

# PARISH AND TOWN COUNCIL CHARTER



**Between Stroud District Council and the Parish and Town Councils of the Stroud district.**

## 1 Introduction

There are three tiers of local government in the Stroud district: Gloucestershire County Council, Stroud District Council, 51 parish councils and two parish meetings. Local councils are at the heart of the Stroud district community, and all tiers of local government share the same ambitions to serve our residents.

Local government is responsible for many vital services and in the Stroud district each tier has its own responsibilities. Some of the services Gloucestershire County Council is responsible for include social care, schools, and highways, and some of the services Stroud District Council is responsible for include housing, planning, waste collection, and licensing. Parish councils are responsible for an array of services to meet local needs ranging from litter bins to community safety schemes. It is recognised that it can be difficult to differentiate between the functions of each tier of government.

Parish councils have a depth of insight into the needs of their local communities that may not be achievable for the County or District Council, whilst the County and District Councils can provide the scale and resources to bring local goals to fruition. It is recognised that greater partnership working between all tiers of local government can add significant value to the services we provide to the community. Parish councillors, their clerks and other officers have unparalleled knowledge of their communities, and by working together effectively we can strengthen local decision making and improve engagement with residents.

This Charter has the support of the Gloucestershire Association of Town and Parish Councils.

This Charter has been prepared by a working group of Stroud District Council officers and representatives from parish councils. Feedback and input from the following parish councils has contributed to the development of this Charter:

- Berkeley Town Council
- Bisley-with-Lypiatt Parish Council
- Brimscombe and Thrupp Parish Council
- Cainscross Town Council
- Cam Parish Council
- Chalford Parish Council
- Dursley Town Council
- Eastington Parish Council
- Fretherne-with-Saul Parish Council
- Frocester Parish Council
- Hardwicke Parish Council
- Haresfield Parish Council
- Hillesley and Tresham Parish Council
- Hinton Parish Council
- Horsley Parish Council
- Kingswood Parish Council
- Leonard Stanley Parish Council
- Nailsworth Town Council
- Painswick Parish Council
- Rodborough Parish Council
- Slimbridge Parish Council
- Stonehouse Town Council
- Stroud Town Council
- Upton St Leonards Parish Council
- Whiteshill and Ruscombe Parish Council
- Woodchester Parish Council
- Wotton-under-Edge Town Council

## 1.1 Terms and definitions

In this Charter:

**Consultation** refers to seeking feedback and input on documents and/or policy, funding bids and/or services. It should have a clear beginning, middle and end. It is one form of engagement.

**Engagement** refers to a broader and ongoing process of working with communities and encouraging productive relationships.

**Parish Council** refers to all Parish Councils, Town Councils and Parish Meetings.

## 2 Aim

This Charter has been developed to provide a clear and mutual understanding of roles and expectations, develop good working relationships between councils, and promote partnership working within and beyond statutory frameworks.

By creating a framework for parish councils and Stroud District Council to work effectively in partnership, we can better address the challenges faced by our local communities and make the whole of the district a better place to live, work and visit for everyone.

## 3 Principles

Stroud District Council and parish councils in the Stroud district will:

- Work together to make the district a better place to live, work and visit for everyone.
- Value and respect the roles and responsibilities of our respective councils and understand that we have a common purpose to serve the residents of the district.
- Work in partnership to bring together the strengths that each council has for the good of local communities, as well as to address the challenges faced in the wider district.
- Recognise that Stroud District Council and parish councils within the district exist as separate bodies and have separate tax raising powers.
- Achieve the commitments in this Charter by:
  - Valuing the people and businesses that make up our communities;
  - Putting the people in our communities at the heart of everything we do;
  - Maintaining high ethical standards, respecting and valuing each other; and
  - Providing practical support to help each other wherever possible.



## 4 Commitments

The table below sets out the two-way commitments between Stroud District Council (SDC) and parish councils in the district:

	Stroud District Council will:	Parish Councils will:
<b>Consultation</b>	Coordinate consultation across the council to avoid duplication.	
	Adhere to statutory requirements for consultation and allow as much time as possible for parish councils to respond. The cycle of parish council meetings will be taken into account whenever possible and SDC will endeavour to involve parish councils at the earliest opportunity.	Respond to consultations within the timeframe (if a response is to be made) or request an extension in good time before the deadline. If required and where possible, additional council meetings will be convened or other mechanisms such as delegation to a committee will be considered to meet the consultation deadline.
	Provide a clear timeframe at the outset of any consultation, including a deadline for responses.	Provide a clear timeframe at the outset of any consultation, including a deadline for responses.
	Respond to consultations within the timeframe (if a response is to be made). Mechanisms such as delegation to a Strategic Director or Head of Service will be put in place to meet the consultation deadline.	Provide an appropriate period for consultation but always aim to provide a minimum of 6 weeks.
	Provide consultation documentation in an accessible format that can be easily shared at parish council meetings.	Share consultation documentation at parish council meetings where relevant.
	Consult parish councils on all planning applications in their town or parish and give appropriate weight to the local opinions they express when determining them.	Where appropriate, seek local opinion on planning applications in their town or parish and feed them back to SDC.
	Where appropriate, consult parish councils on all applications in their town or parish made under Tree Preservation Order regulations.	Where appropriate, provide comment on applications made under Tree Preservation Order regulations.

