

DEVELOPING A PARISH CHARTER FOR COPELAND

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Summary: This report outlines work that has been done to develop a Parish Charter for the Copeland Area in partnership with the County Council and the Parish & Town Councils and seeks member's endorsement of a Draft Charter and wider consultation.

Recommendation:	That members note the work undertaken to develop a Parish Charter for Copeland and endorse the draft for consultation with Parish Councils in Copeland.
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Impact on delivering the Corporate Plan: Links directly to Corporate Plan objective OL5 on working with Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC) to promote the Quality Parish initiative.

Impact on other statutory objectives (e.g. crime & disorder, LA21): Parishes have a very positive effect on rural communities. Much of the work of Parish Councils can have a positive effect on Crime & Disorder.

Financial and human resource implications: None directly

Project & Risk Management:

Key Decision Status

- **Financial:** None
- **Ward:** None

Other Ward Implications: None

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Government launched its Quality Parish Status (QPS) Scheme in April 2003. Under this scheme Town & Parish Councils that satisfy certain specific standards can apply for QPS accreditation. Councils which attain this status are to be given greater opportunities to take responsibility for some local government services and to have greater influence over the way services and projects are delivered in their area by other authorities.
- 1.2 For the 3 years up to March 2004 the Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC) has managed the Parish Democracy Programme. This programme is promoting good practice, providing training and engenders a more proactive culture amongst Town & Parish Councils. Government's Quality Parish Initiative provides an opportunity to build on these foundations by providing a new and challenging framework for further capacity building. Capacity building programme aims to

- 1) Develop a greater capacity within the parish tier of local government in Cumbria to meet the needs of communities and assist rural regeneration and
- 2) Maintain the capacity of the Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC) to support Town & Parish Councils during the period of change at the National and local level.

1.3 Specific objectives of the programme are to

- 1) Develop partnership working between Town & Parish Councils and principal authorities
- 2) Increase the levels of community and voluntary sector engagement with Town & Parish Councils, increase the amount of joint working amongst Town & Parish Councils
- 3) Identify and support the role of Town & Parish Councils within Local Strategic Partnerships and implementation of Community Strategies.

1.4 Within the Quality Parishes scheme 3 main aims are identified:

- 1) Accreditation of Local Councils as Quality Parishes (this is voluntary and requires successful passing of 7 mandatory tests)
- 2) Development of Agreements or Charters between all individual local authorities (not just those who are QPS accredited) and their principle authorities (city, district, borough or county) to clarify improved working arrangements and exchange information.
- 3) Development of charters between QPS accredited parishes and principal authorities, which could involve greater powers and increased funding being delegated downwards to local council level.

2. PARISH CHARTERS

- 2.1 Charters are aimed to improve joint working arrangements and develop a better understanding between the different tiers of local government. Model charters have been developed based on good practice from around the country. The charter provides a structure within which principal authorities and local councils agree to work. It includes a number of general principles and covers a common set of topics such as consultation and communication, community planning, service delivery and how the document will be monitored and evaluated.
- 2.2 The Charter is a starting point, a commitment to work together and a statement for the principles by which all partners will approach their work together. The document is adapted to reflect circumstances and the model is set out in 2 parts. The first part relates to the relationship between principal authorities and all Parish and Town Councils in their areas. It gives details of general working practices needed for achieving improved partnership working including how parties will share information and communicate with each other. The second part explains the enhanced role that Quality Councils in the area can perform and the benefits that quality status can bring to these Councils.
- 2.3 The Charter will deal with those functions and services that might be considered for delegation to Parish Councils by principal local authorities.
- 2.4 In Copeland we do not at present have a Parish Charter, however CALC developed a first draft of a model charter for Cumbrian Authorities, which was considered by our Parish Review working Party in 2005 and circulated to all members of Council later that year for individual comment. The further development of the charter has been between principal authorities and CALC using the model charter as a base but it is now intended to go out to all local councils in Copeland for their individual input The latest draft of the Parish Charter to be circulated is attached at Appendix A

- 2.5 Within the same timescale Cumbria County Council's area committees are considering the parish charter as part of their consultation process.
- 2.6 If the draft is approved for consultation, it is intended to put out a tripartite covering letter (signed by Cumbria County Council, Copeland Borough Council and CALC) with a questionnaire (for responses) and a date and venue for a consultation event. Local councils will be given at least two months to send back the questionnaire. They could also attend the consultation event to make their views known; the Copeland Centre would be a suitable venue for such an event.

3. CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 The national Quality Parish Scheme recommends the agreement of Charters between Principal Authorities and Local Councils in order to promote partnership working and enhance the opportunities for citizen engagement in the design and delivery of local services.
- 3.2 Member's views are sought on the draft of the Parish Charter attached and any further comments on its content and intended consultation at this stage.

List of Appendices:

Appendix A – Draft Parish Charter for Copeland

List of Background Documents:

List of Consultees:

Corporate Team