

# St Albans City & District parish charter

## Summary

**The aim of the Parish Charter is to improve joint working between the three government tiers: county; district and parish, so that services are more efficient and responsive to the needs of local communities by providing best value and quality.**

The key principles outlined below encapsulate the areas the Charter will affect. There are clear benefits for local communities and all tiers of local government.

1. **Trust and mutual respect** – to build relationships that work.
2. **Communication** – to foster good relationships.
3. **Consultation** – meaningful and timely consultation with the aim of delivering improved services.
4. **Advice and support** – sharing expertise, including support for those wishing to obtain Quality Status.
5. **Collaboration on service shaping and delivery** – to create continuously improving, customer centred services.
6. **Better value** – the development of a clear process and criteria to review whether services can be devolved and delivered within local communities, while retaining or improving their quality and cost effectiveness.

# introduction and objectives

Nine out of ten St Albans City and District residents rate the district as a good place to live\*. Evidence from surveys suggest that residents appreciate a number of key features which together makes the district a success.

Well preserved, traditional streets, cultural richness, great educational opportunities, beautiful green spaces and a high level of community safety have helped to create local communities that work.

The challenge for local government in the future is to continue to deliver quality services, shaped to the needs of local communities at an affordable cost. A strong, collaborative relationship between the three tiers will help to achieve these goals.

The District is home to around 133,500 people living in St Albans City, the town of Harpenden and many villages, all with their own traditional features and characteristics.

Outcomes from the **City and Rural Vision** projects are helping us to identify and understand the needs and future direction for the individual communities which make up the District.

Work has also been completed on a refreshed **Sustainable Community Strategy** which has identified an overall direction for the District and set out the vision for what we want for **St Albans District now and in the future**.

**Vision for St Albans and District:** a progressive, unique and vibrant District which values its environment, heritage and culture, and cares for the future: an outstanding place to live where everyone can flourish.

# about this charter

This Charter supports parishes in retaining their distinctiveness while providing a framework that ensures opportunities for all communities to work towards delivering their priorities.

The Charter recognises the power of close working between all tiers of local government. Close co-operation will utilise the benefits of strategic planning and service provision and the deep rooted knowledge and community links in parishes.

We see the Charter as the start of a process of closer working. Some of the issues in the Charter will need further discussion in the months ahead. At the end of the Charter we have included an action plan, which sets out the main areas where we will be doing further work.

**We are also committed to refreshing the Charter regularly in consultation with the St Albans District Association of Parish Councils.** Initially, we will refresh it in 18 months time, in Autumn 2011. From then on we would expect to review it every four years. In the meantime, the Parish Conference will have a prominent role in reviewing progress on the Charter.

For more information about this document please contact:

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## **1. Trust and mutual respect**

Residents, visitors and businesses expect all tiers of local government to work in harmony together for the benefit of the local good. Better knowledge and understanding of each others roles and responsibilities, together with a willingness to work together will help to build trust and mutual respect.

## **2. Communication**

Residents, visitors and businesses benefit from easily accessible and local information on services and local democracy issues. Effective communication is essential in fostering a good relationship between local government partners and other agencies so they can provide local information.

### **Role of District and County Councils**

- ✓ Produce information bulletin aimed at parishes.
- ✓ Share minutes, agendas and policy documents (electronically whenever possible).
- ✓ Support for development of parish websites when needed.
- ✓ Develop protocols regarding information provision and responses, setting timescales.
- ✓ Sharing information more effectively using digital channels.
- ✓ County Member newsletter for information on county initiatives.
- ✓ Herts Local available on computers in libraries and community hubs.

### **Role of Parish and Town Councils**

- ✓ Information provision – work with the District and County Councils to provide local community information with the help of notice boards and logging documents for public perusal.
- ✓ Represent local communities at district and county level.

### **3. Consultation**

Residents, visitors and businesses will benefit from co-ordinated, partner consultation so they are not overburdened. Effective and meaningful consultation is essential in empowering local communities and facilitating a good relationship between all local government partners.

