

A PARISH AND TOWN COUNCIL CHARTER FOR SEFTON

**Sefton Metropolitan
Borough Council**

**Sefton Area Partnership
of
Local Councils**

Dated: 9th October 2014

Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the refresh of the Sefton Town and Parish Charter and recognise the commitment and efforts of the Parish and Town Councillors and Sefton Council Officers, who have worked hard to produce a Charter which is accepted by all parties.

Given the current climate it is important that we are able to work in effective partnership and it is in the spirit of understanding the challenges faced by Sefton MBC that we commit to our continued partnership working with the Town and Parish Councils.

Over the last 3 years the Council has had to save £115m from its budget and we are facing further substantial spending reductions in the coming years. We are, therefore, appreciative of the support of Town and Parish Councils in recognising that we can no longer do what we may have done previously and may not be able to respond in quite the same way as we have done in the past. This must not be seen as a devaluing of the relationship but rather strengthens the message that we must work together for the benefit of the communities of Sefton.

This is a working document and it is hoped that those making use of the Charter do so positively in the spirit in which it has been written; as a set of guiding principles for how we will work together. As we all come together to respond to the challenges presented we must accept that things will change and this Charter will evolve and reflect those changes whilst maintaining at its foundation a continued commitment to partnership working.

Cllr Trish Hardy

Cabinet Member Communities and Environment

Aim

1. To create a framework for Sefton Council and parish/town councils to work in partnership to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.

Introduction

2. Sefton Council and the parish councils of Aintree Village, Formby, Hightown, Ince Blundell, Little Altcar, Lydiate, Maghull, Melling, Sefton, and Thornton have agreed to publish a Charter which sets out how they aim to work together for the benefit of local people. This Charter is the result of in depth discussions held locally to establish a new way of working and to maintain good practice.

3. Sefton Council recognises the importance of parish and town councils as the grass-roots level of local government. By working with them, the Local Area Committee(s) appointed by Sefton Council, and the Sefton Area Partnership of Local Councils (SAPLC), Sefton Council will promote active citizenship and participation.

4. In their role as democratically accountable bodies, parish and town councils offer a means of shaping the decisions that affect their communities. They offer a means of decentralising the provision of certain services and of revitalising local communities. In turn, the parish/town councils recognise the strategic role of Sefton Council and the equitable, efficient and cost-effective distribution of services, which it has to achieve.

5. The Charter recognises that it is imperative that these strategic and local tiers of government operate together in order to secure the effective representation of the needs and aspirations of all Sefton's people. It acknowledges and gives due weight to the important but separate roles and functions carried out by each tier of local government.

6. Sefton Council recognises and understands that the work of parish/town councils is heavily reliant on volunteering and goodwill. The differences between smaller and larger parish/town councils will be respected and all will be treated equitably.

Sustainability

7. Sefton Council will work in partnership with all parish/town councils in its area to promote sustainable social, economic and environmental improvements for the benefit of local communities. It is recognised that the Sustainable Communities Act 2007, as amended, provides an opportunity for principal councils and parish/town councils to ask central Government to remove legislative or other barriers that prevent them from improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas.

Sefton Vision and Strategic Direction

8. Sefton Council will involve parish and town councils in the processes of reviewing and implementing The Vision For Sefton. We will work together on the development and implementation of the Local Plan and the designated Neighbourhood Plans.

9. Furthermore acting through the SAPLC, Sefton Council will undertake to consult and involve parish/town councils accordingly about the content and direction of key strategies that impact upon the local communities they represent.

Local Governance

10. The following arrangements will apply for the engagement of parish and town councils in Sefton Council's local governance arrangements and for liaison between them: -

- Each of the parish/town councils will nominate a representative to sit on the Central Sefton Area Committee, or its successors, without voting rights. The Chair of the SAPLC will be invited to attend in order to assist in this democratic process. The role of the SAPLC will be refined over time.
- Sefton Council will attend an annual meeting or such events with representatives of all parish and town councils that wish to take part.

11. Sefton Council will help administer the holding of parish and town council elections. The respective authorities will work together to limit the costs of holding such elections.

Code of Conduct

12. Both Sefton Council and the parish and town councils have adopted Sefton MBC revised Codes of Conduct with effect from 1 July 2012. The parish/town councils will work with Sefton MBC Audit and Governance Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. Sefton MBC has consulted on and agreed the following arrangement with the SAPLC for the appointment of **two** representatives on to the Initial Assessment, Review and Hearing sub-committees, concerning any written complaint regarding the alleged misconduct and breach of the Code of Conduct of any Parish/Town councillor or co-opted Parish Council member.

Audit and Governance Committee Structure

13. Any complaints received regarding conduct of Parish or Town Councillors will be responded to in accordance with arrangements set out in Chapter 7 of Sefton Council's Constitution:

<http://modgov.sefton.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s55343/Chapter%207%20-%20Regulatory%20and%20Other%20Committees.pdf>

14. The following process has been put in place under the terms of reference of the Audit and Governance Committee:

- **INITIAL ASSESSMENT SUB-COMMITTEE**
To receive and determine whether to refer for investigation or other appropriate action any written complaints regarding alleged misconduct and breach of the Code of Conduct of any Borough or Parish or Town Councillor or Co-opted Member.
- **REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE**
To further review and re-consider the decision of the Initial Assessment Sub-Committee in relation to any decision not to refer an allegation for investigation or any other action which was considered by the Sub-Committee and to determine that matter.
- **HEARING SUB-COMMITTEE**
To hear and determine any complaints which have been referred for investigation.

