

**POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE
21st OCTOBER 2009**

Hampshire County Council – Questionnaire on review of Charter with local Councils

1. Hampshire County Council is working with the Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC) on a review of the 'Charter' that has existed between local Councils and the County Councils since 2005. The original Charter recognised common objectives and set out the guiding principles for working together.
2. Much has changed since the original Charter was prepared and the County has agreed to work with the HALC Executive on two parallel pieces of work that relate to the Charter:-
 - a) To review the formal agreement and arrangements with HALC and
 - b) To consider whether there also needs to be any formalised partnership framework between the County Council and local Councils themselves.
3. In order to enable the County and HALC to determine a way forward, they have jointly issued a Questionnaire seeking local Councils' views on future arrangements.
4. Attached as an Appendix is the questionnaire received from the County Council and HALC, incorporating suggested responses as discussed with the Chairman of the Committee.
5. In general, the responses have been based on trying to ensure that good communication channels are opened between all tiers of local Government and, in particular, that the County Council keeps local Councils fully informed of proposals that affect the areas of individual local Councils. The questionnaire also seeks information on powers which the Town Council might wish to have devolved from the County Council (see question 7). Whilst the Town Council has always indicated that services should be delivered as close to the people as possible, it must be recognised that in general terms most of the County Council services need to be organised across a wide area and/or need highly specialised and trained staff to deliver effective services. Therefore, the list of items it is suggested might be considered for devolvement to the Town Council is very short. These are believed to be those that can be delivered more effectively locally without any increase in costs. In that connection, Members should know that the County has indicated that it would discuss financial arrangements in relation to any services that are devolved.
6. Members are asked to consider the questionnaire and approve a response for submission to Hampshire County Council and Hampshire Association of Local Councils.

For further information, please contact:

Terry Simpson
Town Clerk, Ringwood Town Council, 'Greenways', 71 Christchurch Road, Ringwood
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Tel: 01425 473883 E-mail: Town.Council@ringwood.gov.uk

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Hampshire Local Councils

1. ABOUT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is to help Hampshire County Council determine how it can better work in partnership with the local councils of Hampshire.

The County Council wants to understand whether developing an Accord directly with local councils would be a positive step and to help this, understanding the relationship now and ideas for the future are important. However, there are two things we want to be clear about in doing this:

- 1) We cannot promise it will be possible to provide or offer what is asked.
- 2) There is no expectation that all Councils will want to operate the same way or that they should be expected to. It is understood that answers will be very different and that is ok.

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2. UNDERSTANDING YOU

1. What is your name? (Optional)

Ringwood Town Council

* 2. What type of local council do you represent? Or what sort of local council would you say you are? (Please tick)

Parish Council

Parish Meeting

Town Council

3. What is the size of your electorate?

11,200

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4. What is the role of your council? Please help us to understand what you believe the primary role(s) of your council is. Please tick as many options below as you would identify as being the role of your council and identify whether you see them as a priority.

	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority	N/A
To make sure local needs are listened to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To provide local facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To communicate with local people about services & support available to them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To consult local people on planning applications in order To advise the planning authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To act as an additional interface between local people and other tiers of government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To deliver very local services to the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To improve quality of life for local people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To communicate with local people about what is happening locally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To know how to solve local problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify role and priority rating)

To encourage democratic engagement - High

To involve young people in Council decision making processes - High

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5. What factors are important in delivering your role? In order to look at how we could better work in partnership it would help us to understand what you see the focus of your role to be. Please tick the following factors and activities you believe are important to enable you as a Council to carry out your role well.

- Holding regular meetings
- Having a clerk with appropriate time available
- Having a clerk with the right skills
- Good communication channels from & to your residents
- Having a good website with the information / forms that are regularly requested
- Other (please specify)

Receiving timely information from the County Council on matters of general interest to residents and businesses in the town.
Meetings rarely achieve this.

Having the opportunity to comment on matters affecting the town with realistic timescales to formulate a considered response.

