

Communities, Housing and Environment

15 Sept 2015

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

No
(at Policy and Resources Cttee)

Refresh of the Maidstone Parish Charter

Final Decision-Maker	Chair of the Communities, Housing and Environment
Lead Director or Head of Service	John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Communities Services
Lead Officer and Report Author	Sarah Robson, Housing and Communities Manager
Classification	Non-exempt
Wards affected	All Parishes/Parish Councils

This report makes the following recommendations to the final decision-maker:

1. It is recommended that Committee agrees for the Maidstone Parish Charter - a framework to support effective relationships and partnership working between Maidstone Borough Council and Maidstone's Parishes and Parish Councils within its administrative area – to be presented to Policy and Resources Committee for final endorsement.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Great People
- **Great Place:** Parishes and Parish Councils play a valuable and essential role in the fabric of local life, representing half of the population of the Borough. Parish Councillors and their Clerks possess a unique local knowledge that can help the community planning and decision-making process.
- Great Opportunity

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Corporate Leadership Team	To be advised
Policy and Resources Committee	21 October 2015
Council	
Other Committee	

Refresh of the Maidstone Parish Charter

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This Parish Charter describes the terms for an effective and productive relationship between Maidstone Borough Council (the Borough Council) and all Parish Councils in Maidstone Borough and recognises the role of the Maidstone Committee of the Kent Association of Local Councils (Maidstone KALC) on behalf of Parishes within Maidstone Borough.
- 1.2 Its purpose is to:
- Provide a sound basis for close co-operation in the development and provision of excellent services for local people, both in Parishes and in non-Parished areas within the Borough.
 - Support the evolution of the local Parish as an environment within which Parishioners wish to live, being compatible with the Localism Act 2011, which has provided a new impetus for all tiers of local government to seek a more collaborative approach to decision-making.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council is pursuing a number of policies and initiatives aimed at empowering local communities and providing local residents with the opportunity to shape the way in which public services are being designed and delivered. This has become even more important as financial resources are squeezed and the Council faces changes which will inevitably result in greater demands upon its services unless it changes the way it relates to local communities and partner agencies. Democratically elected Parish Councils – the most local tier of local government – can play a key role in helping meet these challenges.
- 2.2 The Council established a Parish Liaison Group in 2014 with the aim of promoting better working and more effective relationships between Maidstone Borough Council and Maidstone KALC. The Parish Liaison Group established a working group to produce a draft Charter which has been informed by best practice elsewhere. The key elements of the charter are:
- A focus upon shared goals and partnership working to improve the well-being of local communities
 - Information exchange and sharing, liaison and consultation, and the provision of services by the body best placed to do so;
 - Practical and not over-ambitious arrangements, with the emphasis being upon a two-way relationship between equals;
 - It is intended to be a working document which will be reviewed annually and adapted to meet changing circumstances.
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3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 There is no statutory requirement to put in place a Parish Charter. It is a voluntary agreement for both the Borough Council and Parishes and Parish Councils, with the main purpose of further enhancing joint working between the parties involved.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Although there is no statutory requirement to put in place a Parish Charter, there are benefits from adopting a charter – for the Borough Council, Parish Councils and for local residents – as stronger partnership working enables public services to be designed and delivered in a way that meets residents' needs and reflects the changing landscape within which local government now operates.
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5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 A draft Charter was first considered by the Parish Charter Working Group and then discussed at the Annual Parish Conference of Town and Parish Councillors in March 2015. The Conference made a number of suggestions and the final draft was then circulated to all Clerks with a request that discussion of the Charter be included on each Parish Council agenda. A further presentation was made at the April meeting of the Maidstone Committee of KALC.
- 5.2 Consultation responses have been circulated, with the Maidstone Committee of KALC welcoming the draft Charter as submitted, but drew attention to some minor amendments and the need to establish a Task and Finish Group to identify improvements to procedures, processes and working practices in key service areas. These points have all been incorporated.
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6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 The Charter has been subject to widespread consultation with parishes and Parish Councils. The Charter was approved by the Maidstone Committee of KALC in July 2015. As a result of the consultation undertaken, all feedback has been reflected in the Charter or, where relevant to Service delivery (e.g. Planning), via the proposed establishment of a Task and Finish Group. The Committee is therefore asked to recommend for the Charter to be submitted for final endorsement at Policy and Resources Committee.
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7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all: The Charter respects the character of our Borough, recognising that Parishes and Parish Councils play a vital part of democratic local government, representing communities at the most local level.	Head of Housing and Community Services
Risk Management	None.	Head of Housing and Community Services
Financial	None. There are no direct financial implications from the Charter. Whilst the Charter sets out general principles and protocols, there are no legal or financial consequences (except where the Borough Council is bound by other statutory requirements, such as in the case of planning applications).	Chief Accountant
Staffing	None.	
Legal	None. The Charter is not a legally binding document.	
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	The Charter can positively assist the Council in discharging its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between people from different backgrounds.	[Policy & Information Manager]
Environmental/Sustainable Development	None.	Head of Housing and Community Services
Community Safety	None.	Head of Housing and Community Services
Human Rights Act	None.	Head of Housing and Community Services
Procurement	None.	Head of Housing and Community Services
Asset Management	None.	Head of Housing and Community

		Services
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Draft Parish Charter
- Appendix II: Consultation Responses
- Appendix III: Letter to KALC (Maidstone Committee)
- Appendix IV: Proposed Terms of Reference: Task and Finish Group

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.