



**Northumberland
Town & Parish
Council Charter**

A joint Charter between
Northumberland County Council
and the
Town and Parish Councils of Northumberland

Foreword

Northumberland County Council acknowledges that local councils are an important part of local government . By working in close partnership with local councils, Northumberland County Council aims to connect with local communities, understand their needs and respond to their priorities. In turn, the local councils recognise the strategic role of Northumberland County Council and the equitable distribution of services that it has to achieve. Together, working in partnership, we will deliver services and activities for our residents, businesses and visitors that make Northumberland such a great place to live, work and visit.

This revised Charter has been developed in partnership with all Northumberland Town and Parish Councils and represents a mutual agreement between the two tiers of local government.

I very much welcome this revised Charter and look forward to continuing to work closely with our Local Councils over the coming period.

Peter Jackson
Leader, Northumberland County Council

NALC welcomes this updated Charter illustrating the continuing partnership developed by NCC and local Town and Parish Councils. Each are equally responsible for providing local services to the residents of Northumberland.

We suggest the increased closer working relationship between NCC, their senior officers and local councils recognises this can only lead to better delivery of local services to our residents. NALC will continue, as it has for generations with all administrations and stakeholders to play its part facilitating the relationship between all the parties.

NALC recognises that it remains the right of each town, parish or community council to determine whether or not it wishes to support the principles identified within the Charter, however the potential benefits to local communities should encourage all local councils and NCC to work collaboratively.

Cllr Alex Wallace
Chair, Northumberland Association of Local Councils

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1. Introduction

Within Northumberland, there are currently 148 Town and Parish Councils (T&PCs), comprising one or more civil parishes¹. T&PCs are the first tier of Local Government in England, with Members elected every four years. T&PCs have a range of powers, and are principally funded by an annual precept.

In 2009, following Local Government reorganisation in Northumberland, when the former County Council and the six District Councils were abolished and replaced by one unitary authority, the new unitary Northumberland County Council (NCC) adopted a Local Council Charter. The purpose of the Charter was to define the relationship between NCC and T&PCs. It was designed to enable effective partnership working between the two tiers of local government within Northumberland at a time of significant change. Reviews of the principles within the Charter were undertaken in 2011 and 2014.

This revised Charter includes only minor amendments to the 2014 edition and has been prepared following consultation with Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC); it defines joint principles to enable NCC and T&PCs to work effectively together to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of Northumberland.

The implementation of the Charter, and its effectiveness, will continue to be monitored by regular joint meetings of the Town and Parish Liaison Working Group and, as a minimum, the document will be updated after every County Council election. The annual T&PC Conference will also address issues relating to the implementation of the Charter.

¹ There are 165 Civil Parishes in total within the County – 129 un-warded “whole” civil parishes & 36 warded civil parishes (112 wards between them). 9 Civil Parishes (Snitter, Bewick, Roddam, Ilderton, Earle, Akeld, Kilham, Ewart, and Easington) are presently without a Parish Council.

2. Effective Joint Working

Successful partnership working between NCC and T&PCs can only be achieved if both partners understand and respect each other's roles and work cooperatively to serve the community. It is recognised that both NCC and T&PC Councillors volunteer their services for the benefit of their diverse communities, it is also acknowledged that many T&PCs have very limited resources. This Charter therefore sets out how NCC and T&PCs will work in partnership to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.

NCC recognises that T&PCs across Northumberland are:

- The community's hub, engaging with all parts of the community, a parliament which draws on its democratic legitimacy and expertise to reach conclusions and take decisions, generating new opportunities, resolving local differences, and helping the community to look-forward
- The community's voice, articulating local needs, aspirations and collaborating with the responsible bodies
- Key providers of local public services, as authorised by statute
- Facilitators and supporters of action by the wider community, providing resources, encouragement and a 'stamp of approval' to community initiatives

T&PCs recognise the strategic role of NCC.

3. Shared Principles

Northumberland County Council and Town and Parish Councils will work together in partnership to deliver their statutory roles and responsibilities to:

- Promote and protect social, economic and environmental well-being for the benefit of our local communities, to ensure vibrancy and future sustainability**
- Strive to eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote equality of opportunity**
- Promote an active democracy to ensure all members of every Northumberland community is able to have a say in our future and feel able to help to develop a shared vision, identity and sense of belonging**
- Welcome all feedback and aim to act quickly and efficiently to address issues within their power**
- Respect and promote the role of both elected and co-opted councillors as representatives of their communities through positive communication, leadership and engagement, all undertaken to high ethical standards**
- Give importance and recognition to issues and ideas raised at each level of local government**
- Ensure efficient, effective and value for money management, supported by adequate training**

4. Communication

Effective communication is the basis for any successful working relationship, it needs to be a two way process and utilise a variety of methods. The Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC) has an important role in facilitating communication and providing coordinated feedback.