Having sufficient confidence that the County will give full and proper consideration to any views expressed.

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3. MAKING SPECIFIC INTERACTIONS WORK BETTER

When we need to find out what you and local people think about an issue we are considering, we need to be clear from your perspective how best to achieve this and what you feel your role should be.

1. Please tick how and whether you would want to be consulted on the following issues and feel free to add other topics that apply.

	Via HALC	Via your District Association	Directly via email	Directly via post	Don't mind	Don't want to be consulted
Highways issues & roads	€	€	✓	and/or ✓	€	€
Local planning decisions	€	€	✓	and/or ✓	€	€
Agreeing a process (i.e. how would you want us to do something)	✓	€	✓	✓	€	€
Identifying local priorities	€	€	✓	and/or ✓	€	€
Feeding into partnership priorities (i.e. Local Area Agreement or a Community Strategy)	✓	€	✓	and/or ✓	€	€

Any other topics? (Please specify)

The County Council's remit is so wide that it is difficult to list all items. But the general philosophy should be that where a decision or action is likely to have an effect on the town or a number of persons in it, then consideration must be given to at least informing the Town Council of that matter.

2. When new topics come up do you have any ideas about how we could work out the best way to consult you in a realistic timescale (i.e. 3 months)?

For major policy issues 3 months seems sensible. For individual issues 4-6 weeks is usually sufficient to enable the matter to be placed before Councillors at a meeting.

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3. Would you be willing and able to work with your local County Councillor to act as a hub for consultation on behalf of the County on issues with local impact?

Yes: able and willing

Yes: willing but not sure how

Willing but do not have the capacity

Not willing

Depends upon the issue

Please add any comments that will help us understand your answer

As the largest town in the south west corner of the County, the Town Council willingly accepts that it should act as a hub to channel local views into the County's decision making processes.

4. COMMUNICATION WITH US

There will be times when you want to communicate with the County Council and we would like to gain a better understanding of how this would best work for you. There are several elements to this, all of which are open questions.

1. In what ways is communication with the County Council working well or improving? tell us what you want us to continue or do more of?

Highways & Passenger Transport communication is good. But this is not always achieved across all services. County ought to adopt common protocol for all services.

2. Are there any particular sections of the County Council that you feel communication is good with (departments/bodies/structures/functions, etc.)

Highways Department at Jacobs Gutter Lane is generally good.

3. Are there any particular sections of the County Council that you feel are particularly poor or difficult to communicate with? (departments/bodies/structures/functions, etc.)

Paperwork is exchanged, but we have doubts whether the communication is effective, for example local Councillors are aware of needs of townspeople and yet views expressed are over ridden particularly when it comes to the south east Plan & Community strategies. Consultation/communication is pointless if views expressed are ignored.

4. What would you want or expect from your local County Councillor in terms of communication and support?

It is important for the local County Councillor to keep the Town Council abreast with current issues affecting the town. This is achieved through his report to the monthly Council meetings.

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5. Please tick which local issues are critical for you to be able to have quick contact with the County Council about.

	Not critical	Fairly critical	Critical
Flooding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Road safety	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Travellers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please specify what other local issues

Highway maintenance and defects (includes highway footpaths) - Critical

Highway flooding - Critical

Street lighting - Critical

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5. POSSIBILITIES FOR IMPROVED PARTNERSHIP

The Government has been making changes to the expectations and opportunities of the way we work together. To help us think about our part in this it would be useful to know your thoughts and parameters on a few things.

1. What do you think having 'the power of well-being' means to your Council?

Local Councils already have Section 137 powers. The power of well being is only relevant where local councils wish to spend in excess of the maximum allowed by S137. In addition, there are constraints on local councils' use of the new power as any decisions have to "have regard" to Principal Councils strategies. The Courts have yet to determine the meaning of "have regard."