#### **Role of District and County Councils**

- ✓ Engage parishes at an early stage so they can help shape strategic thinking (including in relevant scrutiny or other relevant committee discussions) and developing a consultation forward plan.
- ✓ Provide collaborative opportunities to discuss issues for information sharing and participation, such as Parish Newsletter or Community News.
- ✓ Provide timely feedback on issues consulted on.
- ✓ Ensure consultation, or notification, happens when required by law.
- ✓ Ensure adequate timescales are allowed, at least six weeks from date of receipt and outside of the school summer holidays wherever possible.
- ✓ Recognise the St Albans District Association of Parish Councils as the collective voice of the parishes (and continue engagement with individual parishes).
- ✓ Organise Parish Conference every six months.
- ✓ Explore possible parish/district/county liaison function, linked to broader community engagement.
- ✓ Engage with parishes early in the process of considering Section 106 funding.
- ✓ Facilitate inter council liaison including digital channels.

#### **Role of Parish and Town Councils**

- ✓ On going active engagement with a cross section of the local community (consider the use of The Community Panel\*).
- ✓ Ensure the St Albans District Association of Parish Council is representative of all Parish Councils.
- ✓ Where possible co-ordinate consultation activity.

#### **4. Advice and support**

Residents, visitors and businesses benefit from well trained and skilled local government members and officers. Building expertise in the parishes will help to make the most of local ambitions. Some parishes have achieved Quality Status while others are making progress towards achieving Quality Status. The Herts Association of Parish and Town Councils, the County and District Councils could assist through training, expertise and sharing good practice.

##### **Role of District and County Councils**

- ✓ Explore possible access to provision on central services such as IT; Legal advice; Human Resources; procurement frameworks.
- ✓ Head of Service mentoring.
- ✓ Assist in providing knowledge and training, including access to Council programmes (planning might be a priority).
- ✓ Support and advice on bids for external funding.
- ✓ Recognise the value of Quality Status.
- ✓ Planning advice.
- ✓ Consider benefit of partnering with parishes when bidding for external funds.

##### **Role of Parish and Town Councils**

- ✓ Promote Quality Status to peer Councils, to those who wish to obtain it.
- ✓ Advise and support District and County Councils on effective engagement with local views.

## 5. Service delivery

Residents, visitors and businesses benefit from the use of local knowledge. Parishes have a wealth of local knowledge and expertise which should be harnessed to create customer centred services. Parishes should play an active role in the creation, shaping and delivery of local services.

### Role of District and County Councils

- ✓ Consult with parishes at key milestones during the project planning stage, especially in relation to new contracts.
- ✓ Design in local variation into key contracts, where possible.
- ✓ Co-partner with the parishes in the monitoring of service and contract delivery and quality.
- ✓ Support Parish Councils to engage with their local communities.
- ✓ Connect existing customer access points to parish facilities where appropriate.
- ✓ Parish/ward dimension built into review of district new integrated enforcement service.

### Role of Parish and Town Councils

- ✓ Gaining the views of representative samples of local communities and prioritising aspirations.
- ✓ Development of local project delivery.
- ✓ Participate where appropriate in project team.

## 6. Better value (Devolved, Pooled and Shared Services)

For some services there may be benefits in delivery within local communities. For some, there may be benefits in looking to share services across parishes or with the district/county. And some parishes may have the capacity and desire to take on more direct management of services than others. Residents, visitors and businesses benefit from Parish Councils that can choose the level of service they offer in consultation with the local community.

### Role of District and County Councils

- ✓ Develop a set of criteria/benefits based on best value principles as an aid to progress a change in the delivery of some services – including: costs, benefits, capacity and resourcing.
- ✓ Develop a menu of options for services where these criteria can be applied.
- ✓ Develop a transparent process for considering requests for service devolution, linked to the criteria.
- ✓ Through the procurement process, offer framework contracts which the parishes can take advantage of if they so wish.
- ✓ Establish methodology for fair allocation of funding (including guards against the duplication of expenditure on services).
- ✓ Review role of parishes to examine and comment on planning applications.

### Role of Parish and Town Councils

- ✓ Effective engagement with local communities and stakeholders to identify the potential benefits of devolvement.
- ✓ Additional funding could be raised through the precept establishing a direct link with the locality.
- ✓ Work in collaborative groups with other parishes if this is expedient.