

Local Council Charter for District of Easington Council

INTRODUCTION

1. The Parish Council(s) of Easington District, District of Easington Council and Durham County Council have agreed to publish a charter which sets out how they aim to work together for the benefit of local people. This Charter is the result of discussions locally to establish a new way of working and to confirm existing good practice.
2. District of Easington Council and Durham County Council acknowledge that Parish and Town Councils are the grass-roots level of local government. By working with them the District of Easington Council and Durham County Council aim to act in partnership with local communities, while balancing the needs of the wider community.
3. District of Easington Council, Durham County Council and the Parish and Town Council's will recognise and respect the diverse views and culture of all residents in the neighbourhood.
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, the Parish and Town Council(s) recognise the strategic role of Durham County Council and District of Easington Council and the equitable distribution of services which it has to achieve.

SUSTAINABILITY

5. The District of Easington Council and Durham County Council will work in partnership with all Parish and Town Councils in the District of Easington area to promote sustainable social, economic and environmental development for the benefit of local communities.

LOCAL COMMUNITY LIFE

6. The District of Easington Council and Durham County Council will involve Parish and Town Councils in the processes of preparing, implementing and reviewing the community strategy to promote or improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area, and the role which Parish and Town Councils should take. The District of Easington Council and Durham County Council will consult and involve Parish and Town Councils accordingly about the content and direction of the community strategy as it affects the local communities they represent.

LOCAL GOVERNANCE

7. The District of Easington Council and Durham County Council will hold regular liaison meetings with representatives of all Parish and Town Councils that wish to take part, on not less than two occasions per year.
8. The District of Easington Council will administer the holding of Parish and Town Council elections. The District of Easington Council and the Parish and Town Councils will work together to limit the costs of holding such elections.
9. Representatives of Parish and Town Council's will sit on the District of Easington Council's Area Forums and have appropriate representation on any neighbourhood arrangements developed by Durham County Council.
10. The District of Easington Council's Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer will provide advice and support on all electoral issues.

11. The District of Easington Council, as the responsible Authority, have established a Parish Remuneration Panel to make recommendations relating to the payment of allowances to Members of Parish and Town Councils. District Council Officers will support and advise the Panel.

CONSULTATION

12. The District of Easington Council and Durham County Council will aim to give Parish and Town Councils the opportunity to comment before making a decision which affects the local community. In furtherance of this, Durham County Council and District of Easington Council will circulate a list of their respective council meetings to Parish Clerks and these will be available via the Council's website. Parish and Town Councils can request a copy of any public report and are encouraged to comment directly to Durham County Council and District of Easington Council, whichever appropriate. (For Planning consultations use paragraph 28).
13. Only in exceptional circumstances will appropriate consultation not take place, in which case a written explanation will be given on request.
14. To help achieve the objectives laid down in this Charter, liaison and consultation (both formal and informal) will be further developed at Parish and Town Council level through regular meetings or specific service consultative groups and, at officer level, individually or through working parties and groups.
15. The District of Easington Council and Durham County Council will attend meetings with the Parish and Town Councils (or groups of such Councils) at a mutually agreed time to discuss matters of common interest.
16. Parish and Town Councils will send copies of their agendas and papers to Durham County Council and District of Easington Council and to Councillors for their area upon request. Officers and Councillors of Durham County Council and District of Easington Council will be given an opportunity to speak at Parish and Town Council meetings on matters of mutual interest.

INFORMATION AND COMPLAINTS

17. When the District of Easington Council and Durham County Council consult Parish 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.
18. The District of Easington Council and Durham County Council will communicate with Parish and Town Councils and others in the community by publishing Countywide & Infopoint regularly and making them available to the local community. They will also keep Parish and Town Councils informed by sending them copies of other relevant newsletters/local promotional material.
19. The District of Easington Council, Durham County Council and Parish and Town Councils will acknowledge letters sent by the other party, and both will provide substantive answers to letters which need a reply [in accordance with the provisions of their respective Customer Service Standards. A full substantive reply or an acknowledgement will be sent by Durham County Council and District of Easington Council within seven days. If an acknowledgement is sent, the full substantive reply will be sent within 28 days, or within a time frame agreed by both parties.
20. If a Parish or Town Council is dissatisfied with the actions of Durham County Council or District of Easington Council, or with a response to a request for information, or believes there has been a failure to consult, the Parish or Town Council may make a formal complaint.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

21. Both the District of Easington Council, Durham County Council and the Parish and Town Councils have adopted codes of conduct.
22. The Parish and Town Councils will work with the District of Easington Council's Standards Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. The District of Easington Council has consulted and agreed the following arrangements with the Parish and Town Councils:
 - Two members will be nominated by Parish and Town Councils to sit on the District of Easington Council Standards Committee;
 - Parish/Town Council representatives will be entitled to vote at meetings of the District's Standards Committee;
 - At least one Parish/Town Council representative must be present when matters relating to Parish/Town Councils or their members are being considered;
 - A Parish/Town Council representative will sit on the Sub-Committee appointed by the District's Standards Committee to determine complaints;
 - The District of Easington Council's Monitoring Officer will work with Parish and Town Councils to promote and maintain high standards of conduct within Councils;
 - The District of Easington Council's Monitoring Officer will ensure that good communications exist between him and Parish and Town Clerks on issues within the ethical framework;
 - The District of Easington Council's Monitoring Officer will provide training for Parish and Town Councils on ethical issues.

DELEGATING RESPONSIBILITY FOR SERVICE PROVISION

23. If a Parish or Town Council (or group of local Councils) wishes to discharge functions on behalf of a principal authority, Durham County Council and District of Easington Council will consider this where it provides best value (taking account of cost, quality, local preferences and practicability). Where it is not good value or practicable Durham County Council and District of Easington Council will, in consultation with the Parish or Town Council, explore alternative solutions to encourage more local-level input into service delivery.
24. Where such arrangements are put in place they will be the subject of a separate agreement between the principal and local Council concerned.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

25. The District of Easington Council and Durham County Council will set out its financial arrangements for Parish and Town Councils as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan in accordance with the principles set out in the document 'Guidance on Financial Arrangements with Parish and Town Councils'.

26. Where a Parish or Town Council takes on the provision of certain services, the level of funding will be agreed by the principal local authority and the Town or Parish Council concerned. It is acknowledged that funding should follow the services, and where possible real costs identified. The exact contribution will need to be negotiated and agreed with the parties, over a fixed period (for example linked to financial plans) and clearly set out terms, conditions, monitoring arrangements, as well as incorporating flexibility.
27. In arranging for any devolution of services the principal and Town and Parish Councils will work together to ensure that resources are used effectively and any duplication of activities is minimised.

PLANNING

28. The District of Easington Council and Durham County Council will engage with the Parish and Town Councils in the preparation of development plans and the consideration of planning applications in accordance with the principles set out in their Statements of Community Involvement
29. The District of Easington Council and Durham County Council will have regard to Parish Plans where they are available and take cognisance of them in the development of a Local Development Framework.

PRACTICAL SUPPORT

30. The District of Easington Council and Durham County Council will, where practical, offer Parish and Town 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 in association with County Durham and Cleveland Training Partnership will be offered in identifying and helping to meet the training needs of Parish and Town Councils. Where the principal authorities are unable for reasons of capacity or otherwise, to provide the support service requested, they will assist the Town or Parish Council concerned to engage a suitable service provider.
31. This Charter will be jointly monitored by the principal authorities and the Town and Parish Councils on an annual basis. These discussions will inform a formal review of the Charter which will be carried out every five years.