

PARISH CHARTER

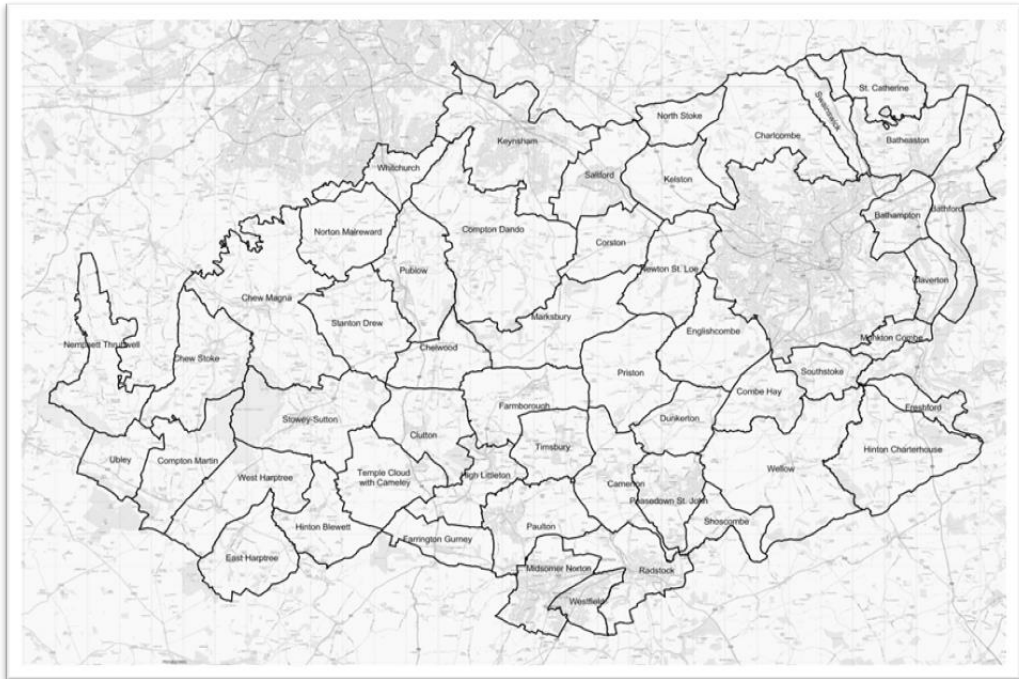
between

Bath & North East Somerset Council

Improving People's Lives

and

the Parish Councils of Bath and North East Somerset



Introduction

Our Parish Charter has one simple aim - **to provide a framework for us to work together to serve the people of Bath and North East Somerset**. We have a common purpose to promote the wellbeing of Bath and North East Somerset, and we serve the same residents.

The Charter is an essential guide to working with Parishes for Clerks, officers and Councillors – both Ward and Parish. We also hope it will be of more general interest - for example to voluntary groups wishing to work with Parish Councils.

This version, updated in 2025, continues to build on the strong tradition of joint working between Bath & North East Somerset Council and the Parish and Town Councils in its area. A testament to our relationship, and strong foundation of partnership working, is the way in which Parishes and Bath and North East Somerset Council came together during the Covid-19 pandemic to jointly and effectively respond to our communities' needs.

The Charter also recognises the continuing challenges in the delivery of public services - from ongoing financial constraints; demographic changes and cost of living pressures, to the impact of climate emergency for our communities now and in the future.

In updating this version of the Charter, the Core Commitments remain. We have however added to them to incorporate the challenges described above. We have also set out how we will manage our relationship – putting things right when they go wrong as well as celebrating the things that go well.

We recognise that the Charter is not able to include everything we do, but it needs to be a working document that is read, understood and offers practical information. The key strengths of our Parish Councils and the principles of effective partnership working remain. Clear communications are also central to successful collaboration. We have therefore redesigned the Charter into four sections:

- **Our Values and Core Charter Commitments:** our values and commitments in promoting the wellbeing of residents of Bath and North East Somerset
- **How we make this happen:** setting out the expectations that will improve the ways in which we work together, highlighting what we do well, the challenges facing us and specific examples of local good practice that we can build on.
- **Parish Information Pack:** A dynamic and practical tool for Parish Clerks and Councillors to assist them in navigating Bath & North East Somerset Council services, reporting issues and how to get support.
- **Monitoring and review:** setting out how we will monitor and review the Charter, how we might know we are succeeding and the procedure to follow if it is believed the Charter is not being upheld.

We will ensure that the Parish Charter and associated documents are made available on our websites. We recognise that information will change over time and we will review and update regularly.

Footnote: In the Charter, we have used the phrases “Parishes” or “Parish Councils” for simplicity throughout. It relates to Town, Parish and Village Councils and Parish Meetings. However, allowance needs to be made for the differing legal framework of Parish Meetings.

