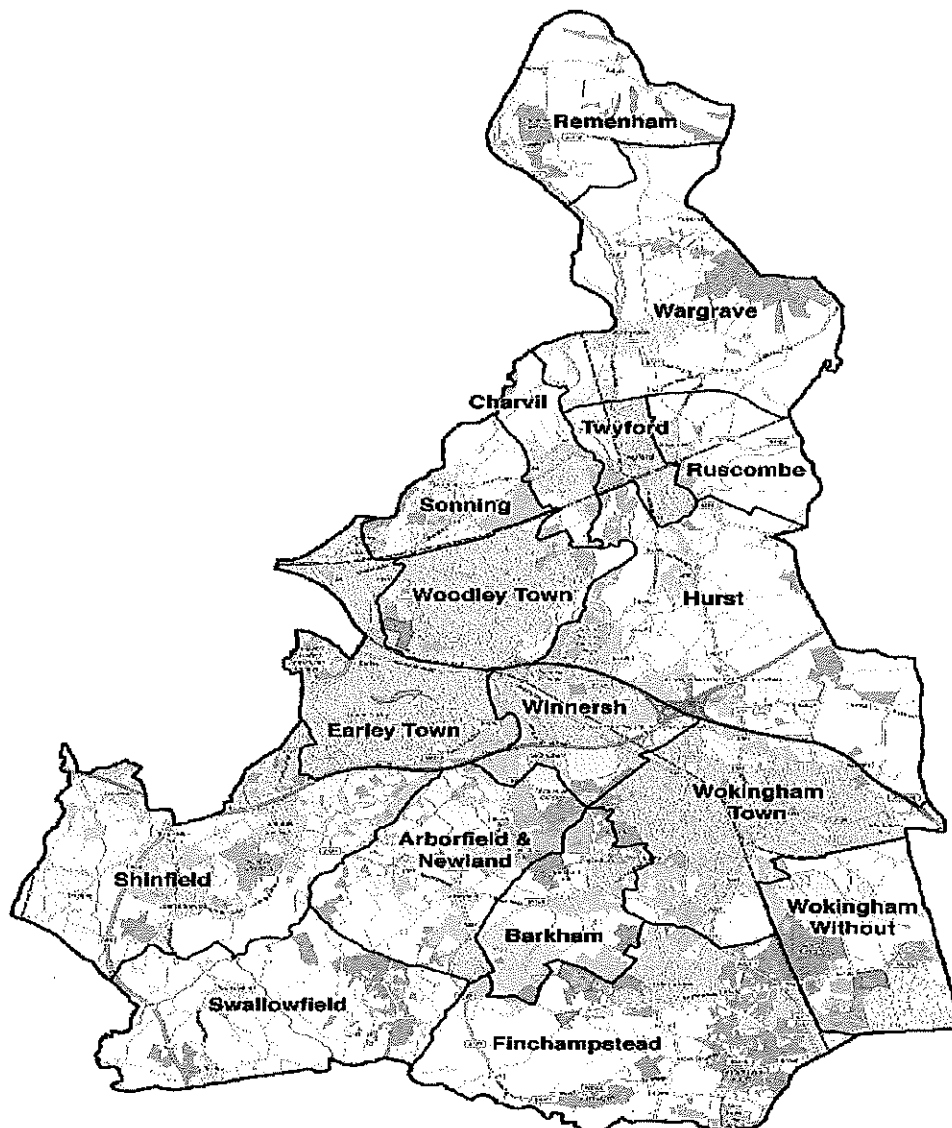


CHARTER BETWEEN THE TOWN & PARISH COUNCILS OF WOKINGHAM AND WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL



February 2021

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1. Summary - What you need to know about the Charter

The Charter has one simple aim - to provide a framework for us to work together to serve the people of Wokingham borough. We have a common purpose to promote the wellbeing of Wokingham borough, and we serve the same residents. This is the foundation of our Charter.

The Charter sets out how we will achieve this, by:

- Maintaining high ethical standards, **respecting and valuing each other**
- Being good partners and continuously **strengthening relationships**
- Providing **practical support** and helping each other out
- Being clear on **who does what**

The main document sets out what the Charter's signatories will do to deliver these aims.

You will find this useful if you are in a Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) service area or are a Town or Parish clerk or elected member (whether from WBC or Town or Parish council). We also hope this will be of more general interest - for example to voluntary groups who wish to work with Town and Parish Councils.

