

PARISH AND TOWN COUNCIL CHARTER

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- 1.** The Councils and Exmoor National Park Authority in the area of West Somerset District have agreed to publish a Charter, which sets out how they aim to work together across the area. This Charter is the result of discussions locally and across the West Somerset District to establish a new way of working and to confirm existing good practice. There are many Parish and Town Councils in the West Somerset District, all playing a valuable role in local democracy and service provision.
- 2.** The Town and Parish Councils (together with the Somerset County Council, District Council and Exmoor National Park Authority) jointly represent all levels of democratic local government, to whose principles they are committed. They are keen to see continued efforts made to improve our system of local democracy and to see greater public participation in and appreciation of this system.
- 3.** The West Somerset District Council and Exmoor National Park Authority acknowledge and recognise that Parish and Town Councils are the grass-roots level of local government. By working with them and the Local Area Panels, the District Council and National Park Authority aim to act in partnership with local communities, while balancing the needs of the wider locality.
- 4.** In their role as democratically accountable bodies, Parish and Town Councils offer a means of shaping the decisions that affect their communities. They offer a means of decentralising the provision of certain services and of revitalising local communities. In turn, they recognise the strategic role of the District Council and Exmoor National Park Authority and the equitable distribution of services and statutory purposes which they have to achieve.

5. This Charter reflects the increasing importance attached by Central Government to partnership working and the development of QUALITY status for Parish and Town Councils. It will be formally reviewed after five years in operation.

Sustainability

6. The West Somerset District Council and the Exmoor National Park Authority will work with each other and in partnership with Parish and Town Councils to promote sustainable social, economic and environmental development in the area of the West Somerset District and the Exmoor National Park Authority.
7. The District Council and the Exmoor Coast and Countryside Partnership will involve the Exmoor National Park Authority and Parish and Town Councils through Area Panels in the processes of preparing and implementing the community strategy to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area, and the role which local Councils should take. The District Council and Exmoor Coast and Countryside will consult and involve the Exmoor National Park Authority and local Councils (through their representatives) about the content and direction of the community strategy as it affects the local communities they represent.

Local Governance

8. The local arrangements for engagement of Parish and Town Councils in local governance arrangements and for liaison between them include -
 - Representatives of Parish and Town Councils sit on the District Council's Area Panels.

- Representatives being invited to attend the Exmoor National Park Authority District and Parish Consultative Forum.
 - Parish and Town Councils will invite appropriate Members and Officers of the West Somerset District Council and the Exmoor National Park Authority to their meetings.
- 9.** The West Somerset District Council will help organise the administration of Parish and Town Council elections. The relevant authorities will work together to limit the costs of holding such elections.

Consultation

- 10.** The West Somerset District Council and Exmoor National Park Authority will aim to give Parish and Town Councils the opportunity to comment before making a decision which specifically affects their local community.

Only in exceptional circumstances will appropriate consultation not take place, in which case a written explanation will be given on request.

- 11.** To help achieve the objectives laid down in this Charter, liaison and consultation (both formal and informal) will be further developed at Parish Council and Area Panel level through regular meetings or specific service consultative groups and, at Officer level, individually or through working parties and groups.
- 12.** The West Somerset District Council and/or Exmoor National Park Authority will attend meetings with Parish and Town Councils (or Area Panels) at a mutually agreed time to discuss matters of common interest when requested to do so and given sufficient notice.

- 13.** Officers and Councillors of the West Somerset District Council and Exmoor National Park Authority will be given an opportunity to speak at local Council meetings on matters of mutual interest if they request to do so.

Information and Complaints

- 14.** When the West Somerset District Council and Exmoor National Park Authority consult local Councils, they will provide them with sufficient information to enable them to reach an informed view on the matter, and give them adequate time to respond in accordance with the statutory requirements where applicable.
- 15.** The West Somerset District Council, Exmoor National Park Authority and Parish and Town Councils will acknowledge letters, and provide substantive answers to letters which need a reply in accordance with the provisions of their Customer Charters. The District Council and Exmoor National Park Authority will send a full substantive reply or an acknowledgement within 10 days. If an acknowledgement is sent, the full substantive reply will be sent within 28 days.
- 16.** If a local Council is dissatisfied with the District Council's or Exmoor National Park Authority's actions, their response to a request for information, or their failure to consult, it may initiate that body's formal complaints procedure.

Standards Committee

- 17.** The West Somerset District Council and the Parish and Town Councils have adopted codes of conduct, based on the national model code of conduct. The local Councils will work with the West Somerset District Council Standards Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. The West Somerset District Council has consulted and agreed arrangements with the Parish and Town Councils for the appointment of representatives to the Standards Committee.
- 18.** The Exmoor National Park Authority has adopted a similar Code of Conduct, but has no role with regard to Parish Councils.

Delegated Responsibility for Service Provision

- 19.** If a local Council (or group of local Councils) wishes to take on delegated responsibility for service delivery, the District Council and Exmoor National Park Authority will actively encourage this, where it is best value (taking account of cost, quality, local preferences and practicability). Where it is not good value or practicable the relevant body will, in consultation with the local council, explore alternative solutions to encourage more local-level input into service delivery.

Financial arrangements

- 20.** Where a Parish or Town Council takes on the provision of certain services, the level of funding will be agreed by the relevant body and the local Council.

Local Community Life

- 21.** The West Somerset District Council will promote local community life through schemes including capital grants to village halls, community centres, and other similar organisations, and rate relief for village amenities.
- 22.** Within the National Park area, the Exmoor National Park Authority will endeavour to provide similar opportunities linked to National Park purposes and the securing of social and economic well-being.

Practical Support

- 23.** The West Somerset District Council will, where practical, offer local Councils access to their own support services, to enable them to take advantage of facilities such as printing and purchasing, at a mutually agreed price. In particular, assistance will be offered in identifying and helping to meet the training needs of local Councils.

The Parties to this Charter are the following –

Bicknoller Parish Council	Nettlecombe Parish Council
Brompton Ralph Parish Council	Oare Parish Meeting
Brompton Regis Parish Council	Old Cleeve Parish Council
Brushford Parish Council	Porlock Parish Council
Carhampton Parish Council	Sampford Brett Parish Council
Clatworthy Parish Council	Selworthy & Minehead Without Parish Council
Crowcombe Parish Council	Skilgate Parish Meeting
Cutcombe Parish Council	Stogumber Parish Council
Dulverton Town Council	Stogursey Parish Council
Dunster Parish Council	Stringston Parish Meeting
East Quantoxhead Parish Meeting	Timberscombe Parish Council
Elworthy Parish Meeting	Treborough Parish Meeting
Exford Parish Council	Upton Parish Council

Exmoor National Park Authority
Exmoor Parish Council
Exton Parish Council
Holford Parish Council
Huish Champflower
Kilve Parish Council
Luccombe Parish Council
Luxborough Parish Council
Minehead Town Council

Watchet Town Council
West Somerset District Council
West Quantoxhead Parish Council
Williton Parish Council
Winsford Parish Council
Withycombe Parish Council
Withypool & Hawkridge Parish
Council
Wootton Courtenay Parish Council