## Communications

Notify parish councils of licensing applications in their parish.

Refer to the SDC website or contact the Licensing team if more information on specific licensing applications is required.

Be willing to seek a mutually satisfactory solution in areas of difficulty/disagreement.

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Adhere to the customer care principles set out in the [Our Service Standards](#), including minimum expectations for response times.

Treat everyone using or providing council services politely and with respect.

Respond to emails received to shared service area email addresses in the timeframes outlined in [Our Service Standards](#).

Utilise the shared service area email addresses as far as possible to streamline communications and ensure queries can be responded to by the most appropriate officer.

Answer and respond to phone calls in the timeframes outlined in [Our Service Standards](#).

Direct phone calls to SDC Customer Services in the first instance, so the query can be passed onto the most appropriate team/officer.

Share organograms with shared service area email addresses.

Inform SDC's Democratic Services team of changes to councillors and clerks, including notifying them of vacancies and providing them with a copy of the Casual Vacancy Notice. Provide Democratic Services with up-to-date contact details, and if the Clerk is part-time, inform SDC of the most appropriate days/times to make contact.

Keep parish councils informed through the eNews, press releases and the Hub.

Use local newsletters and websites to disseminate information and consultations to local communities.

Ensure that service delivery changes are communicated.

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## Working in Partnership

Acknowledge results of surveys conducted by parish councils and use data shared with SDC to inform service delivery where appropriate.

Seek to keep the residents in the town or parish informed of local government matters and seek to assess public opinion through meetings, newsletters and surveys that follow good practice where relevant. Where appropriate, make the results of surveys available to SDC.

Inform all staff and councillors of this Charter's commitments and ensure they uphold them.

Inform councillors, Clerks and any town or parish council staff of this Charter's commitments and request they uphold them.

Hold working groups or consultation events for the development of significant strategies and funding bids.

Aim to attend working groups or consultation events that are relevant to the town or parish and actively participate.

District/ward councillors will aim to attend parish council meetings in their ward.

Inform the district/ward councillor of town or parish meetings, particularly where topics to be discussed have relevance to the district council.

Copy the relevant Stroud District Councillor into communications of importance to parish councils.

Copy the relevant Stroud District Councillor into communications of importance to SDC.

Recognise the contribution of parish councils when working together and acknowledge partnership working in all publicity where practical.

Recognise the contribution of SDC when working together and acknowledge partnership working in all publicity where practical.

Support, provide information and work with parish councils wishing to undertake a neighbourhood plan under the Localism Act 2011.

Approach SDC's Planning Strategy team if their town or parish wishes to undertake a neighbourhood plan.

Communicate emergency plans with parish councils in a timely manner and work with parishes in response to emergencies.

Work with SDC in response to emergencies that affect their town or parish.

	Where appropriate, endeavour to involve parish councils at the beginning of discussions on Government initiatives, community planning, and funding opportunities.	Engage in discussions on Government initiatives, community planning and funding opportunities, where relevant.
	Explore the development of joint framework agreements between SDC and parish councils, where relevant and appropriate.	Propose joint framework agreements where an opportunity for one is identified.
	The Monitoring Officer will promote the <a href="#">Civility and Respect Pledge</a> to maintain high standards of conduct and provide Code of Conduct training for councillors.	Councillors will attend Code of Conduct training and engage with the Monitoring Officer to promote and maintain high standards of conduct.
Engagement	Invite all parish councils to meetings and other events arranged for their benefit.	Aim to be represented at these meetings and events and actively engage in them.
	Where possible, record meetings so the recording can be shared with parish councils unable to attend.	Share recordings and disseminate content where relevant.
	When requested, senior officers will attend ward walks when there are specific major issues in a town or parish. Ward councillors will be invited to attend.	Invite officers and/or councillors to attend ward walks when there are specific major issues in a town or parish.
	Invite all Parish councillors and clerks to a biannual Strategic Forum to receive briefings and presentations from SDC on key issues and developments and consider other issues of common interest to parish councils.	Aim to be represented at these meetings and events and actively engage in them.
	Bring together representatives from all parish councils at an annual Town and Parish Council Working Group for the purposes of conducting an annual review of this Charter, formulating proposals for the Strategic	Aim to be represented at these meetings and events and actively engage in them.

