

Charter for the Vale of Glamorgan Council and Community and Town Councils

Introduction

The community and town councils of the Vale of Glamorgan and the Vale of Glamorgan Council have agreed to publish a charter which sets out how we aim to work together for the benefit of local communities whilst recognising our respective responsibilities as autonomous, democratically elected statutory bodies.

The charter is designed to build on existing good practice and embrace the shared principles of openness, respect for each other's opinions, honesty and our common priority of putting citizens at the centre. This charter is based on equality of partnership and is not a top-down arrangement. It is a set of guiding principles by which we will work together. It will not compromise the autonomy of any of the councils which are signed up to it.

Partners to the Charter

[names to be listed individually here]

Recognition

We accept the legitimacy and benefits of partnership working whilst at the same time recognising and respecting each other's roles. We aim to work together as a partnership of equals rather than tiers.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
Acknowledges and recognises that community and town councils are the grass roots level of local government. In their role as democratically accountable bodies, community and town councils offer a means of engaging with local people, of decentralising the provision of certain services, and of revitalising local communities.	Recognise the strategic importance of the Vale of Glamorgan Council and the economy of scale and equitable distribution of certain services they are able to achieve.
Recognises and respects the diversity of community and town councils and that their needs varies according to size, and the extent to which they participate varies.	

Local Governance

We will be clear about the expectations that we have of each other in order to facilitate a smooth working relationship. In this regard, we will define the way in which we interact with each other. We will be clear about the role of councillors at all levels in the relationship and in community leadership.

The Community Liaison Committee meets quarterly. One representative, or nominated substitute, attends from each town and community council and from any other organisation considered appropriate, along with thirteen unitary councillors, to discuss local government matters of mutual concern. The Committee provides comments and makes recommendations to the appropriate decision-making body.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Council
Will hold quarterly community liaison meetings with representatives of all community and town councils that wish to take part.	Will contribute towards the agenda of liaison meetings and contribute proactively to the attendance and discussion.
Will share agenda papers and minutes of Council meetings (including Cabinet, scrutiny and other committees) electronically.	Will share agenda papers and minutes with interested officers and councillors when appropriate by electronic means.
Will appoint a nominated member of staff to be a liaison officer between the Vale of Glamorgan Council and community and town councils	Will contact the nominated officer on the agreed issues and make them aware of any difficulties being encountered.
Community and town council councillors / officers (as appropriate) will be formally represented on key local partnerships and committee meetings. The Vale of Glamorgan Council will seek to ensure that these arrangements are regarded as suitable and sufficient.	Community and town council councillors/officers (as appropriate) who take part on key partnerships will ensure that they represent the views of all town and community councils and will provide feedback to them on key issues.
Councillors/officers will strive to attend town and community council meetings as appropriate.	Will invite councillors/officers of the Vale of Glamorgan Council to meetings as appropriate and will provide a space on its meeting agenda for presentations.
Will administer the holding of community and town council elections.	Will notify the need for elections in a timely manner.

None of the principles in this Charter would prevent other meetings being held when appropriate on any matters of mutual interest.

Consultation

We appreciate the importance of meaningful consultation and set out a genuine commitment among all parties to consult on matters of mutual concern. We will agree clear, specific and time limited procedures and processes for consultation.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
Will aim to give community and town councils the opportunity to comment before making a decision that affects the local community.	Community and town councils will respond to consultation opportunities in a timely manner, addressing the key issues in the consultation document.
Will make available copies of its public	Will make full use of the papers available

reports (Cabinet, scrutiny and other committees, Council, etc.); will advise clerks of the dates of its public meetings; and will make copies of its agendas available on the Council's website as soon as possible.	to them to inform local decision-making.
Only in exceptional circumstances will appropriate consultation not take place, in which case a written explanation will be given on request.	Acknowledge that in some circumstances the time scales set for receipt of comments on consultation documents are imposed externally and are occasionally very short. It may be that to meet deadlines, especially on major issues, it will be necessary for community and town councils to hold a special meeting.