2. What (actions/activities etc.), if anything, are you planning to do under this new power of well-being?

None

6. WORKING WITH YOU TO ACHIEVE YOUR KEY PURPOSES

Earlier you told us what you are seeking to achieve and in the factors that are important to success. We would like to know if there are any ways we could help.

1. What may be helpful in supporting you to undertake these activities effectively?

Provision of timely information and early consultation where appropriate.

2. Could we provide any incentives that would help?

Confidence that any views expressed will be taken seriously and not air brushed at the first opportunity!

3. What barriers need to be overcome?

The perception that the County does not really want to inform or consult and that views expressed will not be considered seriously.

4. Is there any potential for you to work together with other adjacent local councils on the following?

	Yes	No
Purchasing equipment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sharing a clerk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Jointly contracting services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jointly funding an Accredited Community Safety Officer post dedicated to your area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sharing a responsible finance officer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify)

- a) Provision of information on public services. Yes
- b) Responding to consultation papers. Yes
- c) Community Transport schemes Yes

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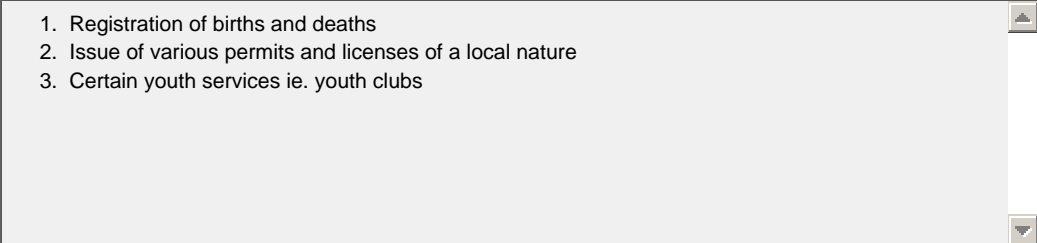
7. DEVOLUTION OR DELEGATION FROM THE COUNTY COUNCIL

Before you start this section we want you to be very clear about two things:

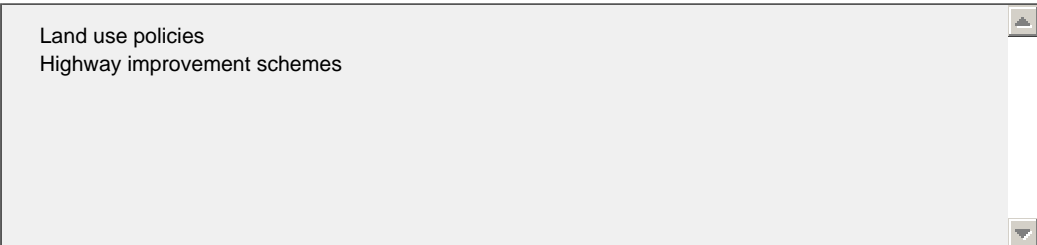
- 1) We know that the things below are not things all Councils are willing or able to consider.
- 2) We cannot promise we will be able to do any of the things you may request. We are just seeking to know how the land lies with you in terms of your interest and aspirations.

We are asking because we want to know if there are any areas where your council would like us to consider delegating activities or responsibilities to you IF the right safeguards and financial arrangements could be put in place. We are aware that arrangements already differ across the county so you may even already be doing some of this. The following questions are to get an overall feel.

1. Which of the services that are normally delivered by the County Council would you like us to consider devolving to you to deliver (i.e. give you to do on our behalf)?

- 
- 1. Registration of births and deaths
 - 2. Issue of various permits and licenses of a local nature
 - 3. Certain youth services ie. youth clubs

2. Which of the services the County Council delivers would you want to have a stronger advisory role on?

- 
- Land use policies
 - Highway improvement schemes

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8. END OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Hampshire County Council will collate and analyse all of the responses, along with representatives from the Hampshire Association of Local Councils.

Your responses will inform the drafting of a new partnership framework which will be send out for consultation later this year. It is intended that the new framework will be adopted in time for April 2010.