

**Report for: Community Policy Development  
Group**

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Date of Meeting: 23 January 2024

Subject: Town and Parish Charter Review

Cabinet Member: Councillor David Wulff  
Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure

Responsible Officer: David Parker Democratic Services Officer and  
Town and Parish Liaison Officer

Exempt: None

which are Exempt from publication under paragraph 3, Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) as it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

Wards Affected: All

Enclosures: (i) Charter between Mid Devon District Council and the Town and Parish Councils  
(ii) Annexe 1 – Planning Charter

**Section 1 – Summary and Recommendation(s)**

To present to the Policy Development Group the proposals for a review into the Charter between Mid Devon District Council and the Town and Parish Councils in Mid Devon.

**Recommendation(s):**

**That the PDG considers and recommends to Cabinet that the proposed new Charter is sent to the Towns and Parishes for review between February and April 2024.**

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **2.0 Introduction**

- 2.1 The Town and Parish Charter was originally approved in December 2010, following this the Charter was circulated to Parishes for adoption at the Annual Meeting of the Town and Parish Council Clerks in March 2011. As of May 2012 of the 48 Town and Parish Councils in Mid Devon 37 had adopted the Charter.
- 2.2 As agreed at that time, the Charter was to be reviewed after 12 months and thereafter on a 3 yearly basis.
- 2.3 In May 2012, a review duly took place and amendments were made to the document providing clarity and in line with changes to legislation.
- 2.4 A further review took place in 2016/2017 meaning that a review was due during 2020. This review commenced but, with the ongoing effects of Covid-19 and changes within the organisation, the review was not completed.
- 2.5 This review is therefore proposed in order to reflect on the current effectiveness of the Charter and ensure it is fit for purpose in accommodating the needs and working practices of both the District Council and Parish and Town Councils.

### **3.0 Proposed 2024 Consultation and Review**

- 3.1 This review has been led by the Town and Parish Liaison Officer, but has also involved engagement with the Development Management (Planning) and Forward Planning (policy) teams in order to ensure that both the Charter and the Planning Charter reflect current legislation, best practice and working practices.
- 3.2 The draft Charter with the Towns and Parishes is attached for review and consideration. Proposed changes are shown through “tracked changes” so that the PDG can review the current and proposed wording side by side. It is also proposed that, if agreed, the document is circulated to Towns and Parishes with the same tracked changes so that they can easily reference the proposed changes.
- 3.3 In considering the proposed changes, it is considered important to make specific reference to the following points to allow full consideration of the proposed changes:
  - 3.3.1 The Town and Parish newsletter stopped being published during Covid. Now that the Communications Team send out regular press releases with any items of interest, it is considered to be unnecessary to recommence the Town and Parish Newsletter especially bearing in mind the historical difficulty of finding enough content to fill its pages.
  - 3.3.2 Since Covid, the District Council and many Town and Parish Councils have become much more technologically agile so that many meetings are now held virtually, facilitating and enabling increased public participation.

3.3.3 Resources: Council resources continue to be squeezed meaning that the District Council is, along with many other Council's, needing to find efficiencies and financial savings wherever practicable in order to ensure that it can continue to meet its statutory obligations. Although the changes proposed through the document are considered minor and are not considered to fundamentally affect the operation or intent of the Charter, it is necessary to understand that some of the proposed changes seek to reflect working practices which have been adopted in order to ensure the Council in achieving more efficient ways of working and operational cost savings.

#### **4.0 Next Steps**

4.1 If the draft Charter is approved by the Community Policy Development Group (PDG), the proposed revisions to the Charter between Mid Devon District Council and Town and Parish Councils in Mid Devon (and its annexe) will be sent to the Town and Parish Councils for them to consider and reply within three months. This time frame is considered necessary in order to give all Town and Parish Councils due opportunity to review and comment upon the proposed changes.

4.2 Once the responses have been received from the Towns and Parishes, the responses will be collated into a report for the Community PDG for recommendation to Cabinet to amend the charter and its annexe.

**Financial Implications:** As set out within the main body of the report; direct financial implications to the Council are minimal. However, it should be noted that some of the proposed changes do reflect current working practices which have been adopted in order to ensure the efficient use of financial resources. Should any of the proposed changes not be accepted, it is therefore possible that financial implications would accrue to the District which would place pressures on existing budgets.

**Legal Implications:** Community engagement and empowerment is one of the key implications of the Localism Act 2011. Good working relationships with the parish and town councils will build mutual trust and support, leading to more effective local government. By contrast, poor relationships may lead to a breakdown in trust, communication and ethical standards.

**Risk Assessment:** Failure to work effectively with Town and Parish Councils could lead to a breakdown in the relationship which could ultimately impact on our community.

**Impact on Climate Change:** No direct impact, although there is a link with ensuring effective communication with Town and Parish Councils in planning matters and ensuring that the Council (the LPA) fully discharges its obligations on planning consultation and in the achievement of climate/carbon/biodiversity objectives and requirements.

**Equalities Impact Assessment:** No equality issues have been identified.

**Relationship to Corporate Plan:** Strengthening the relationships with Town and Parish Councils assists in the delivery of the 'empowering our communities' policy.

### **Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks**

**Statutory Officer:** Andrew Jarrett  
Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151  
**Date:** 09 Jan 2024

**Statutory Officer:** Philip Langdon  
Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer  
**Date:** 09 Jan 2024

**Chief Officer:** Stephen Walford  
Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director  
**Date:** 09 Jan 2024

**Performance and risk:** Steve Carr  
Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager  
**Date:** 12 Jan 2024

**Cabinet member notified:** (yes/no)

### **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

**Contact:** David Parker, Democratic Services Officer and Parish Liaison Officer  
Email: [dparker@middevon.gov.uk](mailto:dparker@middevon.gov.uk)  
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**Background papers:** None