

# **A SHARED COMMUNITY**

## **CHARTER AGREEMENT**

### **Introduction**

The Community and Town Councils of Neath Port Talbot and Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council have agreed to publish a charter which sets out how we aim to work together for the benefit of local communities whilst recognising our respective responsibilities as autonomous, democratically elected statutory bodies.

The charter is designed to build on existing good practice and embrace the shared principles of openness, respect for each other's opinions, honesty and our common priority of putting citizens at the centre. This charter is based on equality of partnership and is not a top-down arrangement.

### **Partners to the Charter**

[names to be listed individually here]

## Recognition

We accept the legitimacy and benefits of partnership working whilst at the same time recognising and respecting each other's roles. We aim to work together as a partnership of equals rather than tiers.

<b>Neath Port Talbot CBC</b>	<b>Community and Town Councils</b>
<p>Acknowledges and recognises that Community and Town Councils are the grass roots level of local government. In their role as democratically accountable bodies, Community and town Councils offer a means of engaging with local people, of decentralising the provision of certain services, and of revitalising local communities.</p>	<p>Recognise the strategic importance of the Principal Authority and economies of scale and equitable distribution of certain services they are able to achieve.</p>
<p>Recognise and respect the diversity of Community and Town Councils and that their needs vary according to size, and the extent to which they participate varies.</p>	<p>Recognise that Community and Town Councils come within the common umbrella of the Principal Authority.</p>

## Local Governance

We will be clear about the expectations that we have of each other in order to facilitate a smooth working relationship. In this regard, we will define the way in which we interact with each other. We will be clear about the role of Councillors at all levels in the relationship and in community leadership.

<b>Neath Port Talbot CBC</b>	<b>Community and Town Councils</b>
<p>Will hold liaison meetings with representatives of all Community and Town Councils that wish to take part.</p>	<p>Will contribute towards the agenda of liaison forum meetings and proactively encourage attendance and discussion. In addition, agenda items put forward by Town and Community Council's for liaison forum meetings must be non-location specific and notice of such items must be submitted in a timely and reasonable manner to the appropriate officer/clerk of meeting.</p> <p>Furthermore a standing agenda item must be maintained at the Liaison Forum meetings to ensure Members report back to the Community Council Liaison Forum in relation to their representations on other organisations or outside bodies.</p>
<p>Will appoint a nominated member of staff to be a liaison officer between the unitary authority and Community and Town Councils. This officer will act as a specific 'point of first contact' for Town and Community Councils providing advice and guidance as needed. However, it will not preclude Town and Community Councils from making direct contact with Officers or Members of the County Borough Council on specific issues if required. Deputy liaison officers will also be appointed as and when necessary.</p>	<p>Will contact the nominated officer on the agreed issues and make them aware of any difficulties being encountered.</p>

<p>Community and Town Councillors/Officers (as appropriate) may, where appropriate, be formally represented on key local partnerships and committee meetings. The unitary authority will seek to ensure that these arrangements are regarded as suitable and sufficient.</p>	<p>Will invite Councillors/Officers (as appropriate) of the unitary authority to meetings and will provide a space on its meeting agenda for presentations as and when appropriate.</p> <p>There will be a responsibility for representatives to formally report back to their individual councils in relation to liaison forum meetings.</p>
<p>Will administer the holding of Community and Town Council elections.</p>	<p>Will notify the need for elections in a timely manner.</p>

## Consultation

We appreciate the importance of meaningful consultation and set out a genuine commitment among all parties to consult on matters of mutual concern. We will agree clear, specific and time limited procedures and processes for consultation.

<b>Neath Port Talbot CBC</b>	<b>Community and Town Councils</b>
<p>Will, where appropriate and reasonable, give Community and Town Councils the opportunity to comment before making a decision that affects the local community. In support of this NPTCBC will make available a copy of its public reports to Cabinet, Panels, Committees, and copies of its agendas, on the Council's corporate website as soon as possible.</p>	<p>Community and Town Councils will respond to consultation opportunities in a timely manner, addressing the key issues in the consultation document. They will also make full use of the papers available to them to inform local decision-making.</p>
<p>NPTCBC Officers may, if appropriate and practicable, attend meetings with Community and Town Councils (or groups of Councils) at a mutually agreed time to discuss matters of common interest when requested to do so and given sufficient notice.</p>	<p>NPTCBC Councillors and Officers will, where appropriate and practicable, be given an opportunity to speak at Community and Town Council meetings on matters of mutual interest</p>
<p>Will encourage Scrutiny Committees to liaise with Community and Town Councils on relevant local issues and look at potential ways of incorporating views of Town and Community Councils into Scrutiny Forward Work Programmes following discussions with Scrutiny Committees Chairs where appropriate and practical.</p>	<p>Will respond to requests to input views to Scrutiny Committees.</p>

## Information and Communication

We appreciate the need for timely, clear and relevant information and communication in fostering good relationships and better joint working for the benefit of local people.