Information and Communication

We appreciate the need for timely, clear and relevant information and communication in fostering good relationships and better joint working for the benefit of local people.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
Will provide to community and town councils a list of named contacts, telephone numbers and where possible e-mail addresses.	Will utilise the agreed contact points and respond in the most appropriate and timely method.
Will communicate by providing sufficient numbers of documents for members of community and town councils.	Will ensure that all town and community councillors have access to the appropriate documents.

Joint working and engagement

The Charter defines 'Partnership' as working together towards a common set of goals, based on equality in terms of ownership, decision-making and recognition of each party's distinctive contribution. An equal and effective partnership brings benefits and responsibilities to all those involved. Local government at both tiers must work together to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of our area. If doing things differently achieves a better and more sustainable service, we will seriously examine these methods.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
Will provide opportunities for clerks of town and community councils to meet to discuss common concerns and resolve issues.	Will encourage participation by clerks in opportunities to network and share common concerns.
Will be clear about how devolved services can be discussed and agreed.	Will use the agreed procedures if there is a wish to progress devolved services.

Will give due consideration to devolving services that would provide better value for money and/or enhanced services.	Will be clear about how any devolvement of services will provide better value for money and/or enhanced services.
Will promote opportunities to work jointly with town and community councils to communicate and consult with local people and communities.	Will identify opportunities to work with the unitary council to communicate and consult with local people and communities.

Land Use Planning

Community and town councils know and understand their local area and must be able to comment effectively on planning matters. The Vale of Glamorgan Council is able to take an overview of the needs of the whole local area and make decisions, taking local views into account.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
Will uphold its statutory duty to consult community and town councils on all planning applications in their communities	Make appropriate responses to the Vale of Glamorgan Council recognising the parameters imposed by planning law and agreed planning policy.
Will invite representatives from a community council or town council to participate in Planning Committee site visits relating to planning applications in its area.	Ensure that councillors receive training on planning issues and have a sound understanding of how planning law works.
Will ensure that town & community councils receive copies of decisions made on applications relevant to their area, and make further clarification where requested.	Will progress any further clarification with the council officers concerned.
	Maintain an objective and professional approach to planning matters at all times.

Practical Support

In order to be effective, elected members and officers must be well-trained and have the support they need to carry out their roles.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
Will, where practical, offer community and town councils access to support services, to enable them to take advantage of facilities such as printing, IT, legal services, personnel services, purchasing at a mutually agreed price.	Will follow procedures set out to access Vale of Glamorgan Council support services.

Capacity

We will encourage continuous development of officers and members in both Vale of Glamorgan Council and community and town councils, either in their individual groupings or together. Capacity building leads to professionalism and more effective joint working.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
Assistance will be offered in identifying and helping to meet the training needs of community and town councils.	Will ensure that councillors and clerks are trained to undertake their role effectively.
Will offer member induction training to town and community councillors to enable them to understand the role and function of the Vale of Glamorgan Council.	Will provide an induction to newly elected councillors to enable them to undertake their role effectively.
Will provide service-specific support materials and training as appropriate, subject to resources being available.	Will provide an induction to new clerks to enable them to undertake their role effectively.

Ethics

We will provide an ethical service to local people, following the appropriate standards and Codes of Conduct. We will encourage links between community and town council clerks and the Vale of Glamorgan Council Standards Committee.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
Will, through the appointed Monitoring Officer, support community and councils in the timely consideration and provision of advice in relation to the application of the Members Code of Conduct.	Will act in an appropriate manner under the Code and will provide all such information as required by the Monitoring Officer to enable him/her to carry out his/her function effectively.

Financial arrangements

Both the Vale of Glamorgan Council and town and community councils recognise the need for clarity and transparency in financial arrangements. In developing and implementing financial arrangements, relevant national and local priorities will be taken into account.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
In setting the level of council tax for the area, will have regard to services being delivered by community and town councils in its area, and the funding thereof. This will be with a view to avoiding double-taxation.	In setting the annual precept, shall have regard to the plans for service delivery of the Vale of Glamorgan Council for the coming year.