	Forums, encouraging networking and sharing of best practice amongst local councils.	
<b>Resources</b>	Provide resources and relevant information, events, and opportunities on the Town and Parish Council Hub.	Use the Town and Parish Council Hub as the first port of call for any information, support, or queries.
	Produce a schedule of training opportunities open to parish councils, working with GAPTC and training partners to avoid duplication of topics.	Aim to attend training events where relevant and make councillors and staff aware of training opportunities that may be beneficial.
	Make procurement templates and guidance available on the Town and Parish Council Hub and provide basic procurement training that gives an overview of procurement and public contract regulations, as part of the annual training programme. (Please note this is in addition to training provided by GAPTC and aims not to duplicate content). SDC cannot provide further advice on procurement.	<p>Access the procurement resources available on the Town and Parish Council Hub if seeking procurement guidance from SDC.</p> <p>Seek independent legal advice for any guidance beyond what has been provided on the Hub.</p>



## 5 2030 Strategy



The district council and parish councils will always act as an example in the community and be an enabler and encourager of positive action to become carbon neutral by 2030. Through our services, policies and projects we will demonstrate leadership, doing everything in our power to collaboratively achieve ecosystem restoration and a just transition to a carbon neutral and resilient district.

## 6 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The district council and parish councils are committed to promoting equality and tackling discrimination. This means treating people fairly, valuing differences and removing the barriers that prevent people from fully participating in public life and realising their full potential.



## 7 Information Governance

The district council and parish councils understand that sharing data responsibly is important to deliver our services and respect individuals' privacy. When sharing data, the councils agree to:

- Promote a more joined up approach to service delivery across the district by ensuring access to information is efficient, appropriate, and lawful.
- Be clear about the purpose of sharing information and share only the minimum and necessary information required to achieve the purpose.
- Provide information to individuals about why and how the councils process personal data.
- Ensure there are adequate technical and organisational measures in place to keep information secure and held only for as long as it is required.

More information on data sharing in local councils can be found on the [Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\) website](#).

## 8 Performance, Monitoring and Review

This Charter is intended to be flexible and adaptable to the changing circumstances and arrangements for local government. This will be achieved by an annual review of the Charter by a Town and Parish Council Working Group, to keep pace with developments.

The parish councils will monitor the effectiveness of the Charter. The parish councils will decide whether or not, on balance, the Charter has been upheld by SDC and will, as they consider appropriate, submit views for consideration by the Town and Parish Council Working Group as part of the annual review.

SDC will also conduct an annual monitoring exercise, reviewing from their perspective, their relationship with the parish councils and their commitments set out in the Charter.

## 9 Managing Relationships

All councils who have signed this charter will make every effort to resolve any disputes relating to this charter. The proposed method is as follows where the parties will focus on reaching a consensual resolution:

- If a parish council is dissatisfied with the actions of SDC then in the first instance, they should raise their concern with the relevant service area. If the parish council remains dissatisfied, they may submit a complaint to the service area in accordance with SDC's published procedure for dealing with complaints and compliments.
- If a parish council is dissatisfied with the actions of SDC arising from this Charter, but which are not specific to a service area, the parish council may submit a complaint to [policy@stroud.gov.uk](mailto:policy@stroud.gov.uk), where it will be investigated and arranged for an appropriate response to be submitted.

## 10 Related Documents

- [The Gloucestershire Charter \(2016\)](#) – A shared commitment between Gloucestershire County Council and the parish and town councils of Gloucestershire. If the Gloucestershire Charter is updated, the Stroud district Charter will be reviewed to ensure the two are aligned.
- [Statement of Community Involvement](#) – SDC's strategy for community involvement in the planning process.
- [Our Service Standards](#) – A document setting out SDC's customer service commitments to residents and communities.



<b>Document Responsibility</b>		
<b>Name</b>	<b>Document title</b>	<b>Service</b>
Hannah Barton, Policy & Projects Officer	Parish and Town Council Charter	Corporate Policy & Governance

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23 May 2022	1.1	Policy & Projects Officer	Updated following feedback from Corporate Policy and Governance Manager and Senior Policy and Governance Officer
27 May 2022	1.2	Policy & Projects Officer	Updated following feedback from Town and Parish Council working group meeting, and to include suggested statements on the 2030 strategy and ED&I
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<b>Policy Review</b>			
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<b>Document Review and Approvals</b>		
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