<b>Neath Port Talbot CBC</b>	<b>Community and Town Councils</b>
Will provide up-to-date named contacts, office telephone numbers and where possible e-mail addresses via the Council's corporate website.	Will utilise the agreed contact information and respond in the most appropriate and timely method.
Will communicate by providing, where appropriate, sufficient numbers of electronic versions of documents for members of Community and Town Councils.	Will ensure that all Town and Community Councillors have access to the appropriate documents.

## Joint Working and Engagement

The Charter defines 'Partnership' as working together towards a common set of goals, based on equality in terms of ownership, decision-making and recognition of each party's distinctive contribution. It is recognised that an equal and effective partnership brings benefits and responsibilities to all those involved. Local government at both tiers must work together to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of our area. If doing things differently achieves a better service, we will seriously examine these methods.

<b>Neath Port Talbot CBC</b>	<b>Community and Town Councils</b>
Will provide opportunities, when practicable and appropriate, for clerks of Town and Community Councils to meet relevant NPTCBC officers to discuss common concerns and resolve issues.	Will encourage participation by clerks in opportunities to network and share common concerns.
Will be clear about how devolved services can be discussed and agreement reached on whether to proceed or not to proceed with the consent of the relevant town or community council.	Will use the agreed procedures if there is a wish to progress devolved services.

Will give due consideration to devolving services that would provide better value for money and/or enhanced services.	Will be clear about how any devolvement of services will provide better value for money and/or enhanced services taking account of local and wider county borough considerations as necessary?
Will encourage accountability for all acquired activities.	Will take responsibility for aspects of joint working that are signed up to.

## Land Use Planning

Community and Town Councils know and understand their local area and must be able to comment effectively on planning matters. The unitary Council is able to take an overview of the needs of the whole local area and make decisions, taking local views into account.

<b>Neath Port Talbot CBC</b>	<b>Community and Town Councils</b>
Will uphold its statutory duty to consult Community and Town Councils on all planning applications in their communities.	Make appropriate responses to the unitary authority recognising the parameters imposed by planning law and agreed planning policy.
Ensure planning application decisions are available to view on the Council's website	Maintain an objective and professional approach to planning matters at all times.
Ensure information about relevant planning committee meetings (times, dates, venues) are available to view on the Council's website.	Councillors to take up the opportunity to attend planning committee meetings as spectators/observers.

## Practical Support

In order to be effective, elected members and officers must be well-trained and have the support they need to carry out their roles.

<b>Neath Port Talbot CBC</b>	<b>Community and Town Councils</b>
<p>NPTCBC will, where practical and taking account of any relevant capacity issues, offer Community and Town Councils access to support services, to enable them to take advantage of facilities at a mutually agreed price. Such agreements will be published and made available to all Town and Community Councils.</p>	<p>Will follow procedures set out to access unitary authority support services, but also have opportunity to make own arrangements.</p>



## Expertise

We will encourage continuous development of officers and members in both unitary authority and Community and Town Councils, either in their individual groupings or together. Improved expertise leads to professionalism and more effective joint working.

<b>Neath Port Talbot CBC</b>	<b>Community and Town Councils</b>
<p>Will offer member induction training to Town and Community Councillors to enable them to understand the role and function of the Principal Council as and when practicable and appropriate. In addition, all venues utilised for training should as far as possible be accessible by public transport.</p>	<p>Will provide an induction to elected Councillors to enable them to undertake their role effectively, as and when practicable and appropriate.</p>

## Ethics

We will provide an ethical service to local people, following the appropriate standards and Codes of Conduct. We will encourage links between Community and Town Council clerks and unitary authority Standards Committee.

<b>Neath Port Talbot CBC</b>	<b>Community and Town Councils</b>
<p>NPTCBC will, through the appointed Monitoring Officer, support Community and Town Councils in the timely consideration and provision of advice in relation to the application of the Members Code of Conduct.</p>	<p>Community and Town Councillors shall not make vexatious complaints under the Code and will provide all such information as required by the Monitoring Officer to enable him/her to carry out his/her function effectively.</p>

## Financial Arrangements

Both NPTCBC and Town and Community Councils recognise the need for clarity and transparency in financial arrangements. In development and implementing financial arrangements, relevant national and local priorities will be taken into account.

<b>Neath Port Talbot CBC</b>	<b>Community and Town Councils</b>
NPTCBC in setting the level of council tax for the area, will have regard to services being delivered by Community and Town Councils in its area, and the funding thereof.	Community and Town Councils, in setting the annual precept, shall have regard to the plans for service delivery of the unitary authority for the coming year.

## Delegating responsibility for service provision

Services should be delivered in the most appropriate manner, with regard to value for money and added value for local people.

