

Parish and Town Councils and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council Charter

This Charter sets out the terms of partnership for working between officers, decision makers and members of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and all Parish and Town Councils in the Solihull Borough and is designed to support good partnership working to provide better services to the people of Solihull whom we all serve.

There are two levels of local government in Solihull:

Parish and Town Councils are the first tier of government where decisions are made or influenced at the most local level and are pivotal connections to local communities. Parish and Town Councils have been granted powers by Parliament including the authority to raise money through taxation as a precept, and a range of powers to spend public money. There are 16 Parish and Town Councils within Solihull:

Balsall Parish Council

Dickens Heath Parish Council

Barston Parish Council

Fordbridge Town Council

Berkswell Parish Council

Hampton in Arden Parish Council

Bickenhill and Marston Green Parish Council

Hockley Heath Parish Council

Castle Bromwich Parish Council

Kingshurst Parish Council

Chadwick End Parish Council

Meriden Parish Council

Chelmsley Wood Town Council

Smith's Wood Parish Council

Cheswick Green Parish Council

Tidbury Green Parish Council

Solihull Council is a metropolitan borough council and is responsible for developing local policy and strategies as well as delivering a number of legal and statutory services. Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council is a member of the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Birmingham Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership. As a member of these two groups they are able to influence policies and strategies across the whole of the West Midlands.

This Charter sets out our **commitment** to work together with shared values and behaviours that adhere to the Nolan Principles in public life:-

Selflessness; Integrity; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Honesty; Leadership.

The standards set out in this Charter cover how we will communicate and consult each other, how we will support and help each other and how we will measure how well we are doing.

1. Communication

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council will:

- Produce and manage a rolling ward action plan in partnership with the relevant Parish and Town Council.
- Provide a single point of contact via its Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council Connect Customer Service Centre for Parish and Town Councils to raise issues, concerns and service requests.
- Provide timely responses to correspondence.
- Provide links to Parish and Town Councils' information on Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's website for residents to access information.
- Share its digital vision and strategy with the Parish and Town Councils, and align solutions where mutually beneficial.
- Relevant officers actively engage with Parish and Town Councils on mutual interest/ topics to promote closer working relationships.
- Provide a senior representative/champion to attend and be a non-voting member of the Solihull Area Committee (SAC) and other borough-based liaison meetings where important proposals and policy development will be discussed as agreed. This person will also be the designated officer to liaise with SAC on matters related to the Charter.
- Highlight to Parish and Town Councils, via SAC, important information on topics which will affect them and/or their residents.
- Host an annual Parish and Town Council event for all Parish and Town Councillors to review emerging issues and future plans.
- Raise awareness of the Charter and the importance of the role of Parish and Town Councils in councillor and staff induction programmes and in job descriptions for specific roles.
- Sharing demographic expertise linked to improving health and wellbeing of local communities.

Parish and Town Councils will:

- Use digital channels where possible, to contact Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.
- Use and locally promote Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's Connect Customer Service Centre to resolve 'day-to-day' issues.
- Inform Solihull Metropolitan Borough Councillors of key decisions and changes they make that affect local residents.
- Provide local Solihull Metropolitan Borough Councillors with agendas and minutes of meetings (published on the Parish and Town Councils' websites), and allow Solihull Metropolitan Borough Councillors to attend meetings and speak on matters of mutual interest.
- Give Solihull Metropolitan Borough Councillors and officers notice if they would like them to attend a meeting.
- Let Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council know about any issues they would like to discuss at their annual Parish and Town Council meeting before the meeting.
- Share Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's information with local residents.
- Ensure that Parish and Town Council representatives on the SAC disseminate information to their respective Councils and other interested groups in the community.
- Include awareness of the Charter in councillor and staff induction programmes.

2. Consultation

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council will:

- Ask Parish and Town Councils to comment on issues affecting their community.
- Raise awareness of up and coming consultations to Parish and Town Councils by sharing its annual consultation forward plan which shows the main Council contact.
- By highlighting the consultation forward plan seek comments from Parish and Town Councils on issues affecting their community giving at least six weeks to respond to consultations.
- Arrange for the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils, Solihull Area Committee and the Society of Local Council Clerks to comment on issues of collective interest to Parish and Town Councils.
- Give access to feedback on responses to consultations affecting their local area via Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's website where possible.
- Give briefings on hot topics.
- Parish and Town Councils' views from consultations will be considered as part of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's decision making process.
- Carry out joint consultations with partners when appropriate.

Parish and Town Councils will:

- Give views to Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council that represents as many local people as possible.
- Acknowledge that Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's decisions are made democratically and respect decisions.
- Consult Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and other Parish and Town Councils about decisions which affect those Councils.
- Recognise that Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council frequently has limitations and constraints when working on consultations, most notably timescales that cannot be influenced.
- Look for flexible ways to help progress developing consultation responses, e.g. a special meeting or task and finish group.
- Solihull Area Committee will provide a summary of Parish and Town Councils' cycle of meetings and contact list of SAC members and their Clerks.

3. Support and Help

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council will:

- Work with Parish and Town Councils to include parish priorities through Neighbourhood Plans, Parish and Town Council Plans and Community Appraisals in Borough strategies and areas of joint or shared working.
- In line with the Localism Act, establish parameters for Parish and Town Councils to deliver some services.
- Offer Parish and Town Councils access to a range of chargeable services where this is appropriate and lawful to help keep their costs down.
- Resolve complaints informally whenever possible and, if need be, formally through Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council's complaints process.

Parish and Town Councils will:

- Encourage the involvement of residents in local government.
- Help residents influence decisions and services, particularly those who have difficulty getting involved.
- Request specific training from the Council where needs have been identified e.g. safeguarding.
- Encourage and take up training opportunities offered by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council to Parish and Town Councils.
- Make sure capacity and resources are secured before delivering services on behalf of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council.
- Solihull Area Committee will designate the Chair and Deputy Chair to liaise with Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council on matters connected to the Charter.

4. Measure How Well We Are Doing

To deliver these commitments will need openness, transparency, honesty and willingness by all parties so we can see what is working well and what needs to be improved. Each commitment can, by itself or with supporting indicators, be measured to show both the level and quality of activity.

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and Town and Parish Councils to:

- Review performance of the Charter every six months at Solihull Area Committee meetings.
- Each year agree a shared Action Plan of areas to improve.
- Raise issues and concerns at the lowest level and only escalating issues if these cannot be resolved.
- ***We all recognise that local government, at all levels, is faced with unprecedented change, for example, challenges posed by reduced financial resources. We agree to work together to seek opportunities provided by devolution and delegation so that decision making is at the most local level practicable and where appropriate.***