

# **The Cabinet**

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Author: Steve Milton, Principal Democratic Services Officer  
01722 434255

[smilton@salisbury.gov.uk](mailto:smilton@salisbury.gov.uk)

# **REPORT**

**Councillor K Wren: Leader**

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## **WILTSHIRE CHARTER FOR LOCAL COUNCILS**

**1. Report Summary:**

The Wiltshire Association of Local Councils is seeking the views of the Council and the parishes in the area on a revised version of the Wiltshire Charter for Local Councils. The closing date for responses is 29<sup>th</sup> October 2004.

**2. Background:**

The consultation paper follows up the commitment of the principal authorities in Wiltshire and the Wiltshire Association of Local Councils to review and revise the first Wiltshire Charter for Local Councils produced in 1996. The Charter set out the relationship between the County Council and the District Councils, on the one hand, and local councils, on the other, defining for the first time what each could expect of the other.

The current document (attached as Annex A) seeks to revise this earlier agreement, and to extend the range of partners to the Charter, to include the Police, the Combined Fire Authority, and the three Primary Care Trusts that serve the county. The revised Charter sets some challenges to local councils and principal authorities that are above and beyond minimum statutory obligations such as:

- a commitment from local councils to consult with their communities and publish local priorities in the form of a plan for the area;
- partners to present information to local councils in an easily understood format, highlighting issues of local concern;
- local councils to publish an annual report;
- partners to provide information about their work at local level, including key contacts, performance targets and standards and key financial information about the costs of services;
- partners to consider any reasonable proposals from local councils, to take on particular service responsibilities and be clear about what levels of service and funding will be expected;
- local councils will explore ways to co-operate with other town and parish councils, Community Area Partnerships, Local Strategic Partnerships and other local bodies in the area, to find effective solutions to common problems or issues; and
- The Wiltshire Association of Local Councils will submit an annual report on the operation of the Parish Charter to the Wiltshire Strategic Board, containing an assessment of the effectiveness of current arrangements, and any recommendations for change.

The intention of this revised Charter is for it to become a 'living' document; it looks for a 'Wiltshire Charter Implications' on all officer reports which will keep the relationship on every agenda.

### 3. **Implications for the Council:**

The Wiltshire Charter is a commendable document that seeks to reinforce and extend the excellent working relationship that has developed between Salisbury District Council and local town and parish councils in the area. In that respect it is to be warmly welcomed. However, things have changed for local authorities since 1996 with tougher performance targets and more exacting assessments carried out by National Government. Increasingly, funding is linked to performance.

This stringent new regime often impedes the Council's desire to further develop the relationship with local councils. The recent change to the way parishes are involved in the development control process is an example of how pressure from central government is forcing this authority to change the way it works. The highly prescriptive protocol proposed for the delivery of development control (Annex B) does not take into account these recent constraints. Indeed, this Council has only recently adopted a new scheme of delegation for planning following consultation with parishes, area committees and the scrutiny panels. For this reason, it is considered that the planning protocol should be removed from the Charter. In its place should be a statement setting out how the Council will continue to consult with parishes in order to reach local agreements relating to detailed service protocols that reflect local circumstances.

Notwithstanding these new constraints, the Council remains as committed as ever to working positively with parish and town councils in a spirit of partnership. The Charter can be seen as a mechanism for delivering this commitment through the day-to-day working of the Council.

The area committees have been invited to consider the Charter. The views of the Southern and Western Area Committees are attached as Annex C and the views of the Northern Area Committee will be circulated following its meeting on 14 October.

### 4. **Recommendations**

- (1) that the Council welcomes the new Charter;
- (2) notwithstanding (1) above, it is accepted that as was the case with development control, local authorities will need to consult with local town and parish councils to develop practical local service protocols that reflect local circumstances (as outlined in Para. 3 in this report above), consequently this Council is unable to sign up to the planning protocol attached to the Charter; and
- (3) that Cabinet may wish to forward the comments received from the area committees to the Wiltshire Association for Local Councils without further comment.

### 5. **Background Papers**

Letter from WALC dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 2004.

#### **Implications**

- **Financial:** None
- **Legal:** Not a statutory requirement
- **Personnel:** None
- **Community Safety:** the Charter will also involve the local Constabulary
- **Council's Core Values:**
  - Wanting to be an open learning council and willing partner
  - Communication with the public
- **Ward(s) Affected:** All
- **Consultation Undertaken:** This is part of an ongoing consultation exercise.