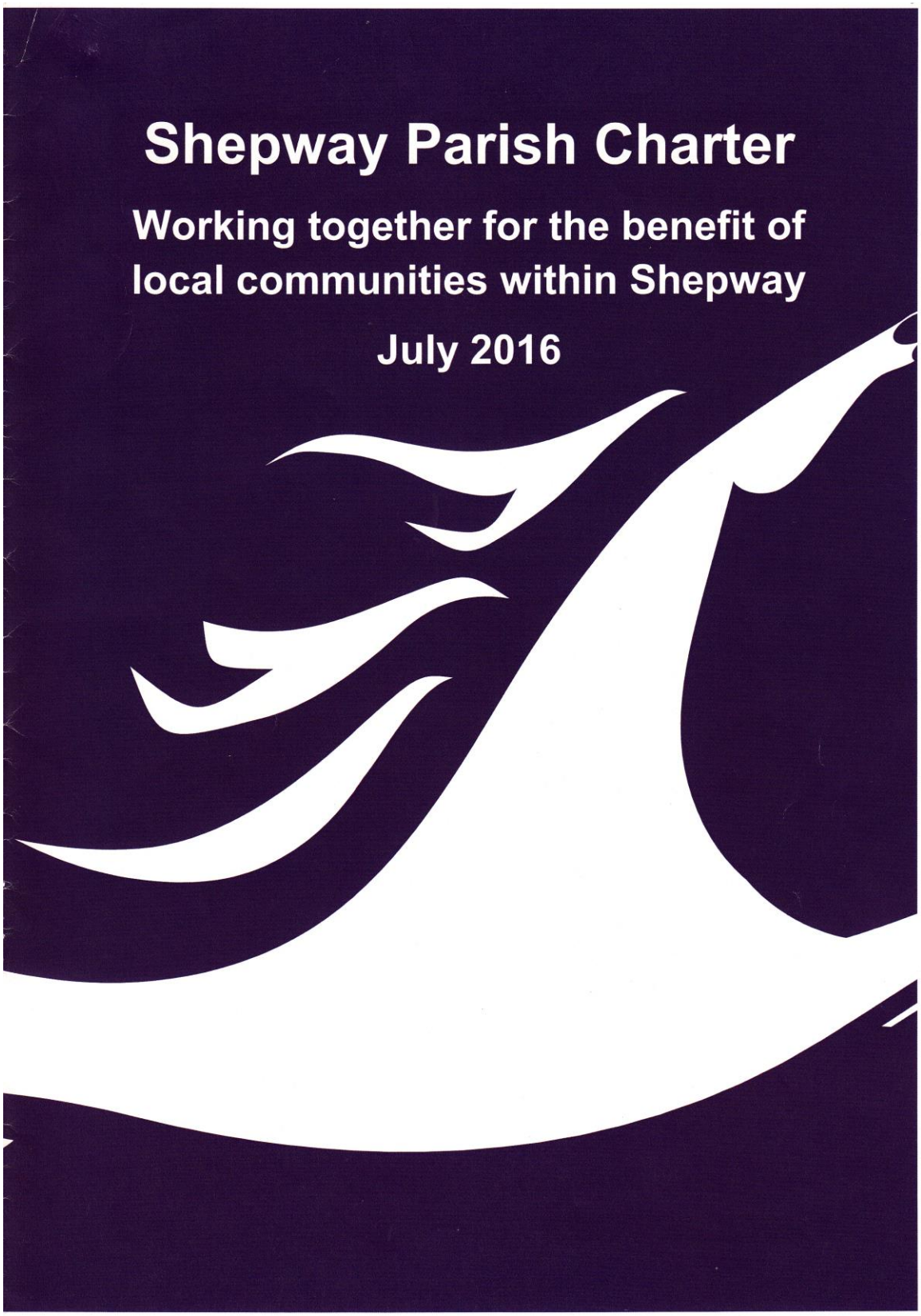
Shepway Parish Charter

Working together for the benefit of local communities within Shepway

July 2016



Foreword

Welcome to the first version of the Shepway Parish Charter.

There are 30 parishes within the district of Shepway, consisting of 5 Town Councils, 19 Parish Councils and a further 6 having a Parish Meeting. Parish Councils play a valuable and essential role in an area, possessing a unique local knowledge of the community that can help with planning and decision making in the local area. We recognise that each parish has a unique character that parishes are committed to protect and enhance.

We want to work closely together in partnership for the benefit of local residents. This charter has been developed between Shepway District Council and the Town & Parish Councils. It acknowledges the role of both councils, providing a framework which enables us all to understand, develop and promote local needs and aspirations. It also recognises the role of the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) on behalf of the parishes within the district.

This Charter is a 'living' document and its relevance and effectiveness will continue to be jointly monitored to ensure it remains of value to those it serves.