Our Charter does not include everything. There are additional details – for example on Development Management and Highways and more information on protocols and standards are on the Council's website.

We will ensure that the Charter and associated documents will be made available on our websites. We recognise that information will change over time and we will review and update annually.

The Charter also sets out how we will manage the relationship – putting things right when they go wrong as well as celebrating the things that go well. Finally, we set out the next steps and the process for future review.

2. Introduction

Wokingham Borough Council and the Town and Parish Councils in our area have had the ambition of achieving effective joint working.

There are three Town councils and fourteen Parish councils within Wokingham borough. These range in size and capacity between organisations with dedicated facilities and staff delivering a number of different services, to smaller organisations without any facilities and a part-time Parish clerk.

Much like each local authority, each Town and Parish council is a separate organisation with their own priorities and operational practices guided by their elected or appointed councillors. This can present challenges to working collectively with all or some of the Towns and Parishes.

Engagement with all the Towns and Parishes has usually been through the Borough Parish Liaison Forum (BPLF).

The Role of our Town and Parish Councils

Each Town and Parish council has responsibilities that are formally defined by their role as “local councils.” These include their governance arrangements and services which they can chose to deliver. These services are summarised in Appendix 1.

In the current climate, much has changed to impact our respective roles. For example:

- Financial constraints on local services have increased, as have demographic pressures such as an ageing population. These are shared challenges for us all.
- We will need a joint focus on getting better value for money and delivering the savings we need to live within our means. WBC is the lowest funded unitary council in the country and the Council’s financial and staffing resources are reducing and this is likely to continue. This provides opportunities for Towns and Parishes and the Borough Council to work together differently.
- Communications have been transformed by digital technology, smartphones and social media. This increasingly provides opportunities to transform the way we work and communicate with each other through “smart” working and use of digital technology.

The strengths of our Town and Parish Councils and the benefits of effective partnership working are recognised and are even more important because of these challenges. Clear communications are central to successful collaboration. For this Charter to work, it needs to be picked up, read, understood and referred to at all levels of our local democracy. In creating this new Charter we have focused on making the document helpful to the people who will use it, including:

- Parish and Town councillors and clerks;
- Wokingham Borough Council elected members; and
- Wokingham Borough Council staff, particularly those whose work brings them into contact with Town and Parish Councils.

The Charter sets out:

- The commitments we are making to work together;
- What we do well, and the challenges facing us. We also include specific examples of good practice locally we can build on; and
- How we will know if we have succeeded.

3. Our Aim: Together to serve the people of Wokingham borough

Our Core Commitments

The Charter has one simple aim - to serve the people of Wokingham borough. This aim is underpinned by the following core commitments.

Together, we will:

- work collaboratively to promote local economic, social and environmental wellbeing.
- value the roles, responsibilities, and opinions of our respective councils and be aware at all times that we have a common purpose to serve the public of Wokingham borough and that we serve the same residents. This is the foundation of our Charter.
- respect the democratic mandates of all our individual councils within their legal and service remits, recognising that Wokingham Borough Council and Town and Parish Councils exist as separate bodies and have separate tax raising powers (for more information on Town and Parish council functions see Appendix 2).
- work together to address the significant challenges facing our area. As resources tighten we will collaborate in supporting communities to do more for their local areas and make the best use of new ways of working, with greater emphasis on the use of digital technology as staffing resources reduce.
- work together to try and answer residents' queries at the first point of contact, signposting as necessary, regardless of whether the query is to a Town/Parish or to Wokingham Borough Council.
- use the following joint principles for the devolution of services to Town and Parish Councils:
 - "By choice, not imposed"
 - "One size doesn't fit all"
 - "All liabilities to be declared openly on both sides"
 - "Give proper notice of changes"
 - "Be clear on what is being transferred, and over what timescales"
 - "Encourage parishes to cluster"
 - "Set up a 'support' offer"- e.g. training/equipment"

As individual bodies, we will make the following core commitments regarding Consultation:-

- Wokingham Borough Council will consult specific Towns or Parishes on matters when a planned decision would have a specific and direct or significant impact on the local council or its area or inhabitants. Wokingham

Borough Council will provide adequate time for a response to be made, appropriate to the issue under discussion and explain why it matters to respond. A longer period of time and more detailed engagement will take place where there is a potential high impact/financial implication for a specific Town or Parish or group of Towns and Parishes.