Delegating responsibility for service provision

Services should be delivered in the most appropriate manner, with regard to value for money and added value for local people.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
Will give due consideration to all reasonably argued cases for the delegation of service delivery to community and town councils, basing its consideration primarily on the improvement of service delivery for citizens whilst ensuring value for money is retained or enhanced.	Will recognise that there are certain instances where it is not appropriate or desirable for the Vale of Glamorgan Council to delegate service delivery.
Where it is not appropriate or desirable to delegate service delivery, the Vale of Glamorgan Council will seek ways in which local information from communities might be used to enhance service delivery to better meet citizen needs.	Will engage with the citizens in the communities they serve to understand better their needs and convey these needs in a coherent and constructive manner to the Vale of Glamorgan Council, such that they can be taken account of in service design and delivery.

Sustainability

We will work in ways that are sustainable, reconciling the long-term needs with those of the present and protecting and improving the quality of life of current generations without compromising the quality of life of future generations.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
Will assist town and community councils with information on sustainable practices.	Will proactively assess the sustainability of current practices and processes.
Will assist town and community councils to adopt electronic working to achieve improved communication and to reduce waste.	Will work towards adopting electronic methods of working wherever feasible to achieve improved communication and to reduce waste.
Will outline how the Vale of Glamorgan Council is actively pursuing sustainable development.	

Community Strategy

We recognise the strategic importance of the Community Strategy as the overarching strategic vision and priorities for the local area. Furthermore, we recognise that the Community Strategy will only be fully effective if it is informed by the grass roots experiences from within our communities.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
Will invite a representative of the community and town councils to sit on the Community Strategy Partnership in recognition of the local knowledge and experience this will bring.	Will together nominate a councillor to be their representative on the Community Strategy Partnership. This individual shall proactively represent the sector, raising matters of general concern appropriate to the agenda of the Partnership.
Will involve town and community councils in the development of the local community strategy.	Will contribute to the development of the Community Strategy in its development stage.
Will involve town and community councils in the implementation of the Community Strategy.	Will respond actively and fully to consultation of the draft Community Strategy.
	Will participate in the partnership monitoring the implementation of the Community Strategy.

Local Elections

Fair and open elections are the bedrock of local democracy. We will ensure that elections are freely and fairly contested, and encourage local people to become involved in local democracy.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
Will involve community and town councils in the local election planning process.	Will encourage participation in the local election process by members of the local community.
Will involve community and town councils in any awareness raising/publicity to encourage nominations for candidacy at local elections.	Will ensure wide publicity of vacancies on community and town councils to maximise community representation.
Will help to publicise forthcoming local elections on behalf of community and town councils.	Will facilitate public participation at all relevant meetings of the council and its committees to encourage community involvement.
Will brief community and town council clerks on the nomination process so that they are equipped to assist any potential candidates who come forward for local elections.	
Will provide help and assistance with the local election legal and administrative processes and procedures.	

Action Plan

This Charter will be supported by the development of an action plan addressing each of the individual topics contained herein. The action plan will be developed on a joint basis and shall attribute responsibilities to each partner. Actions will be accompanied by a timescale and will be reported on six-monthly during the year concerned.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
Will nominate a lead officer for the development and monitoring of the action plan.	Will collectively agree priorities for inclusion in the action plan.
Responsible officers of the Vale of Glamorgan Council will have due regard to the action plan and include relevant actions in their service plans for the year.	Will undertake to implement all actions relevant to them coming from the action plan.

Monitoring and Review

The Charter will be fully reviewed every four years following local elections, or more often if there is a need to do so. The Community Liaison Committee will measure progress annually in achieving the measures set out in the Charter through the setting and reviewing of actions contained in an action plan. The Community Liaison Committee can recommend the need for a mid-term review of the Charter if appropriate.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council	Community and Town Councils
Will arrange for the Charter to be reviewed when appropriate.	Will actively contribute to the review of the Charter.
Will arrange for the development of an action plan linked to the Charter.	Will actively contribute to the development and delivery of the Charter action plan.
Will actively contribute to achieving the action plan.	Will actively contribute to achieving the action plan.

Conclusion

The undersigned community and town councils and Vale of Glamorgan Council are committed to the principles and statements with the charter, for the benefit of local people:

Appendices

None at present; when an action plan has been developed, this will be appended.