<b>Neath Port Talbot CBC</b>	<b>Community and Town Councils</b>
NPTCBC will give due consideration to all reasonably argued cases for the delegation of service delivery to Community and Town Councils, basing its consideration primarily on the improvement of service delivery for citizens whilst ensuring value for money is retained or enhanced.	Community and Town Councils will recognise that there are certain instances where it is not appropriate or desirable for the unitary authority to delegate service delivery.
Where it is not appropriate or desirable to delegate service delivery, NPTCBC will seek ways in which local information from communities might be used to enhance service delivery to better meet citizen needs.	Community and Town Councils will engage with the citizens in the communities they serve to understand better their needs and convey these needs in a coherent and constructive manner to the unitary authority, such that they can be taken account of in service design and delivery.

## Sustainability

We will work in ways that are sustainable as far as possible taking account of environmental, economic, financial and social impacts, reconciling the long-term needs with those of the present; and protecting and improving the quality of life of current generations without compromising the quality of life of future generations.

<b>Neath Port Talbot CBC</b>	<b>Community and Town Councils</b>
Will assist Town and Community Councils with information on sustainable practices.	Will proactively assess the sustainability of current practices and processes.
NPTCBC will outline how it is actively pursuing sustainable development as part of its statutory reporting mechanisms and will assist in information sharing particularly in relation to the work it undertakes developing Sustainable Development Strategies and other similar planning documentation	Will investigate projects which contribute to sustainability where beneficial to the community.

## Community Strategy

We recognise the strategic importance of the Community Strategy as the overarching strategic vision and priorities for the local area. Furthermore, we recognise that the Community Strategy will only be fully effective if it is informed by the grass roots experiences from within our communities.

<b>Neath Port Talbot CBC</b>	<b>Community and Town Councils</b>
NPTCBC will invite a representative of Community and Town Councils to attend the Local Service Board (LSB) in recognition of the local knowledge and experience this will bring.	Community and Town Councils shall nominate a representative to attend the Local Service Board (LSB). This individual shall proactively represent the sector raising matters of general concern as appropriate.
NPTCBC will invite representatives of Community and Town Councils to attend the Local Service Board (LSB) Annual Seminar in recognition of the local knowledge and experience this will bring.	Community and Town Councils shall nominate representatives to attend the Local Service Board (LSB) Annual Seminar. These individuals shall proactively represent the sector raising matters of general concern as appropriate.

Will involve Town and Community Councils in the development of the Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP) and Single Integrated Plan (SIP) as and when practical and appropriate.	Will contribute to the development of the Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP) and Single Integrated Plan (SIP) at its development stage as and when practical and appropriate.
Will involve Town and Community Councils in the implementation of the Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP) and Single Integrated Plan (SIP) as and when practical and appropriate.	Will respond actively and fully to consultation of the draft Corporate improvement Plan (CIP) and Single Integrated Plan (SIP) and participate, as and when practical and appropriate, in the partnership monitoring and implementation of the CIP & SIP.

## Local Elections

Fair and open elections are the bedrock of local democracy. We will ensure that elections are freely and fairly contested, and encourage local people to become involved in local democracy.

<b>Neath Port Talbot CBC</b>	<b>Community and Town Councils</b>
Will involve Community and Town Councils in the local election planning process.	Will encourage participation in the local election process by members of the local community.
Will involve Community and Town Councils in any awareness raising/publicity to encourage nominations for candidacy at local elections.	Will ensure wide publicity of vacancies on Community and Town Councils to maximise community representation.
Will help to publicise forthcoming local elections on behalf of Community and Town Councils via the Council's website.	Will facilitate public participation at all relevant meetings of the council and its committees to encourage community involvement.

<p>Will brief Community and Town Council clerks on the nomination process so that they are equipped to assist any potential candidates who come forward for local elections.</p>	
<p>Will provide help and assistance with the local election legal and administrative processes and procedures as and when appropriate</p>	

## Action Plan

This Charter will be supported by the development of an annual Action Plan addressing each of the individual topics contained herein. The Action Plan will be developed on a joint basis and mutually agreed and shall attribute responsibilities to each partner. In addition, as previously mentioned, the plan will explicitly identify any financial implications associated with its implementation. Actions will be accompanied by a timescale and will be reported on at least quarterly during the year concerned.

Neath Port Talbot CBC	Community and Town Councils
NPTCBC will nominate a lead officer for the development and monitoring of the Action Plan.	Community and Town Councils will collectively agree priorities for inclusion in the Action Plan.
Responsible officers of NPTCBC will have due regard to the Action Plan and include relevant actions in their work plan for the year.	Community and Town Councils will have due regard to the Action Plan and include all actions relevant to them during the course of the year.

## Monitoring and Review

The Charter will be fully reviewed every five years or more often if there is a need to do so. The Community Liaison Committee will measure progress annually in achieving the measures set out in the Charter through the setting and reviewing of actions contained in an action plan.

Neath Port Talbot CBC	Community and Town Councils
Will arrange for the Charter to be reviewed every five years or as agreed.	Will actively contribute to the review of the Charter.
Will arrange for the development of an action plan linked to the Charter and will actively contribute to achieving the action plan.	Will actively contribute to the development and delivery of the Charter action plan.

## Conclusion

The undersigned Community and Town Councils and unitary authority are committed to the principles and statements with the charter, for the benefit of local people.