Northumberland County Council will:

- Use a variety of methods to communicate with T&PCs - selecting the most effective method, dependent on the issue and which T&PC it impacts upon
- Identify a Community Regeneration Officer to act as a point of contact to provide help and information
- Make best use of the information technology available to promote quick and efficient communication
- Assist NALC with maintaining up-to-date NCC information relevant to T&PCs
- Respond to enquiries and reported issues from T&PCs in a timely manner
- Ensure working arrangements with T&PCs are reviewed regularly via the T&PC Liaison Working Group and information is published online

Town and Parish Councils will:

- Make every effort to attend and be represented at relevant NCC meetings and events
- Make best use of the available information technology to deliver communication with NCC
- Provide up to date contact details for both T&PC Clerks and Chairs
- Use a variety of appropriate methods to communicate and consult with their communities
- Ensure all Clerks have access to a computer and email account
- Assist and encourage their Councillors to have access to and use of electronic communication

5. Engagement

It is essential that NCC and T&PCs work together when making decisions to shape services and policies that affect Northumberland communities. In order for this to be effective, engagement needs to be a genuine two way listening process; positive and constructive and built upon a foundation of trust.

Northumberland County Council will:

- Engage with T&PCs on all issues that are likely to affect their area
- Engage regularly with T&PCs through the five Local Area Councils
- Support the engagement process through Ward Councillors
- Consult T&PCs in planning, licensing and highways matters
- Take account of the views of T&PCs during the NCC budget setting process, providing information in a timely manner
- Provide briefing or training sessions to groups of T&PCs on complex consultation issues and where capacity allows
- Provide feedback to T&PCs on the results of consultation
- Consult T&PCs for a minimum period of 6 weeks on all non-statutory consultations affecting them
- Provide T&PCs with an up-to-date “Who’s Who” of local services managers, including contact details
- Provide data, information and reasonable support to assist T&PCs undertake their statutory role

Town and Parish Councils will:

- Endeavour to attend NCC engagement meetings
- Recognise the strategic role of NCC in tackling issues that look beyond individual T&PC boundaries
- Take responsibility for engaging with their local community on matters of particular relevance to their area
- Respond within consultation deadlines set by NCC, unless otherwise agreed
- Work with NCC to seek mutually acceptable solutions to issues

6. Finance

Financial arrangements will be informed by the overarching principles of fairness, efficiency and transparency.

Northumberland County Council will:

- **Consult T&PCs on proposed changes to service provision and on budget implications in a timely manner**
- **Provide information to support T&PCs in determining their precepts**
- **Meet the administration and staff costs associated with ordinary elections and Neighbourhood Plan referenda**
- **Provide a detailed breakdown of election costs, to which T&PCs are expected to contribute**

Town and Parish Councils will:

- **Provide precept information by the mutually agreed deadline**
- **Contribute to the costs of any T&PC election that is held in conjunction with an ordinary election**
- **Be responsible for the full cost of any T&PC by-election within their parish**

7. Local Services & Assets

T&PCs are able to provide some local services and organise activities which take place within their area. Many T&PCs across Northumberland already provide and operate a range of services, including parks, playing fields, cemeteries, closed churchyards, and allotments. Most T&PC services formerly provided by NCC have already transferred to the relevant T&PC.

Northumberland County Council will:

- **Manage, maintain and resource the provision of universal services and facilities, including: cemeteries, closed churchyards, parks and playing fields in consultation with T&PCs**
- **Support T&PCs to maintain their own local services and assets if they wish to do so**

Town and Parish Councils will:

- **Manage, maintain and resource the provision of local services and facilities, such as: allotments, annual planting, play parks, bus shelters, public seating, Christmas lighting and war memorials in consultation with NCC**

It should be recognised that the above principles are general and there can be local variations.

For example:

- Where services are deemed to be purely local in nature but are currently provided by NCC, they should as a general rule (and following consultation) be transferred to the relevant local council
- Where services are deemed to be of greater than purely local relevance they would normally be operated by NCC however, in some cases, T&PCs may wish to continue to operate such services
- NCC will continue to provide a cemetery and crematorium service that is universal and available to all, while T&PCs in some cases also provide a local cemetery. Where a T&PC wishes to explore the possibility of transferring a local cemetery to NCC, NCC will consider such requests on a case-by-case basis
- Where a T&PC wishes to take over the management of a park or playing field that is currently managed by NCC, NCC will give positive consideration to such requests on a case-by-case basis

The results of such requests will be available to ensure transparency, equality and openness.

8. Implementation, Monitoring & Review

Implementation of the Charter will be monitored by the T&PC Liaison Working Group and any revisions will be highlighted at the Annual T&PC Conference.

The Charter will be reviewed following each County and Local Council election, as a minimum, to ensure that it remains relevant.

9. Key Contacts

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