

# Charter

between

**Mid Devon District Council**

and

**Town and Parish Councils  
in Mid Devon**

June 2024 (V3)

# CHARTER BETWEEN MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL AND THE TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS IN MID DEVON

Partnership working between town and parish councils (local councils) and the district council will only be successfully achieved if both partners recognise, understand and respect the role that the other plays and work to promote those roles. This Charter was originally adopted in 2011 and has been consulted about various times since then. Version 3 has been agreed following consultation between Mid Devon District Council and the local councils and sets out a framework to enable this partnership working to happen. The Charter will be reviewed on a three yearly basis, consultation will take place with Town and Parish Councils prior to consideration by the Community Policy Development Group.

The District Council will work in partnership with local councils in its area to promote sustainable social, economic and environmental development for the benefit of local communities.

**Mid Devon District Council** recognises that local councils:

- 1 Are an important part of local government representing their communities at the most local level.
- 2 Are a primary source of information about the community's opinions and aspirations.
- 3 Provide an opportunity to develop greater engagement with the local community.
- 4 Are heavily reliant on volunteering and goodwill. The differences between smaller and larger local councils in terms of ability to handle information and resources will be respected.

**Local Councils** recognise that Mid Devon District Council:

- 1 Whilst conscientiously taking account of local views also has to take into account community interests across the Mid Devon District.
- 2 Has strategic roles and responsibilities and has to work within legislative, financial and policy constraints.
- 3 Is able to work most effectively with parishes that are well organised, pro-active, informed and willing to engage.

## Communications and Liaison

**Mid Devon District Council** will undertake to:

- 1 Arrange and host on at least an annual basis a district-wide meeting of clerks to discuss matters of mutual concern and also to periodically arrange training and meetings for Town and Parish Councillors.
- 2 Provide a liaison officer(s) who will act as the point of contact for local councils, providing support and information, directing enquiries, advising and ensuring that issues are followed up and dealt with in a timely manner.
- 3 Work with the Devon Association of Local Councils to provide more information to towns and parishes about obtaining 'Local Council Award Scheme' and the 'General Power of Competence'.
- 4 Assist Town and Parish Councils with the formulation of an Emergency Plan.
- 5 Encourage District Councillors to attend their local council meetings and ensure that issues raised by District Councillors acting in support of local councils will be responded to.
- 6 Formally add to the role of Chairman of the District Council that of being 'Local Council Lead Member' who with the Cabinet Member for Community and Parish Engagement will encourage better working across the district.

- 7 Encourage officers and Members to attend local council meetings and speak on issues of concern/interest and provide feedback.
- 8 Ensure District Council key documents, where appropriate, contain a short executive summary or an explanation of the document's relevance.
- 9 Use plain English in written communications and explain all acronyms used.
- 10 Encourage Local Councils to use in their e-mail addresses the trusted suffix .gov.uk in order to provide community assurance and improved engagement.

**Local Councils** will undertake to:

- 1 Be represented at the annual meeting of clerks.
- 2 Use the Council's Liaison Officer for contact with the District Council in the first instance where the name of the appropriate officer is not known, unless responding directly to consultations.
- 3 Welcome District Councillors to town and parish meetings and send them agendas and minutes and invite reports.
- 4 Utilise the services of Customer First where direct service contact details are unknown.
- 5 Invite relevant officers to meetings where there are issues of concern or interest to the local council.

## Consultation

### **Mid Devon District Council**

will undertake to:

- 1 Proactively engage with local councils on issues which are likely to affect their area.
- 2 Allow five weeks for local councils to respond to consultation. If this is not possible the local council will be given an explanation. (This does not apply to planning applications. These are covered in the attached annexe).
- 3 Provide briefing sessions/workshops to groups of local councils on complex consultation issues as requested/required.
- 4 Make specific arrangements for consultation on planning (see Annexe 1).
- 5 Have regard to the views of the local councils when making decisions.
- 6 Keep under review the level and quality of consultation.

