



# Town and Community Councils Charter

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol



This is a review of the original Charter first published in 2009.

The review of the Charter is as a result of the publishing of Welsh Government's White Paper Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People which outlines the Welsh Government's statement of intent about the future of Local Government in Wales.

This document is available online at [www.bridgend.gov.uk/tcccharter](http://www.bridgend.gov.uk/tcccharter) and printed copies are also available at local Town and Community Council offices across Bridgend County.

The Charter has the full approval and commitment of the Town and Community Councils of Bridgend County Borough and will be reviewed annually to continue to reflect best practice and statute as necessary.

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## Leader's Welcome

The Community and Town Councils of Bridgend County Borough and Bridgend CB Council have always recognised that working together provides clear benefits to the local communities. This Charter sets out how all partners will work together to build on their existing good working relationships and displays the commitment of each partner for the benefit of local citizens.

All across the UK, local councils are facing unprecedented challenges following reduced Government funding and increased demands on essential services. The Welsh Government is considering the findings of the Williams Commission report which has laid out recommendations for re-organising local authorities, reducing the number of councils and changing the way in which services are delivered in future.



Councillor Mel Nott OBE, Leader of Bridgend County Borough Council

Against this backdrop, the Town and Community Councils Charter has been revised to recognise that change is expected and to outline the promise of all partners to embrace the challenges ahead in order to achieve outcomes and demonstrate citizen-focused delivery of services.

One of the most important functions of the Charter is to encourage the more widespread adoption of good practice and engagement between Bridgend CBC and Community and Town Councils. In light of the considerable pressures on local authorities now more than ever it is important that partners aim to work together to meet some of these challenges. It is therefore an opportune time to review the Charter. It provides the platform for dialogue and engagement between partners.

The Charter is designed to build on existing good practice and embrace feedback from all partners in Bridgend County Borough. It reflects the shared principles of openness, honesty and our common priorities of putting citizens at the centre and encouraging democratic participation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mel Nott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

## Partners to the Charter

We the undersigned declare our commitment to the revised Bridgend Town and Community Councils Charter and embrace the spirit of this agreement.

Partners	Signature
Brackla Community Council	
Bridgend Town Council	
Cefn Cribwr Community Council	
Coity Higher Community Council	
Cornelly Community Council	
Coychurch Higher Community Council	
Coychurch Lower Community Council	
Garw Valley Community Council	
Laleston Community Council	
Llangynwyd Lower Community Council	
Llangynwyd Middle Community Council	
Maesteg Town Council	
Merthyr Mawr Community Council	
Newcastle Higher Community Council	
Ogmore Valley Community Council	
Pencoed Town Council	
Porthcawl Town Council	
Pyle Community Council	
St. Brides Community Council	
Ynysawdre Community Council	
Bridgend County Borough Council	



# The Principles of Working Together

## Recognition

The Welsh Government published a White Paper in February 2015, Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People. This White Paper outlines the Welsh Government's statement of intent about the future of Local Government in Wales, which will be based on a smaller number of stronger councils. Following the passage of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill, this will enable Local Government to determine with local people the bulk of their local priorities.

We as partners to the Charter, recognise the clear benefits of partnership working whilst at the same time recognise and respect each partner's role. We aim to work together as a partnership of equals and encourage public participation in local government and the local community.

In order to reflect the recommendations of the White Paper, the ambition of Town and Community Councils will be raised so that they are better placed to deliver important community services in the future. This means building capacity and capability, as well as strengthening governance and engagement with other services, the third and voluntary sectors.

The Charter is in recognition of the challenges we face in partnership.

As partners we recognise:

- Our roles are in partnership and we will work together to engage the local people of Bridgend County to revitalise our communities;
- That significant challenges are ahead of us as partners and in our communities;
- We will work together to find the best way to provide services for our citizens now and in the future;
- The diversity of our partners and our communities and will respect one another's roles;
- And finally, we recognise the importance of this Charter as a means of evidencing to the citizens of Bridgend our commitment to the partnership and to our local communities.





## Sharing Information and Open Communication

We appreciate the need for timely, clear and relevant information and communication in fostering good relationships and better joint working for the benefit of local people. We recognise and will utilise the strengths and areas of expertise of all partners involved. Bridgend CBC will ensure that all relevant staff are aware of the commitments to the Charter to ensure timely and fulfilling responses to partners.