Our Parish Charter

One simple aim:

Together to serve the people of Bath and North East Somerset

Our Values

We achieve this by:

- maintaining high ethical standards, **respecting and valuing each other**
- being good partners and continuously **strengthening relationships**
- providing **practical support** and helping each other out
- making the best use of our **skills and resources**

Our Core Charter Commitments

Strategic Objectives

We will:

- work together, and with other key stakeholders, to identify our long-term objectives and priorities to help address the significant challenges facing our area and to promote local economic, social and environmental wellbeing. In doing this, we will value the roles, responsibilities and opinions of our respective Councils.
- work together and support each other to act on the causes and impact of climate change to protect our environment.
- work together to ensure inclusivity and equality in the delivery of services for all residents

Consultation, Communication and Engagement

We will:

- engage with, and consult each other, when a planned decision would have a specific and direct or significant impact on Bath & North East Somerset Council, a Parish Council, or its area, or its residents. This to include allowing adequate time to respond and ensuring the format facilitates a collective response.
- use our local engagement meetings, including Parish Liaison and Connecting Communities Forums, to put in place shared projects and identify key local priorities.

Democracy and Community Leadership

We will:

- champion local democracy and encourage local residents to participate fully in the local democratic process. To support this, Bath & North East Somerset Council will inform all Parishes about all elections, including by-elections.
- respect the democratic mandates of all our individual Councils within their legal and service remits, recognising that Bath & North East Somerset Council and Parish Councils exist as separate bodies and have separate tax raising powers.
- recognise a shared interest in support for local community facilities and work together within legal and policy framework to achieve this where possible.

Delivering for Residents

We will:

- work together to address the significant challenges facing our area. As resources tighten, we will collaborate in supporting communities to do more for their local areas and make the best use of new ways of working, with greater emphasis on the use of digital technology as staffing resources reduce.
- work together to try and answer residents' queries at the first point of contact, signposting as necessary, regardless of whether the query is to a Parish or to Bath & North East Somerset Council.
- use the following joint principles for any devolution of services to Parish and Town Councils:
 - By choice, not imposed
 - One size doesn't fit all
 - All liabilities to be declared openly on both sides
 - Give proper notice of changes
 - Be clear on what is being transferred and over what timescales
 - Encourage Parishes to cluster as appropriate
 - Set up a support offer- eg training/equipment
- work together to protect the most vulnerable in our community and support our communities to build capacity so that they can deliver more for their local areas
- make the best use of new ways of working, including digital technology, to improve how we work together and deliver services.

How we make this happen

Delivering our Charter commitments requires partners to continue to build strong relationships and work together to effectively respond to our communities' needs. How we make this happen is crucial to our success.

The foundations for the Charter start with our engagement through Parish Liaison and Area Forums. We recognise that the area is diverse with differing needs and priorities and have taken a Place based approach to understand local issues, interconnections and relationships to aid the co-ordination of action and investment to improve quality of life.

Our Parish Liaison meetings are attended by Parish representatives as well as Bath & North East Somerset Cabinet Members, Ward Councillors and officers from Bath & North East Somerset Council. In more recent times, the format has changed to introduce a 'World Café' style session to encourage conversation, build relationships and respond to issues. Meetings are organised collaboratively to ensure timely, appropriate and relevant discussions take place.

Parishes are also actively involved in the Area Forums, taking part in discussions with Bath & North East Somerset Council and key stakeholders, contributing vital local knowledge and information.

In 2024 a survey of Parishes was held. The results of the survey highlighted that 86% of Parishes and their community said that transport was their top priority. They also identified community safety; climate and nature emergency; connectivity; planning and development as other priorities for their communities. This information helps us shape our engagement.

During the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020, Bath & North East Somerset Council were extremely grateful to its Parishes who responded quickly and made the best use of their local resources. Parishes played a vital role in actively supporting residents with shopping, prescriptions and other necessities to ensure the most vulnerable in communities were supported. Many Parishes initiated their own volunteer schemes, or supported community organisations in doing this. Bath & North East Somerset Council established the Community Wellbeing Hub which continues to help simplify access to health and other support services. The working relationships that had been built up over many years enabled this joint effort to be realised and demonstrate the essence of the Charter.

Parishes have also played an important role in supporting the development of new systems such as Fix My Street. User testing with Parishes enabled us to gain useful insights to report and feedback on issues. Their local knowledge and intelligence helped to improve the offer for the whole community.

Communications are key in building positive relationships. We make good use of e-bulletins, newsletters, social media and websites to share information with each other and local communities. This includes promotion of partnership working, good practice and successes.

It is impossible to summarise the work we do together in one page, however, our core commitments underpin everything we do and the approaches we take.

Parish Information Pack

In 2023, we developed a Parish Information Pack to provide the practical information and service standards that were previously included in the Charter in a more user friendly and accessible format.

It contains details of the key day to day queries Parishes may have and the processes to follow. It aims to assist Parish Clerks and Councillors to navigate the services of Bath & North East Somerset Council; identify the support available and report issues.

It is in a format that can be easily updated and made available on our website. We will work together to ensure the content is relevant and current.

Monitoring and Review

A Working Group comprising Parish representatives including BANES ALCA officers and representatives of Bath & North East Somerset Council meets several times a year and collaborates on:

- the setting of agendas for Parish Liaison meetings
- issues relating to implementation of the Parish Charter
- working practices to enhance the relationship with Parishes
- the review and refresh of the Parish Charter
- the celebration and sharing of our work and building of relationships

Parishes may enquire about joining the group to Bath & North East Somerset Council's Corporate Engagement Team or BANES ALCA.

Resolving Issues

The Working Group also works to resolve any concerns Parishes might have regarding the Charter and can be contacted either through BANES ALCA or Bath & North East Somerset Council.

Review

The Charter commitments will be reviewed every four years. However, we will keep the Parish Information Pack and supporting documents up to date and review these annually.