### **Local Councils** will undertake to:

- 1 Take part in consultation exercises seeking to represent the views of the community and respond within the given period.
- 2 Notify Mid Devon District Council if they cannot respond to a consultation within the given period, but will be making a response.
- 3 Work with Mid Devon District Council to seek the views of residents on issues of common interest and achieve a wider response rate.

## Planning

**Mid Devon District Council** will undertake to:

- 1 Have due regard to the views of the local council in determining all planning applications and where relevant neighbouring parishes.
- 2 Ensure planning notices are prominent and A3 size notices are used for major applications.

- 3 Ensure where practicable, notices in connection with planning policy public consultation meetings are placed prominently and at least 14 days in advance of meeting dates.
- 4 Support and encourage the creation of Neighbourhood / Parish Plans.
- 5 Notify the relevant local council(s) of any public meetings and exhibitions organised by Mid Devon District Council about policies and plans affecting the parish.
- 6 Hold separate meetings in the three main towns where matters affecting the preparation of a local plan and specific sites only are being considered.
- 7 Consult with the local councils on planning applications within the Town or parish area in accordance with statutory procedures and on applications in neighbouring parishes where appropriate and inform the Local Council which Planning Officer is dealing with the application.

(NB. Plans with only minor changes are not subject to re-consultation)

- 8 Engage with local councils with regard to the use of discretionary S106 monies and request that schemes are put forward that would enhance the local area.
9. Allow a representative of local councils to attend and speak at meetings of Mid Devon District Council's Planning Working Group in respect of any planning application within that parish/town and to address the Planning Committee in accordance with the Council's scheme of public participation.
- 10 Explain the reasons and seek to make time available to discuss aspects of key planning decisions within the Officer report and decision notice.
- 11 If staff resources allow, endeavour to make officers available to attend meetings of local councils to clarify the details of significant or controversial applications.
- 12 Endeavour to ensure that the 'Public Access' facility on the website is available at all times.

**Local Councils** will undertake to:

- 1 Acknowledge that Mid Devon District Council will not always be able to accede to the views of parish/town councils.
- 2 Respond to all consultations on planning applications within the District Council's deadlines, even if it is a 'no comment' response.
- 3 Comment on planning applications on material planning grounds, and specify as fully as possible the reasons for an objection to, or support for, a particular application.
- 4 Ensure that all councillors are made aware of the contents of planning decision notices sent to the local council by reference to the reasons for approval / refusal.

- 5 Assist Mid Devon District Council by reporting perceived local breaches of Town and Country Planning Legislation, submitted via the online "alleged planning breach" form..
- 6 Attend relevant meetings, briefings and training to gain a better understanding of the planning process.
- 7 Consider preparing a Parish/Neighbourhood Plan. If they have made one, consider offering their assistance and experience to other councils that have not. Provide Mid Devon District Council with sufficient advance notice of requests to designate a neighbourhood area, draft neighbourhood plan consultation, or the submission of a neighbourhood plan, so that Mid Devon District Council is able to provide technical support and meet statutory time limits where it is responsible for these stages.

*Please note: A more detailed Planning Charter between MDDC and Town and Parish Councils is attached to this document (Annexe 1).*

## **Training and Support**

**Mid Devon District Council** will undertake to:

- 1 Continue to provide regular and ongoing planning and ethical standards training to local councils with particular emphasis on the guidance already provided.
- 2 Endeavour to provide website advice where requested.
- 3 Share training where appropriate.

**Local Councils** will undertake to:

- 1 Use the services of Customer First and the Parish Liaison Officer.
- 2 Examine the wide range of training and best practice sources available, particularly through the Devon Association of Local Councils.
- 3 Ensure, where possible, the training needs of their councillors, clerks and chairmen are met.
- 4 Consider training requirements when setting their precepts.

## Partnership and Financial Arrangements

**Mid Devon District Council** will undertake to:

- 1 Collect and pay in a timely manner any precept levy requested by the local councils.
- 2 Operate and keep under review the financial arrangements with local councils in respect of services such as public conveniences and street cleaning.

**Local Councils** will undertake to:

Make any precept requests within the timescale set by Mid Devon District Council.