

REPORT ON THE CHARTER FOR HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCILS

Report By: PARISH LIAISON AND RURAL SERVICES OFFICER

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

1. To consider the current Charter dated November 2002 and its implications to the relationship between Herefordshire Council and Town and Parish Councils in Herefordshire.

Financial Implications

2. There are no direct financial implications.

Background

3. The Rural White Paper, 'Our Countryside: The Future. A Fair Deal for Rural England', published in November 2000, set out a number of measures to give local people the opportunity to become more involved in the development of their communities. The Government argued that parish and town councils, as the tier of government that is closest to local communities, have a central role to play in improving local quality of life.
4. It states: "Parish and town councils are the democratic bodies with the closest direct links to their communities and as such are ideally placed to contribute to the long-term vision and the priorities contained in the community strategies which principal local authorities are responsible for preparing. The Government expects principal local authorities and parish and town councils to work together to provide an effective local government for local people".
5. The White Paper proposed a number of initiatives designed to enhance the role of parish and town councils; to develop a framework for partnership working; and to equip parish and town councils to take on a stronger role for the benefit of the local community. A central proposal was the introduction of the concept of a Quality Parish Council and a Charter for all councils in the area.
6. There are 134 parish and town councils in Herefordshire and 4 parish meetings. To date 5 parish councils and 1 town council have achieved Quality status.
7. The Charter produced in 2002 sets out how the principal local authority and Town and Parish Councils will work in partnership. A copy of the Charter is attached at Appendix 1. It is in two parts. The first part concerns the relationship between the principal local authority and **all** the parish councils in the county. This part gives details of general working practices for achieving improved partnership working, including the process of preparing and implementing community strategies, information flow and dialogue between the tiers. The second part sets out the enhanced role that Quality Parish

Councils can expect to play, specifically, the devolution of particular functions and services which can take place, subject to full discussion and agreement between the parties.

8. The Charter states: "Herefordshire Council (the principal council) acknowledges and recognises that parish and town councils are the grass-roots level of local government. By working with them and the Herefordshire Association of local councils (HALC), the principal council aims to act in partnership with local communities, while balancing the needs of the wider locality."
9. Since its inception the Charter has served its purpose by improving the working relationship between the tiers. Key to this has been the appointment of a Parish Liaison Officer underlining the commitment to the Charter by Herefordshire Council. As there have been so few parishes gaining Quality Parish Status the second part of the Charter has not been utilised.
10. Since the Charter has been in existence for 6 years best practice would suggest that it should be updated and reviewed. It is planned to review the Charter by year end 2008. The main amendments to be considered will be the requirements of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, specifically allowance for the introduction of the "power of well-being" for parish councils and the introduction of a protocol for devolving functions and services to parish councils.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the report be noted.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Appendix1 : The Charter November 2002