- Town and Parish Councils will consult Wokingham Borough Council on matters when a planned decision would have a specific and direct or significant impact on Wokingham Borough Council or on the wider Wokingham borough area or its residents.
- Town and Parish Councils will respond to consultations in a timely manner and, as appropriate, will call special meetings. In doing this they will seek to reflect the view of local people. Town and Parish Councils will also respond as appropriate to general consultations (e.g. where these have been placed online).

In adopting these commitments that drive our Charter, we can build on a wide range of good practice examples in our area, from work on local traffic issues to support for local community facilities and play areas. We have highlighted a few of these in this document.

Our specific commitments will be set out annually in a mutually agreed Action Plan.

4. Making it Happen

In the next four sections we set out in more detail **how** we will work together to meet our aims based on positive examples of what's worked previously. We will do this by:-

- a) Respecting and valuing each other
- b) Strengthening relationships
- c) Providing practical support
- d) Making the best of our skills and resources

Respecting and valuing each other

- Current/ongoing work to develop better partnership working – we are examining ways of embedding these principles within our respective organisations by, for example, at Towns and Parishes ensuring that our Councillors and staff know as much about WBC as they should know about us.

Strengthening relationships

- . Development of Terms of Reference for joint working over CIL
- . Current work to develop better partnership working (as above)
- . Improvements to the working relationship with WBC Planning
- . Wokingham Community Response (Coronavirus) – this has been an ongoing, excellent example, the learning and benefit from which will stand us in good stead for strengthening relationships in other areas
- . Opportunities presented by the developing Localities programme
- . Opportunities provided by the Borough Parish Liaison Forum - a real opportunity here – not just dissemination of information but working positively together on issues
- . Opportunities to work together to address the Climate Emergency - this is a key topic for all requiring a cohesive response across the Borough.

Providing practical support

- . Specialist advice / support on Neighbourhood Development Plans
- . Support with emergency planning e.g. Finchampstead Emergency Response
- . WBC online reporting system provides an efficient way to report routine issues
- . Sharing of communications and disseminating information to communities
- . Support over GDPR and opportunities to develop this further (including the Data Protection Officer role)
- . Support for the election processes
- . Support for the street light replacement and upgrade programme.

Making the best use of skills and resources

- . Potential to share training resources
- . Opportunity with Traded Services
- . Opportunity presented by the WBC Asset Review including the potential devolution of services
- . Opportunity to better co-ordinate the approach to grants / funding for local groups and organisations (currently being looked at through Community Response)

5. Next Steps

To ensure the Charter is effective we need to monitor and review it. We will encourage formal and informal events to celebrate and share our work and build relationships.

We will monitor the Charter and examine the progress, particularly assessing the indicators of success set out below. This will be done in consultation between the Borough Council and town and parish Councils allowing for full input. Indicators of success include:-

- Communication improves with Town and Parishes, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening across the Borough Council.
- Listening to what Towns and Parishes are telling the Borough Council and use this feedback to shape service delivery, challenge how we do business and manage expectations in an open and honest way.
- Communication and feedback that encourages engagement and in an inclusive and informative way.
- Developing a proactive approach in communicating, celebrating our shared success and promoting how the community can get involved.
- Working together to shape services around the needs of residents and deliver them in a way that empowers residents to live independent and healthy lives.
- Working effectively together to help resolve local issues and provide efficient, effective, joined up services.
- Working in partnership to deliver community led solutions that address the issues that matter most to our residents.
- Strengthening our understanding of current and future needs so that we can plan, design and deliver the best outcomes for all our residents.
- Developing a community led approach to meeting the needs of our residents, which is focused on the right outcome, delivered in the right way at the right time.
- Ensuring that Towns and Parishes are fully involved in the COVID recovery process.

The annual Partnership Working Action will agree the priority actions that we want to work on together.

We will jointly agree a dispute resolution process, to be used where it is thought that specific aspects of the Charter are not being delivered. We will keep the document a “live” one and undertake a light touch “refresh” every year, with a full review every 4 years.