To ensure good communications and information sharing partners will:

- Provide and keep up to date the relevant contact information to each other;
- Provide documents electronically in order to reduce costs and the environmental impact, but provide hard copies when appropriate;
- In order to make the most out of forum meetings, clerks will be given the opportunity to hold a pre-meeting when partners deem it appropriate beforehand. Ensuring that the forum agenda meets the needs of partners whilst guaranteeing time at the meeting is well spent;
- In order to support more open communication between partners, Bridgend CBC will share the Council's Forward Work Programme with partners to provide a sight of what issues are coming up in the medium to longer term work of the Council;
- As well as providing links between partner websites to provide easier access to online information to local people.



## Working in Partnership To Encourage Active Community Engagement

At the heart of the White Paper Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People, is a vision for local government in Wales which acclaims a new relationship with our local communities. Any proposals will need to ensure that partners work more closely with their communities.

To facilitate the closer community working, all partners will work together towards a common set of goals, based on equality in terms of ownership, decision-making and recognition of each partner's contribution. An equal and effective partnership brings benefits and responsibilities to all those involved and we must work together to engage with citizens and promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of our communities.

Working in partnership we will:

- Provide opportunities for clerks to network to promote good partnership working arrangements, discuss common concerns and resolve issues. Relevant officers and councillors will attend meetings as agreed, having the opportunity to speak on matters of mutual interest;
- Ensure engagement between partners to better meet the citizen's needs so that service providers can reflect this engagement in their service delivery and design in the future;
- Consider the long-term social, economic and environmental improvements to our local neighbourhoods by considering alternative ways to provide services and ownership of assets; giving consideration to all cases for Community and Town Council run services and recognising when this is appropriate or not;
- Engage with citizens and the Third sector in the communities we serve, to better understand their needs and feedback to partners working together on joint projects.

## Local Governance and Ethics

We will be clear about the expectations that we have of each other in order to facilitate a smooth working relationship. In this regard, we will define the way in which we interact with each other.

We will be clear about the role of councillors at all levels in the relationship and in community leadership. Elected members of Bridgend County Borough Council and Town and Community Councils acknowledge the need to provide an ethical service to local people and for all councillors to abide by the Code of Conduct.



# Engagement And Consultation

We appreciate the importance of meaningful consultation and set out a genuine commitment among all parties to consult on matters of mutual concern. We will agree clear, specific and time limited procedures and processes for consultation.

Engagement and consultation with our citizens is the bedrock of our partnership and to our responsibilities of representing our communities. Without meaningful consultation and genuine commitment to community engagement, the partnership will be unproductive.

In order to give due credit and recognition to the views and concerns of our local people, as partners:

- Bridgend CBC promises to give Community and Town Councils the opportunity to comment before making a decision that affects the local community and will ensure that public reports, agendas and other relevant documents will be made available on the website as soon as possible
- Bridgend CBC will take into account relevant Town and Community Council meetings dates and will provide feedback from consultation to them to which they have contributed

The importance of working more closely is recognised by the partnership. Bridgend CBC recognises that Town and Community Councils have an important role to play in the representation of local communities. Town and Community Councils will assist with communication and engagement activities, raising awareness of proposals for change to public services. In addition, potential exists for Town and Community Councils to provide some services directly.

It is recognised that there is much work to be done to investigate these possibilities and to develop our already positive relationship further.

The process of strengthening joint working would benefit from the inclusion of the third (not for profit) sector who have an important role to play in supporting this work. The partnership will investigate the ongoing development of opportunities that exist in working more closely with each other and the voluntary sector to progress opportunities as well as to build capacity and capability within all organisations to support new ways of working.

Initially the work will focus on the development of relationships and in gaining a greater understanding of the mechanisms (such as Community Asset Transfers) involved in this area. Work will follow to develop specific proposals, for future service reviews which will be incorporated into the Action Plan.



## Community Led Planning

Community and Town Councils know and understand their local area and must be able to comment effectively on planning matters. The County Borough Council is able to take an overview of the needs of the whole local area and make decisions, taking local views into account.

Community-led planning has always been at the heart of our communities. The partnership must continue to adapt to local community developments and provide support to ensure they can meet the needs of the community and take their views into account.

With this in mind, partners are committed to:

- Consulting with each other on planning applications, electronically where possible to ensure costs are managed and to reduce harm to our environment;
- Providing the necessary information on Planning Committee meetings and site visits;
- Allowing partners to address Development Control Committee;
- Informing partners of the decision electronically within 5 days and in writing within 7 days, enabling all partners to be kept up to date with the reasons for the decision including feedback and explanatory information.

