

South Gloucestershire Charter for Parish & Town Councils

Aim

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

Promoting the role of parish and town councils

Parish/town councils and South Gloucestershire Council will endeavour to work in partnership for the benefit of the local community while respecting their mutual rights as separate democratic bodies.

South Gloucestershire Council will:

- Recognise the importance of parish/town councils as the grass roots level of local democracy, and work with them to promote active citizenship and participation.
- Provide information/briefings to ensure that staff have a good understanding of the role and function of the parish/town councils and produce a parish profile directory.
- Recognise and understand that the work of parish/town councils is heavily reliant on volunteering and good will. The differences between smaller and larger parish/town councils in terms of ability to handle information and resources will be respected.
- Hold regular liaison meetings with parish and town councils.

Parish/town councils will:

- Actively promote their work and achievements.
- Encourage active citizenship and participation across all age groups.
- Identify local needs and consult with local communities.
- Provide information on the profile of their parish to South Gloucestershire Council to allow the provision of an up to date directory.

Consultation

South Gloucestershire Council will:

- Consult parish/town councils on all issues which are likely to affect their area.
- Allow six weeks for parish/town councils to respond to consultation. If this is not possible the parish/town council will be given an explanation. (This does not apply to planning applications. These are covered in Appendix 1).
- Prepare a summary report for South Gloucestershire Council consultations of more than four pages.
- Provide briefing sessions/workshops to groups of parish/town councils on complex consultation issues.
- Make specific arrangements for consultation on planning (see Appendix 1).
- Have regard to the views of the parish/town councils when making decisions.
- Investigate producing an annual list of key consultations to give parish/town councils advanced notice.
- Keep under review the level and quality of consultation.
- Circulate agendas for Cabinet, Select Committee and Planning Committee meetings to the clerk to the parish/town councils prior to the meetings. The reports to these meetings will be available on request.

Parish/town councils will:

- Endeavour to take part in consultation exercises and respond within the given period.
- Notify South Gloucestershire Council if they cannot respond to a consultation within the given period, but will be making a response.
- Work with South Gloucestershire Council to seek the views of residents on issues of common interest.
- Send copies of their agendas and papers to South Gloucestershire ward councillors. Officers and councillors of South Gloucestershire Council will be given an opportunity to speak at local council meetings on matters of mutual interest if they request to do so.

Effective Communication

South Gloucestershire Council will:

- Make best use of the information technology available to promote quick and efficient communication. Information can be provided electronically if requested.
- Allow extra time for communication sent by conventional mail so as not to disadvantage parish/town councils not equipped with IT.
- Produce a regularly updated contact list of South Gloucestershire Council Officers and Members.
- Look into how they can best assist with the provision of IT and produce regular guidance on the support available.
- Use plain English in written communication.
- Make every effort to attend parish/town council meetings when invited.

Parish/town councils will:

- Make best use of the available information technology to facilitate communication with South Gloucestershire Council.
- Make every effort to attend meetings/events run by South Gloucestershire Council in which they have an interest.
- Provide e-mail address information to South Gloucestershire Council to allow the compilation of the directory of parish/town council e-mail addresses.
- Be able to initiate the Council's formal complaints procedure if they are dissatisfied with South Gloucestershire Council's actions, their response to a request for information or their failure to consult.

Service Provision

South Gloucestershire Council will:

- Provide prompt responses to requests for information from parish/town councils.
- Provide comprehensive information to allow parish/town councils to decide whether they wish to take on functions/services currently provided by South Gloucestershire Council.
- Allow access to South Gloucestershire Council support services (e.g. printing, graphics/mapping, purchasing) at the same cost as they are offered to South Gloucestershire Council staff.

Parish/town councils will:

- Make available to South Gloucestershire Council their meeting places for public, community or partnership meetings in which they have an interest.
- Consider whether they wish to take on any functions when enabled to make an informed decision.

Training

South Gloucestershire Council will:

- Give parish/town councils access to training courses at the same cost as they are offered to South Gloucestershire Council staff.
- Offer briefings on central and local government policies and initiatives which have an impact on parish and town councils, in conjunction with ALCA, eg Best Value, Codes of Conduct.
- Provide information and advice on training available for clerks and councillors.

Parish/town councils will:

- Encourage staff and members to attend relevant training courses and briefings.

Quality Parishes/Services

- Both South Gloucestershire Council and the parish/town councils will recognise the role of ALCA in supporting and promoting the work of local councils.

South Gloucestershire Council will:

- Promote the achievement of the Quality Parish standards set out in the Rural White Paper and support parishes wishing to attain these standards by providing them with the necessary information and advice.
- Parish and town councils will work with South Gloucestershire Council's Standards Committee to promote and maintain high standards of conduct.