Shepway District Parish Charter

Introduction:

This charter has been jointly created by Shepway District Council and the parish councils within the district to ensure that all parties continue to work as efficiently together as possible for the benefit of local people.

Definition:

A charter is a document describing the relationship between two parties and aims to encourage good working practices. This charter represents a mutual agreement between Shepway District Council and each parish council within the district. It is a statement of intent; however it is not a legally binding document.

Aims:

- To clearly define the expectations that both Shepway District Council and the parishes have of each other.
- To set out what both parties can contribute to develop and maintain good relationships.
- To mutually acknowledge the vital roles played by both parties in local democracy.

Key Principles:

This charter is structured around the following key principles:

1. **Communication & Information Sharing**
   Communication and sharing information is an essential resource to enable effective delivery against respective responsibilities and accountabilities.
2. **Consultation and Engagement**
   Engagement is the foundation of partnership working that will underpin the relationship between the local councils.
3. **Democracy and Community Leadership**
   Working together to promote the interests of those directly affected by decisions made within the district.
4. **Planning, Development and Environmental Protection**
   To work together within the planning process for the best interests of our communities.
5. **Service Delivery**
   This recognises the shared roles and responsibilities and sets out the approach for greater partnership working to deliver excellent services.
6. **Finance and Funding**
   A commitment to demonstrate value for money when commissioning or delivering services across the district.
7. **Advice and Support**
   To provide support and advice and act upon the information provided.

Our Commitment

Successful partnership working at a Parish level can only be achieve if they partners understand and respect each other's roles and work to complement those roles in serving the community.

Shepway District Council recognises that Parish Councils are:

- Comprised of voluntary, elected Parish Councillors (its Members) and employed Clerks, many of whom work only part-time and do not have ready access to specialist advice;
- Focused upon the interests of their residents and recognise that each parish has a unique character that parishes are committed to protect and enhance.
- A vital part of democratic local government, representing communities at the most local level;
- An important primary source of information about community history, aspirations and opinions;
- Providing an opportunity to foster greater community empowerment;
- To be respected, treated fairly and recognised as diverse in their size and in the resources available to them;
- Affected by the financial and political decisions of other tiers of government and have to work within certain constraints when fulfilling their responsibilities; and
- Directly, locally and immediately accessible to their residents and are readily accountable at all times.

Parish Councils recognise that Shepway District Council:

- Is comprised of elected District Councillors (its Members) and a full-time body of professional staff;
- Has a political basis for its elected District Councillors and the pressures of organisational continuity for its professional staff;
- Represents the interests of the local community at a district level;
- Has to take into account community interests wider than the parishes areas; and
- Is affected by the financial and political decisions of central government and has to work within statutory limits and certain constraints when fulfilling its strategic role and responsibilities.

Key Principles

1. Communication and Information Sharing

Communication and sharing information is an essential resource to enable effective delivery against respective responsibilities and accountabilities.

All Councils commit to: • Making effective use of websites and emails for timeliness, efficiency and environmental reasons and encourage others to do the same.	
Shepway District Council commits to:	**Parish Councils commit to:**
Holding a publicly accessible, up-to-date list of parish clerks and links to parish webpages on the district council's website: www.shepway.gov.uk	Promptly informing the council of any changes to parish clerk details or other relevant parish information (as appropriate).
Using plain English and avoid, where possible, using jargon when communicating with the parish councils.	Using plain English, avoid using jargon and ask for clarification if an issue is unclear.
Having public links on its website to its compliments, complaints and other feedback processes.	Putting a process in place for compliments, complaints and other feedback, and make residents aware of this, if not already available.
Providing an appropriate contact within the Leadership Support Team for the parishes (outlined under Monitoring & Review section of the Charter).	Updating the district council with parish contact details when changes occur.
Sending by email to each Parish council a copy of relevant media releases and announcements.	Keeping the district council informed of activities going on in their parish.
Hosting six Shepway District & Parish Councils Joint Committee meetings per year to discuss corporate aims and other matters of mutual interest.	Be represented at joint parish committee meetings convened by the District Council.

2. Consultation and Engagement

Engagement is the foundation of partnership working that will underpin the relationship between the local councils.

Shepway District Council commits to:	**Parish Councils commit to:**
Providing a minimum of 6 weeks for consultation on any district wide or specific issues that affect parishes, where possible - other than in cases where the council is bound by other statutory requirements e.g. planning applications.	Actively responding to consultations and putting delegated authority mechanisms in place for issues that cannot be dealt with within this timescale.

Always acknowledging receipt of correspondence, providing an estimate of when a formal response will be forthcoming, and informing parishes of outcomes.	Always acknowledging receipt of correspondence and providing a response, even if it is a 'nil' reply.
Ensuring Parish Clerks and Chairs are notified when matters relating to the District Council may affect a particular Parish.	Working together to seek mutually acceptable solutions to contentious issues.