6. Jargon Buster

Access Land	Land with public right of access mapped as 'open country' (mountain, moor, heath and down) or registered common land.
Asset of Community Value	An amenity or public building which has been put forward by a community under the Localism Act for inclusion on a register held by their local authority. If it is included, it may not be sold without the opportunity for the public to raise funds to buy it.
BALC	Berkshire Association of Local Councils
Borough Parish Liaison Forum	BPLF Meeting is a joint consultative body set up to consider issues of common interest between the parish/town councils (individually or collectively) and Wokingham Borough Council that are relevant for discussion in this forum.
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)	A planning charge, introduced by the Planning Act 2008, as a tool for local authorities in England and Wales to help deliver infrastructure to support the development of their area.
Community Places of Safety	A temporary shelter to be used in an emergency (eg gas leak; flood; – generally a community venue where people will feel comfortable and safe.
Community Governance Review	A change to parish governance arrangements which Principal Councils (district or unitary) have the power to carry out. A review can consider whether to create a new parish; alter the boundary of an existing parish or to group a number of parishes together. Local people can petition a Principal Council to undertake a Community Governance Review and it must be undertaken if the relevant conditions are met.
Due Diligence	The exercising of an appropriate level of caution or investigation prior to acting or making a decision. It may involve a series of legal, financial and commercial checks depending on the circumstance.
General Power of Competence	The General Power of Competence, Localism Act 2011 Sec 1 (1) gives local authorities, including eligible local councils, "the power to do anything that individuals generally may do" as long as they do not break other laws. It

is intended to be a power of first, not last, resort. However, there remain constraints and in particular this does not give any additional fund raising powers. A parish council wishing to use the power must formally resolve that it is an 'eligible council'. The qualifications for eligibility are that the clerk has completed a course in local administration, and that at least two-thirds of councillors have been elected (i.e. not co-opted).

Local Council

A parish, town, village, neighbourhood or community council. These all have the same powers and can provide the same services. The only difference is that a town council has decided that it should be known as a town council instead of a parish, village, neighbourhood or community council, and may choose to have a mayor.

Monitoring Officer

The Monitoring Officer is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct and probity within the Council and Parish Councils. They also have a responsibility to report breaches and possible breaches of the law or maladministration to the Council.

NALC National Association of Local Councils

The national membership body for Local Councils working to support, promote and improve them.

Neighbourhood Plan

The Localism Act 2011 gave communities the right to shape development in their areas through the production of a neighbourhood plan which should support the strategic development needs set out in the Local Plan.

Section 106 (S106)

Legal agreements between Local Authorities and developers. These are linked to planning permissions and can also be known as planning obligations.

Appendix 1

Essential background information on Town and Parish Councils in Wokingham borough

Introduction

Town and Parish Councils are the first tier of local government in the UK. They serve residents, are independently elected and raise their own precept (a form of Council Tax.)

There are 17 Town and Parish Councils across Wokingham borough. All are responsible for critical activity that helps enable our communities to thrive.

The diversity of Town and Parish Councils is their strength. Each can make a unique contribution to the needs of local communities.

What do Town and Parish Councils do?

Town and Parish Councils are an integral part of the Local Government structure and perform a number of important roles as:

- Providers and supporters of services
- Signposts and access points to services
- Representatives and community leaders

Towns and Parishes discuss and take action on issues of interest to their area. They have a range of powers including provision of recreational facilities, halls, crime prevention, community transport, public toilets, tourism, allotments, footpaths and commons but they are not obliged to use these powers and carry out these functions. Their activities fall into 3 main categories:

- Representing the local community
- Delivering services to meet local needs
- Striving to improve quality of life and community well-being

Councillors and Clerks

Towns and Parishes are made up of a number of councillors appropriate to their size and responsibilities. Their councillors are elected volunteers who serve for 4 years.

All of the Town and Parish Councils in Wokingham borough have a paid clerk, who provides advice and administrative support to councillors and takes action to implement council decisions. The clerk may also operate as a project manager, personnel director, public relations officer or finance administrator. The larger councils may have several members of staff.

How are Town and Parish Councils funded?

Towns and Parishes raise their funds through a charge (precept) made against all households in their area which is collected through Council Tax. The level of the charge is set by Town and Parishes and reflects the funding it will need for the coming year. They may also obtain funds from other sources such as Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), income from facilities and other external sources.