Partners will continue to consult throughout the whole Local Development Process and on new Supplementary Planning Guidance to ensure that a professional and objective appropriate to planning matters.

Partners recognise the importance of maintaining public confidence in the fairness of the decision-making of the planning process. Therefore it is vital that all Bridgend CBC Members abide by the Council's Planning Code of Practice and all Members of Town and Community Councils will abide by sections 1 and 4 of the BCBC Planning Code of Practice.

## Developing our Staff and Members

In order to nurture an environment of professionalism and effective partnership working, naturally we will support and encourage the continuous development of our officers and members.

We will provide the necessary training and practical support and will offer access to relevant information in order to support effective partnership-working to demonstrate a valuable service to our communities.

This includes member induction training and providing supporting information to enable them to undertake their role and to understand the role and functions of Bridgend CBC and the partnership arrangement.

## Financial Arrangements

Both the County Borough Council and Town and Community Councils recognise the need for clarity and transparency in financial arrangements. All parties also recognise the benefit of being able to explore opportunities for delivering services in partnership in the future and that a number of councils already have such arrangements. In developing and implementing financial arrangements, relevant national and local priorities will be taken into account.

All partners understand and respect each partner's priorities in the delivery of services and their own funding arrangements now and how they may change in the future.

Where possible, partners will work together to promote joint working and effective delivery of joint services. Understanding the impacts of reduced budgets and increasing demands, partners will work together to address these issues echoing their own priorities.

Bridgend CBC, in setting the annual council tax for each will have regard to the funding and demand on services already being delivered by Community and Town Councils; ensuring support for further joint working arrangements and using the Town and Community Council Fund to promote the partnership working.





## Working Together to Ensure a Sustainable Future

We all agree to send electronic documents where possible to protect the environment and reduce waste.

Encouraging communities in sustainable practices such as energy, waste, local food and transport, looking for opportunities to get people involved in projects to support further sustainable development and activities for local people.

## Local Community Strategy

The Community Strategy is developed by the Bridgend Local Service Board and is the overarching strategy for the local area. It sets out the key priorities for each area and how partners will work together to address them. The LSB is made up of the most senior representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors and its aim is to deliver improved outcomes for local people by ensuring that partners work effectively together in pursuit of agreed priorities in the Community Strategy.

Partners are committed to consulting and contributing to the development of the strategy, responding actively to the consultation and engaging with the partners who represent our towns and communities to participate in the partnership monitoring and implementation of the strategy.

## Local Democracy

With increasing devolution, our local elections are becoming progressively more important and key to our local decision-making and empowerment of our communities. The partnership will continue to encourage local people to become more involved in their local democracy, publicising forthcoming local elections, maximising community representation and facilitation of meetings.

More specifically, Bridgend CBC will help publicise these elections on behalf of town and community councils, briefing clerks on the nomination process to support potential candidates, running the associated legal and administrative processes ending with a prompt and clear invoice to Town and Community Councils when relevant.

Town and Community Councils will inform Electoral Services of vacancies and ensure compliance within the statutory requirements, paying promptly upon receipt of the invoice.

The involvement of our local people in the democratic process is incredibly important. In these unprecedented times of financial challenges that we as partners face, it is vital to ensure that people feel involved in their community and society as a whole. Involving people in the political process helps strengthen the bond to their local community.

## Joint Monitoring and Review of Charter

In order that the Charter is a useful, useable tool which supports the partnership working between Bridgend CBC and the Town and Community Councils, it is agreed that the partners will use the Action Plan to act as a base document against which progress can be assessed and helps set out what the partnership is aiming to achieve each year. It will also explain who has responsibility for each agreed action

The Action Plan will be discussed and updated at each forum meeting, the Charter and Action Plan will be reviewed annually in order that it remains a valid tool for the partnership.



## Action Plan

This Charter will be supported by the development of an annual Action Plan.

The Action Plan will list the steps that must be taken in order to achieve the goals of the partnership in these challenging times.

The Action Plan will help partners:

- Agree partnership objectives and priorities;
- Clarify any resources that are required to reach each of the partnership's objectives;
- Formulate a timeline for when specific tasks need to be completed;
- Determine any resources required.

The Action Plan can be found in the Appendix and will be updated at each forum meeting. Bridgend CBC will nominate a lead officer for the development and monitoring of the Action Plan. The work plans for the relevant service areas in Bridgend CBC will reflect the Action Plan.

## References

- Devolution, Democracy and Delivery White Paper - Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People 2015
- Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015





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