3. Democracy and community leadership

Working together to promote the interests of those directly affected by decisions made within the district.

Shepway District Council commits to :	Parish Councils commit to:
District councillors will endeavour to attend parish council meetings regularly.	Providing district councillors with papers for parish council meetings in advance.
Encouraging parish council representation on council committees e.g. standards and joint transportation boards.	Encouraging members to attend, where requested.
Continuing to provide the facility for parish councils to have online access to, and sign up for alerts when, committee agendas are published.	Signing up to this service.
Collating and publishing the parish register of interests on behalf of the parish councils.	Updating the council of any changes to this register as soon as possible.
Providing administrative support for parish council elections and locally raised referendums.	Advising the district council of vacancies and promoting these locally, and support all democratic and electoral processes.

4. Planning, Development & Environmental Protection

To work together within the planning process for the best interests of our communities.

Shepway District Council commits to :	Parish Councils commit to:
Ensuring that parish councils have every opportunity to engage in the development of the local plan.	Helping engage local residents in the local plan development process.
Informing parish councils about, and ensuring they have sight of, relevant planning applications and allow the statutory 21 day response period for comments.	Submitting comments within this period to enable the district council to process applications within the timescales set out in the legal framework of the Town and Country Planning Act.

Specifically noting submissions made by parish councils as statutory bodies as part of the planning process.	Clarifying the voting breakdown when providing the parish/town council recommendation reached for planning applications (e.g. number of votes 'for', 'against', 'abstain')
Ensuring parishes can access the online information and alert system, which is updated daily.	Where possible, making effective use of websites, on-line systems and emails for timeliness, efficiency and environmental reasons.
Considering comments and concerns about applications that have an impact on a specific parish or group of parishes.	Endeavouring to send a representative to participate in the Developmental Control Committee meeting, particularly where a parish council has registered an objection to a specific application.
Engaging with parish councils to support and assist town and parish councils in the neighbourhood planning process.	Working closely with the district council and members of the community in the neighbourhood planning process.
Promoting the importance and value of a quality environment and reducing negative environmental impacts across the district.	Maximising the positive environmental impacts through awareness raising and encouraging environmentally positive behavioural changes.
Hosting 3 Planning User Group meetings per year.	Attending the Planning User Group meetings.
Ensure process of collecting CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) and distributing due receipts is undertaken as efficiently as possible.	Engage with Shepway DC in the best use of CIL receipts for local infrastructure including monies due to Town & Parish councils.

5. Service Delivery

This recognises the shared roles and responsibilities and sets out the approach for greater partnership working to deliver excellent services.

All Councils commit to: • Ensuring all service providers meet the required health and safety standards with appropriate public liability insurance and risk assessments.	
Shepway District Council commits to:	**Parish Councils commit to:**
Delivering services on behalf of, and to its residents that are value for money and follow the council's Contract Standing Orders to procure the best services at the right price.	Continuing to ensure value for money when delivering local services, and where appropriate consider alternative providers and collaboration with other parishes to deliver services.

6. Finance and Funding

A commitment to demonstrate value for money when commissioning or delivering services across the district.

Shepway District Council commits to :	Parish Councils commit to:
Collecting precepts as appropriate on behalf of the parish councils.	Returning any required financial information within the set timescales, to allow the council to adhere to its statutory requirements.
Processing precept and other payments to the parish councils within published time scales.	Providing evidence of expenditure relating to any grants or reimbursements received from the district council.
Consulting with parish councils about any budget changes which may have a direct impact on them.	Actively responding to budget consultations within timescales set by the district council.

7. Advice and support

To provide support and advice and act upon the information provided.

Shepway District Council commits to :	Parish Councils commit to:
Ensuring an officer from the relevant service responds to specific queries/issues raised by parish councils.	Taking responsibility for acting on advice given by these officers on issues affecting their community.
Providing contacts on its website-to signpost parish councils to other support.	To ensure contacts are up to date (via leadership.support@shepway.gov.uk

Monitoring and Review

Parish councils are encouraged to express their views on the content and effectiveness of this parish charter.

The Charter will be reviewed every two years or more frequently if substantial changes are made to the Shepway District Council's governance arrangements or to reflect changes to national legislation. Complaints will be handled in accordance with the council's complaints procedure.

Any comments in relation to the Charter should be directed to the Leadership Support Team, Email: leadership.support@shepway.gov.uk, Tel: 01303 853232.

Any parish specific issues and/or day-to-day matters should be directed towards the Council's PAs within Leadership Support Team.
Email: leadership.support@shepway.gov.uk, or
Tel: 01303 853345