Delegating Responsibility for Service provision

15. When a parish/town council achieves quality status and they decide to seek to discharge functions on behalf of the principal authority, Sefton MBC will consider these where they provide best value of cost, quality and service. Where service costs are devolved or shared the financial reporting procedure will be agreed by both parties.

Effective Communication

Sefton Council will:

16. Make best use of the information technology available to promote quick and efficient communication. Information can be provided electronically if requested.

17. Maintain an updated contact list of Members on Sefton MBC's website and ensure that information on key contacts is readily available.

18. Use plain English in written communications.

Parish/town councils will:

19. Make best use of the available information technology to facilitate communication with Sefton Council, through the Clerk of the SAPLC or direct through the specific Parish/Town council(s) affected.

20. Make every effort to attend meetings/events run by Sefton Council in which they have an interest.

21. Be able to initiate the Council's formal complaints procedure if they are dissatisfied with Sefton Council's actions, their response to a request for information or their failure to consult.

Service Provision

Sefton Council will:

22. Provide prompt responses to requests for information from parish/town Councils in line with established standards.
23. Provide comprehensive information to allow parish/town councils to decide whether they wish to take on functions/services currently provided by Sefton Council.
24. Allow access to Sefton Council support services (e.g. printing, graphics/mapping, purchasing) at the same cost as they are provided within the Council and within available resources.
25. Give parish/town councils access to **training courses** at the same cost as they are provided within the Council.
26. **Offer briefings on central and local government policies** and initiatives which have an impact on parish/town councils, in conjunction with SAPLC, e.g. Codes of Conduct, financial disciplines and such matters as from time to time may arise.
27. Provide information and advice on training available for clerks and councillors.
28. Consider entering into **Annual Service Level Agreements** with Parish/Town Councils for the provision of Legal, Human Resources/Personnel and financial services or to provide 'one-off' assistance, at an agreed level of cost, where so requested.
29. **Neighbourhood Planning.** Sefton Council has a duty to provide advice and assistance to parish and town councils that elect to undertake neighbourhood planning under the provisions of the Localism Act. A protocol setting out what Sefton will provide and what will be expected from those councils proposing to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan will be agreed. Sefton will fulfil various legal duties. These include publishing neighbourhood area and fora applications, designating neighbourhood areas and fora, publishing submitted plan proposals, appointing an independent examiner, organising the independent examination and referendum.

Further information can be found on www.sefton.gov.uk/neighbourhoodplanning

Parish/town councils will:

30. Make available to Sefton Council their meeting places for public, community or partnership meetings in which they have an interest.
31. Consider whether they wish to take on any functions when enabled to make an informed decision
32. Encourage staff and members to attend relevant training courses and briefings.

33. Operate as the eyes and ears within their Parish and Town Council localities to feed in and work with Sefton MBC where issues are identified.

Consultation

Sefton Council will:

34. Aim to give the parish/town councils the opportunity to comment before taking a decision, which significantly affects the local community. It will therefore consult parish/town councils on significant issues, which are likely to affect their area.

35. Allow a minimum of four weeks for parish/town councils to respond to consultation (unless there is a specified statutory period). If this is not possible, the parish/town council will be given an explanation.

36. Make the following arrangements for consultation on planning:

- To provide the parish /town council with a link to access planning and building regulations and decisions via the Sefton MBC website.
- To allow 21 days for the submission of representations on applications the number of days may be reduced for certain applications of a shorter determination periods).

37. In relation to Sefton Council meetings:-

- Parish and Town Councils have a duty to sign up to receive alerts for specific Council Committees: <http://modgov.sefton.gov.uk/moderngov/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>
- Reports containing confidential or exempt information will not be made available.

38. If appropriate, provide briefing sessions to groups of parish/town councils on complex consultation issues.

Parish/town councils will:

39. Endeavour to take part in consultation exercises and respond within the given period.

40. Notify Sefton Council if they cannot respond to a consultation within the agreed period, but will be making a response.

41. In relation to planning, the parish/town councils will:-

- respond promptly and within 21 days of consultation on a planning application;
- comment on planning applications on planning grounds; and
- assist Sefton Council by reporting local breaches of planning and licensing control, whilst recognising the Council's priority schedule for dealing with complaints and the fact that the enforcement process can be long and difficult if action is required.

42. Work with Sefton Council to seek the views of residents on issues of common interest.

43. Engage in constructive challenge with Sefton MBC to represent the views of residents.

44. Send copies of their agendas, minutes and reports to Sefton Ward Councillors on a timely basis.

45. Officers and Councillors of Sefton Council will be given every opportunity to speak at meetings of the SAPLC and local council meetings on matters of mutual interest if they request to do so.

46. Acknowledge that Sefton Council will not always be able to comply with the requests of parish/town councils but will undertake their best endeavours to respond positively.

Financial Arrangements

47. The financial arrangements between the Sefton MBC and the parish/town councils should be governed by the following principle of achieving best value for money. Sefton MBC will set its Council tax precept equitably and seek to provide such services fairly across all areas. The parish/town councils have the right to raise a levy, in addition to the precept set by Sefton MBC which they can use to provide services over and above those provided by the MBC.

Equality and Diversity

48. In conduction their duties parish and Town Councils are expected to adhere to the equality and diversity duties, policies and procedures of Sefton MBC.

Information Management and Telecommunications Services

49. Sefton Council's public website is available to view at www.sefton.gov.uk.

Sefton MBC will:

50. provide links to Parish and Town Council websites Parish and Town Council websites on the Sefton MBC public website: <http://www.sefton.gov.uk/your-council/parish-and-town-councils.aspx>

Review and Improvement of this Charter

51. This Charter has been the subject of consultation with all parish/town councils. A full review of the Charter will be undertaken every 3 years, however, it will be updated as and when any details change.