Implementation, Review and Improvement

- The Charter for Parish & Town councils has been drafted by a working group of South Gloucestershire Council officers and representatives from the following parish and town councils:

Dyrham & Hinton Parish Council
Bradley Stoke Town Council
Dodington Parish Council
Frampton Cotterell Parish Council
Stoke Gifford Parish Council
Marshfield Parish Council
Yate Town Council

- Consultation with all parish and town councils has been undertaken throughout the process of drafting the parish charter, and changes have been made wherever possible to take account of the views expressed.
- Work is ongoing to continuously improve the Parish Charter. An annual action plan will be produced to implement the Charter. This will be developed and monitored by a working group of officers from South Gloucestershire Council and the parish/town councils. Any parishes which would like to be involved in the working group should contact the Community Planning Division. Improvements to the Charter will be made as they arise, and a formal review will be carried out annually.

PLANNING ISSUES

South Gloucestershire Council will:

- Consult parish/town councils on all applications for planning permission.
- Allow 21 days for the submission of representations by parish/town councils (the statutory minimum is 14 days).
- Notify parish/town councils of any significant amendment to a planning application and allow a further 14 day period for representations to be made before a decision is taken on the amended plan. (Significant amendments are those considered by the case officer to materially affect the planning application, but not to require a new application).
- Report the views of parish/town councils to South Gloucestershire Members on either the Circulated Schedule (proposed decisions under delegated powers) or to the relevant Development Control Committee, in accordance with the Council's scheme of delegation.
- Send, to parish/town councils, a list of proposed decisions appearing on the Circulated Schedule. Where the parish/town council's view on any planning application differs from action proposed under delegated authority, they may make representation to their Ward Councillor who will have the power to seek call in of the application for consideration at a Development Control Committee.
- Notify parish/town councils of all permitted development rights (PDRs) requests and to send copies of plans for permitted development rights to parish/town clerks for their information and comments.
- Notify parish/town councils of all planning decisions.
- Provide parish/town councils with copies of the Planning Committee agenda items on request.
- Allow a representative of parish/town councils to attend and speak at meetings of South Gloucestershire's Sites Inspection Panel in respect of any planning application and to address the Development Control Committee in accordance with the Council's scheme of public participation.
- Endeavour to make officers available to attend meetings of parish/town councils to clarify the details of significant or controversial applications.
- Provide periodic training courses for local councillors and/or parish clerks to aid an understanding of the planning process and the matters, which have a material bearing upon the determination of a planning application.

Parish/Town Councils will:

- Acknowledge that South Gloucestershire will not always be able to accede to the requests of parish/town councils.
- Respond promptly in writing to all planning applications received from South Gloucestershire.
- Comment on planning applications on planning grounds, and specify as fully as possible the reasons for an objection to, or support for, a particular application.
- Create a mechanism whereby the parish/town councils can respond to any amended plans received from South Gloucestershire.
- Assist South Gloucestershire by reporting local breaches of Town and Country Planning Legislation.
- Attend meetings, briefings and training to gain a better understanding of the planning process.

Information Management and Telecommunications Services for Parish and Town Councils

South Gloucestershire Council's public website is available to view at www.southglos.gov.uk.

South Gloucestershire Council will:

- Co-operate with the parish/town councils to provide joined up government for the public.
- Provide parish/town councils with a line on South Gloucestershire Council's Centrex, providing connections are available from Telewest. This line would then operate like an extension on the South Gloucestershire Council switchboard, offering free internal calls within the Council.
- Allow parish/town councils to have an account on South Gloucestershire Council's internal e-mail system, known as Groupwise. There is a cost to set up this service.
- Host websites created by parish/town councils on South Gloucestershire Council's website. This service is free. For further details see the notes at: www.southglos.gov.uk/corporate/website/siteinfo.htm

Please note:

- Internet access is available economically from commercial providers and the Council is unable to offer this service.
- Access to the Council's internal intranet will not be available to parish/town councils for reasons of confidentiality and data protection.

Financial Arrangements

The financial arrangements between South Gloucestershire Council and the parish/town councils should be governed by the following principles which are, in effect, among those underlying the concept of Best Value:

- Fairness between council tax bills in parished and non-parished areas, and between different parish/town councils.
- Fairness in the provision of services (and access to them) by the South Gloucestershire Council between different parts of the area.
- Simplicity – to keep administrative costs of operation to a minimum.
- Transparency – to help understanding.
- Democratic control and accountability – to let parish and town councils support additional services with additional expenditure while ensuring accountability to all those responsible for funding. This means distinguishing between funding by South Gloucestershire Council (for a service carried out by a parish/town council) and funding raised by parish/town councils themselves (e.g. using their precepting powers).