

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member for Communities and Cohesion</b>
2.	<b>Date:</b>	<b>21<sup>st</sup> July, 2014</b>
3.	<b>Title:</b>	<b>Joint Working Charter between Parish and Town Councils and RMBC.</b>
4.	<b>Directorate:</b>	<b>Neighbourhoods and Adult Services</b>

### 5. Summary

The Joint Working Charter between Parish and Town Councils and RMBC was signed in 2006 and provides the established framework within which the two tiers of local government work together. The Charter was amended to an extent in 2010, although not significantly.

Due to the changing environment within local government and also legislative changes, such as the introduction of the Localism Act 2011, it is appropriate that the Charter is reviewed and refreshed, to reflect these changes.

This report proposes that the Parish and Town Councils and RMBC Joint Working Group be requested to undertake a review of the Charter and produce recommendations for consideration and approval.

### 6. Recommendations

**THAT THE CABINET MEMBER,**

**SUPPORTS A REVIEW OF THE CHARTER AND REQUESTS THE JOINT WORKING GROUP TO UNDERTAKE THE REVIEW AND REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS TO A FUTURE MEETING.**

## 7. Proposals and Details

Rotherham currently has 30 Parish and Town Councils of which three are classed as Parish Meetings.

The Joint Working Charter between Parish and Town Councils and RMBC was signed in 2006. There have been several positive developments as a result of the Charter and many of its original aims have been met, such as;

- The establishment of an elected Joint Working Group, chaired by the Cabinet Member, to act as the main focal point for discussion and resolution of issues relating to relationships between the two tiers of local government.
- The establishment of the borough wide Parish Network, which supports the sharing of good practice and consultation
- The development of joint training opportunities with Borough council members
- Key contacts established within each council directorate
- Standards established around communication and consultation.
- Support for parish councils to communicate through website provision and support.
- Planning liaison meetings held twice a year.

Although the Charter was lightly refreshed in 2010 it now requires a more comprehensive review. Much of the legislation referred to in the document has been superseded and the environment within which both tiers of local government are working has changed dramatically. Members of the RMBC/Parish Councils Joint Working Group have themselves identified the need to look again at the Charter and bring the document up to date.

During negotiations for the current Charter several key principles were identified by the Joint Working Group that would drive improvements and act as the basis both for the Charter and joint working going forward. In reviewing the Charter these key principles are still very relevant to maintaining a positive working relationship:-

**Recognition:** A clear statement of the contribution both tiers of local government make.

**Engagement:** A clear commitment from both tiers to engage on key local issues

**Consultation:** Clear, specific and timely processes for consultation from both tiers wherever possible.

**Communications:** Provisions to enhance and improve communications including Directorate based key contacts and information on parish councils for officers and members e.g contact details, frequency of meetings, website address etc

The Joint Working Group have been clear that the document should be simple, clear, straight forward, practical and meaningful.

Given the established nature of the RMBC/Parish and Town Councils elected Joint Working Group this is the natural initial place for discussion to begin around the format and content of a renewed charter and mapping out how discussions are to take place. This could include the following:-

- Establishment of a guiding timetable for negotiations.
- Review of existing charters currently being used in other local authorities and their strengths and weaknesses.
- Advice and independent guidance from the Yorkshire Local Councils Association.
- RMBC officers group with representation from each Directorate to be convened to comment/advise on development.

## **8. Finance**

There will be no costs associated with the review of the Charter other than administration and venue costs for the holding of meetings.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

Failure to have an up to date working document that can act as a base for an ongoing commitment to work together may result in disengagement and a lack of co-operation at a local level jeopardising both tiers ability to deliver improvements for local people. This is particularly relevant to deprived communities and the focusing of the council's resources in specific areas that require additional support and the role of parish councils in areas outside the deprived communities.

## **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

The key principle of joint working and co-operation between the two tiers of local government remains crucial.

## **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

1. Joint Working Charter: Cabinet 15<sup>TH</sup> March 2006
2. The Localism Act 2011
3. Discussion at the meeting of the RMBC/Parish and Town Councils Joint Working Group June 2013.
4. Charters for Parish and Town Councils and Principal Local Authorities: A Good Practice Guide LGIU

**Contact Names** : Paul Griffiths, Parish Council Liaison Officer, Neighbourhood Partnerships  
Tel: 01709 823159 paul.griffiths@rotherham.gov.uk