

ST ALBANS CITY AND DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO : CABINET

DATE : 2 March 2010

REPORT TITLE : Parish Charter

WARDS : ALL PARISHED WARDS

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR ROBERT DONALD, COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATIONS
COUNCILLOR ANTHONY ROWLANDS, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

CONTACT OFFICER : Jane Ratford, Marketing & Consultation Officer
01727 819518, Jane.Ratford@stalbans.gov.uk

James Blake, Chief Policy and Partnership Officer
01727 819264, james.blake@stalbans.gov.uk

1. **Purpose Of Report**

1.1 To request Cabinet approves the draft Parish Charter.

2. **Recommendations**

2.1 That Cabinet considers the draft Parish Charter and gives its approval.

2.2 That in the event of any substantive final issues being raised by the individual parishes or the St Albans District Association of Parish Councils, the Chief Policy and Partnerships Officer, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holders, be delegated authority to make changes to the Charter and Action Plan.

2.3 For Cabinet to endorse the Action Plan as an evolving document to be reviewed at each Parish Conference

3. **Corporate Policy Implications including Equalities and Equalities Impact Assessment**

3.1 The draft Parish Charter aims to improve joint working between the three local government tiers. It sets out roles and responsibilities with the aim of shaping services that are more efficient and responsive to the needs of local communities. The tough financial climate makes this a more urgent task.

3.2 The Parish Charter will help contribute to the Council's suite of strategic policies. It supports community engagement, which is one of the target 'gap areas' of the Sustainable Community Strategy. It will also help to deliver the Council's corporate priority of providing better value for money services.

3.3 The Charter gives parishes a stronger role in the governance and delivery of services in St Albans City and District. Parishes have already been involved in streetscene and rural vision work, and Cabinet recently agreed a new governance framework for the Cleaner District/Public Realm and District Vision which includes parishes representation on working groups for each of these priorities.

4. Financial implications

4.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

5. Legal and Property Implications

5.1 There are no direct legal implications as a result of this report.

6. Workforce implications

6.1 There are no immediate workforce implications as a result of this report.

7. Background Information

7.1 New arrangements for parishes have been in place since January, 2008 which involve a twice yearly Parish Conference bringing together key members and officers from the District Council and the parishes. At the Parish Conference in April 2009, a commitment was made to work together to develop a draft Parish Charter.

8 Draft Parish Charter

8.1 The draft Parish Charter is attached at Appendix A. It has been developed by a Task and Finish Group with representatives from Harpenden Town Council; St Albans District Association of Parish Councils; St Albans District Council and Hertfordshire County Council. Opportunities for all parishes to feed in their views was part of the drafting schedule and a special meeting of the St Albans District Association of Parish Councils was held towards the end of the process. The draft Parish Charter was presented to the third Parish Conference in November 2009.

8.2 The main part of the Parish Charter is a set of key principles which aim to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all three tiers of local government, to help them work together for the benefit of local communities. The Charter is intended to be adaptable to different parishes who may have different needs and capacities. The Task and Finish Group recognised that in some areas and for some services, more detailed work will be needed to develop new ways of working, and therefore it has prepared a separate action plan which will be updated and developed and discussed at each Parish Conference. The action plan aims to encourage three tier ownership of each project, with involvement from each level of local government. Project timescales have been indicated and will be refined shortly in consultation with the parishes. The action plan is attached at Appendix B.

- 8.3 The content of the draft Parish Charter deals with the three tiers of local government. It outlines clear roles and responsibilities of the partners. It specifies standards – especially on consultation and communication. And there are options for delivering services, ranging from collaboration to devolvement. The Action Plan, to support the Parish Charter, is now being developed based on feedback from the Parish Conference workshops.
- 8.4 Following its presentation to the Parish Conference, parishes are now in the process of gaining approval for the draft Parish Charter in their respective councils with an expected sign off, by most, by the end of February, 2010. Herts County Council will also formally endorse the Charter.
- 8.5 The latest information is that the following town and parish councils have signed off the Charter: Harpenden Town Council; Sandridge; St Stephen; Redbourn and Wheathampstead. Colney Heath is planning to discuss the Charter at its 4 March meeting and London Colney has requested more information regarding the action plan with a view to further discussion of the Charter in March.
- 8.6 The St Albans District Association of Parish Councils will meet on 23 February to consider the Charter. There will be an oral update to Cabinet on the outcomes of this meeting.
- 8.7 Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Internal Performance) considered the Charter at its 27 January meeting. The Chairman commented that the document had been well written and attractively produced.
- 8.8 The key principles outlined below encapsulate the areas the Parish Charter will affect:
1. **Trust and mutual respect** – to build relationships that work and achieve mutually agreed prior results.
 2. **Communication** – effective communication to foster good relationships.
 3. **Consultation** – meaningful and timely consultation as a pathway to the deliver of quality services.
 4. **Advice and Support** – building resilience and expertise to make the most of local ambition, including support for the obtainment of Quality Status.
 5. **Collaboration on service shaping and delivery** – harnessing knowledge and expertise to create continuously improving, customer centred services.
 6. **Better value** – the development of clear process and criteria to review whether services can be devolved and delivered as close to local communities as possible, while retaining or improving their quality at the same or lower cost as now.

9 Benefits

- 9.1 The benefits of a Parish Charter are outlined below:

- Improved joint working – better knowledge and understanding of each others roles will help to building trust and mutual respect.
- More efficient and responsive services – there is potential for parishes to play a bigger role in the creation, shaping and delivery of local services with the aim of delivering more services closer to the customer.
- Co-ordinated, communication and consultation – giving information and receiving feedback from local communities can be greatly enhanced by working closely with parishes.
- Sharing advice and support – building resilience and expertise in the parishes will help to make the most of local ambition. County and district can assist through training, expertise and sharing good practice.

9.2 Cabinet is invited to consider the draft Parish Charter and provide any feedback.

10 Conclusion

10.1 This report sets out the draft Parish Charter for consideration by Cabinet.

10.2 Following Cabinet approval, a formal signing event of the Charter will be organised to mark the Charter coming into operation.

11 Further Information/Appendices

11.1 Appendix A: Draft Parish Charter

11.2 Appendix B: Draft Action Plan

12 Background Papers - Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

Bibliography

Custodian

File Location

Draft Parish Charter

Marketing and Consultation
Manager

Council Offices