List of Town and Parish Council Functions (Source: NALC)

This is an indicative list of parish powers and functions to illustrate the wide range of activities covered by Acts of Parliament. Not every Town and Parish exercises these powers, and the list is not completely comprehensive

The table below summarises all the responsibilities that local councils have within their areas:

Allotments	Employment of Staff	Planning Applications
Allowances for Councillors	Fetes and Other Events	Precept
Ancillary Power(s)	General Power of Competence	Public Buildings and Village Halls
Bands and Orchestras	Gifts	Public Rights of Way
Bicycles and Motor Cycles – Parking Places	Graffiti	Public Toilets
Boating Pools	Honorary Titles	Recreation
Borrowing Money	Indemnities	Right to challenge services that are provided by a local authority
Burial Grounds & Cemeteries	Investments	Right to nominate and bid for assets of community value
Bus Shelters	Land / Premises	Roads
Byelaws	Life-Saving Appliances	Sports & Recreation Facilities
Car Parks (off road)	Lighting	Swimming Pools
Commons & Common Pastures	Litter	Traffic Signs
Community Gardens	Litter Bins	Theatres
Conference Facilities	Lotteries	Tourism
Contracts	Markets	Traffic Calming
Crime Prevention	Mortuaries and Post-Mortem Rooms	War Memorials
Dance Halls	Newsletters	Websites
Ditches and Ponds	Open Spaces	
Dog Control Orders	Parish Meetings	

Appendix 2 – Borough Council functions, priorities and delivery plans

Introduction

Wokingham Borough Council delivers a wide range of services for the residents and businesses in the borough including education, environmental health, highways, housing, leisure, libraries, planning, social care, transport and waste collection and disposal.

The Council is made up of 54 elected Councillors representing 25 wards across the borough, one of whom is elected as Leader. The Leader appoints up to 10 Councillors who make up the Executive which is responsible for the development and implementation of policy on behalf of the Council. The Chief Executive leads Officers who are employees of the Council, and give advice to elected Councillors, implement decisions and manage the day to day delivery of services.

Community Vision 2020 to 2024

'A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.'

Our Community Vision sets out what the Borough Council will focus on over the next 4 years to improve outcomes for residents. The Community Vision was approved by Full Council in February 2020 and covers the 4 year period 2020 / 2021 to 2024 / 2025.

Strategic priorities

The strategic priorities are:

- Enriching Lives
- Safe, Strong Communities
- A Clean and Green Borough
- Right Homes, Right Places
- Keeping the Borough Moving
- Changing the way we work for you

Read the [Community Vision \(PDF document\)](#) for further details about these strategic priorities, what outcomes we want to deliver for residents, the journey so far and next steps.

Corporate Delivery Plan 2020 to 2024

The [Corporate Delivery Plan](#) supports the Community Vision and sets out ambitions and plans for each strategic priority, actions for getting there and what success will look like.

The Delivery Plan will be monitored within the Borough Council's services and corporate performance measures will be identified to track our progress in delivering these strategic priorities for Wokingham Borough.

Appendix 3 Town and Parishes in the Borough (Click on links for further details)

- [Arborfield and Newland Parish Council](#)
- [Barkham Parish Council](#)
- [Charvil Parish Council](#)
- [Earley Town Council](#)
- [Finchampstead Parish Council](#)
- [Hurst Parish Council](#)
- [Remenham Parish Council](#)
- [Ruscombe Parish Council](#)
- [Shinfield Parish Council](#)
- [Sonning Parish Council](#)
- [Swallowfield Parish Council](#)
- [Twyford Parish Council](#)
- [Wargrave Parish Council](#)
- [Winnersh Parish Council](#)
- [Wokingham Town Council](#)
- [Wokingham Without Parish Council](#)
- [Woodley Town Council](#)

Appendix 4 – Signatories to the Charter

Council	Chairman
Arborfield and Newland Parish Council	
Barkham Parish Council	
Charvil Parish Council	
Earley Town Council	
Finchampstead Parish Council	
Hurst Parish Council	
Remenham Parish Council	
Ruscombe Parish Council	
Shinfield Parish Council	
Sonning Parish Council	
Swallowfield Parish Council	
Twyford Parish Council	
Wargrave Parish Council	
Winnersh Parish Council	
Wokingham Borough Council	
Wokingham Town Council	
Wokingham Without Parish Council	
Woodley Town Council	

