.

- If the issue remains unresolved, the relevant Herefordshire Council Corporate Director and Parish or Town Clerk will work together to propose a suitable resolution within five working days, or within five working days after the next Parish or Town Council meeting if a Council resolution is required.
- Should the issue still not be resolved, the Herefordshire Council Leader and Parish or Town Chair will collaborate to find an appropriate resolution within five working days, or within five working days after the next Parish or Town Council meeting if a Council resolution is required.
- If issues cannot be resolved through these steps, a formal complaint should be raised in accordance with the relevant body's complaints procedure.
- The successes and challenges of implementing this charter will be thematically reported by relevant Herefordshire Council Service Directors at Parish Summits to facilitate learning and improvement in partnership working.

Specific Responsibilities

If a Town or Parish Council leads a service or project for Herefordshire Council, there will be a clear plan, regular progress reviews, and risk management strategies in place.

In the context of Local Government reform, any extension of service provision directed to or through Town and Parish Councils will be openly discussed before any consideration or implementation.

Implementation

This charter will evolve over time. Once agreed upon, all councils share responsibility for upholding its principles. No changes will be made without majority consent.

The charter will be supported through:

- **Quarterly** Parish Summits,
- **Quarterly** meetings between the Chief Executive, Council Leader, and the Charter Reference Group,
- **Biannual** meetings between the Chief Executive, Council Leader, and City/Town Councils.

The **Charter Reference Group (CRG)** will act as developers and guardians of the charter and will help to develop and manage the Parish Summit agendas. The mechanism of determining the Group's membership will be shaped by feedback from the Towns and Parishes during the consultation process and the Parish Summit so that the Group can act on their behalf. The CRG will ideally include representation from HALC.

Review

The charter will be reviewed following the end of its first year of operation and an updated version produced for approval if necessary. Thereafter it will be formally reviewed every four years.

Approval

Herefordshire Councils will take this Charter through their own approvals process with a formal record of approval made publicly available.

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Appendix 1: Service Standards and Communication Timescales

- All correspondence to Herefordshire Council Staff or Councillors and to Parish and Town Clerks will be responded to within 10 working days.
- Herefordshire Council will give 21 working days for Parishes to respond to consultation of Traffic Regulation Orders.
- Herefordshire Council will give 21 day working days for Parishes to respond to non-statutory consultations,
- Herefordshire Council will give 21 working days for Parishes to respond to consultation of Traffic Regulation Orders.
- Herefordshire Council will make payments for invoices from Parishes for devolved services or grants within 21 days of submission.
- Herefordshire Council will confirm amounts for grants or budget for devolved services to Parishes by 31 March for the following financial year.
- Wide-ranging copy (cc) lists by Herefordshire Council or their agents will be avoided, so that it is clear to whom information is being communicated and from whom any response or acknowledgement is required.
- Respect for personal data protection will always be maintained, and long email lists of visible non-public email addresses by Herefordshire Council or their agents should never occur without prior consent from recipients.

Appendix 2: Framework for Key Services

The following sections set out how can work together in specific areas. Not all areas will be applicable to all councils.

Planning Service

Herefordshire Council will:

- Notify Parish and Town and City Clerks of new applications (where consultations are required) as soon as possible when they have been validated.
- Identify the contact details for the relevant Planning Officer with applications or as soon as possible thereafter.
- Respond to queries from Clerks concerning planning applications in time for Parish and Town Councils to consider their response before having to submit formal comments on an application.
- Consider all planning applications against a made NDP.
- Give serious and early consideration to items on Parish and Town Council wish list proposals for Section 106 monies.

Parish and Town Councils can:

- Sign up to the notification portal run by Herefordshire Council and receive direct notifications of planning applications.
- Submit comments that are 'Material Considerations' and include references to national, county and parish (NDP) planning policies (21 days) or otherwise agreed period.
- Appoint a named representative to attend planning committee meetings of Herefordshire Council, as necessary.
- Prepare and keep up to date a Section 106 wish list proposals and share this with the team at Herefordshire Council and copy the Ward Councillor.

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Neighbourhood Development Planning (NDP)

Herefordshire Council will:

- Provide officer support for Parish and Town Councils creating or reviewing an NDP to ensure that lawful processes are undertaken in a timely manner.

Parish and Town Councils can:

- Set up an NDP Working Group and ensure that all meetings are open to residents.
- Provide all relevant information to Herefordshire Council to enable them to prepare required documents.

Highways

Herefordshire Council will:

- Give good notice to Parish and Town Councils of proposed works within a locality, particularly when road closures are required.
- Consult Parish and Town Councils on adoption of new highways, traffic measures and street lighting during the development process.

Parish and Town Councils:

- Are encouraged to report works required on verges and ditches, so that Herefordshire Council can maintain up-to-date records.

Public Rights of Way

Herefordshire Council:

- Recognises that Footpaths Officers are volunteers appointed by Parish and Town Councils and are directly responsible to and insured by them. They will liaise with Herefordshire Council Officers to support them in fulfilling their legal obligations for Rights of Way.

Parish and Town Councils can:

- Apply for grants or funding to undertake works to improve Public Rights of way in their area for which Herefordshire has earmarked funding.
- Chose to appoint a Footpaths Officer in their area, and Herefordshire Council will provide training and support to enable them to perform their duties.
- Bring matters to the attention of Herefordshire Council in a timely way where necessary if they cannot be addressed locally.

Local Drainage

Herefordshire Council:

- Will provide a timescale to address issues reported by Parish and Town Councils or confirm that the issue reported will not be addressed, giving a reason.
- May provide grant funding for Parish and Town Councils to carry out local drainage schemes.
- May support a Parish or Town Council minded to fund minor drainage works themselves, using a suitably qualified contractor.

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Parish and Town Councils may:

- Apply for grants or funding from Herefordshire Council to carry out local drainage schemes.
- Use a suitably qualified contractor to undertake minor drainage works, using their own funds, and supported by Herefordshire Council.

Lengthsman Scheme

Herefordshire Council may

- Operate a Lengthsman scheme to devolve funding for minor highway works to Parish and Town Councils using a suitably qualified Lengthsman.
- Support Parish and Town Councils to use their own funding to undertake minor highway works using a suitably qualified contractor.

Parish and Town Councils may

- Join the Herefordshire Council Lengthsman scheme to access devolved funding for their Lengthsman to undertake minor highway works.
- Undertake minor highway works using their own funding and a suitably qualified contractor.