

The Worcestershire Agreement

Councils working together

An Agreement between Worcestershire County Council, Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils and the Parish and Town Councils of Worcestershire.





SIGNATURES

We the undersigned declare our commitment to the Worcestershire Agreement and in so doing, aim to encourage the improvement of our good working practices and embrace the spirit of this agreement.

County Councillor Adrian Hardman, Leader of Worcestershire County Council

Adrian Hardman

Keith Perkins, Chairman of Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils (CALC)

Keith Perkins

Chair /Clerk /Councillor for Parish /Town Council

Name

Role

Town or Parish Council:

INTRODUCTION

1. Worcestershire County Council (WCC), the Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils and Worcestershire town and parish councils (local councils) have agreed to publish an agreement that sets out how they aim to work together. This Agreement is the result of discussions locally and across Worcestershire to confirm existing good practice and to establish some new ways of working.
2. The overall aim of the Agreement is to improve relationships between WCC, parish and town councils of Worcestershire and the Worcestershire CALC and to look at ways that they can work more closely and effectively together.
3. WCC acknowledges and recognises that parish and town councils are the grass-roots level of local government. There are 150 parish and town councils in Worcestershire all playing a valuable role in local democracy and service provision. In their role as democratically accountable bodies, parish and town councils offer a means of shaping the decisions that affect their communities. They offer a means of decentralising the provision of certain services and of revitalising local communities. In turn, they recognise the strategic role of WCC and the equitable distribution of services that they have to achieve.
4. Part of Worcestershire CALC's role is to support parish and town councils by being a representative voice and by providing liaison with principal authorities. Worcestershire CALC has been very happy to support the development of the Worcestershire Agreement, and sees it as an immensely useful document. It sets out a template for the working relationship between parish and town councils and the County Council. It details many ways in which we can work together as partners to help each other provide better services.
5. This Agreement looks at which services may be devolved to, or shared with, parish and town councils by WCC if the local councils wish to do so.
6. This Agreement will continue to be monitored with a view to making further amendments as necessary. This will be done by the Area CALC Representatives, Worcestershire CALC and WCC working together to evaluate the Worcestershire Agreement in order to ensure it is being used effectively by all. It will be on the Area CALC Meeting agendas at least once annually and then any issues can be followed up at the proceeding parish conference.
7. The Agreement will be promoted throughout WCC via Chief Officers Management Board (COMB), circulated to second tier officers and above, and promoted through internal communications and on the 'My Parish' web pages and to parish and town councils of Worcestershire via CALC, the CALC newsletter and Area CALC Representatives. It will also be on the CALC website.
8. The Agreement is a working document which must develop and respond to the changing environment to achieve its full potential.

WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S COMMITMENTS TO PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS

1. Informing and engaging with Parish and Town Councillors

1.1 The role of county councillors includes developing effective relationships with the town and parish councillors in their division and to attend town and parish council meetings. The development of these relationships will help to ensure that good communication exists between the two tiers and that we are offering joined up services to our residents.

2. Informing parish and town councils

2.1 WCC will communicate with parish and town councils directly or through the Worcestershire CALC.

2.2 WCC will acknowledge all written communications from parish and town councils (including letters, faxes and emails) and provide a substantive reply to all written communications which need a reply following the County Council standard which is to acknowledge all external correspondence within seven working days if it can't be dealt with straight away. Within fifteen days working days there must be a full response or progress report.

2.3 WCC will signpost parish or town councils to information and advice on record-keeping and specialist storage facilities at Worcestershire Archives. The Record office has a commitment under the 1972 Act to care for the prime records of parish councils. This is free of charge (see contacts – Record Office).

Interested	Already use
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<http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/cms/community-and-living/records/getting-involved/depositors/review-and-appraisal-of-records.aspx>.

3. Informing residents

3.1 Where appropriate, WCC will inform parishes of any updates to the mobile library timetables so that they can communicate these to their residents and best use can be made of this service.

4. Practical Support and working in partnership

4.1 WCC offers a charged service for legal advice, this is available to any parish or town council of Worcestershire who would sign a service level agreement (SLA) with the County Council so as to access these services.

Interested	Already use
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4.2 WCC will host the 'My Parish' web pages enabling parish and town councils to have a webpage free of cost.

Interested	Already use
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4.3 WCC can offer parish and town councils access to our Information and Business Systems (IBS) training for a reasonable price.

Interested

4.4 WCC develops, funds and implements two parish conferences per year at which parishes can request agenda items, put questions directly to senior officers and network with other parish and town councillors and clerks.

4.5 WCC's Property Services can offer a list of approved contractors for parish and town councils to use. Interested

4.6 WCC is committed to providing support for parish councils on speeding and road safety issues. WCC takes an active role in the Safer Roads Partnership's Community Concern scheme which allows it to work with partner agencies to provide a range of potential solutions to the speeding and road safety issues raised with us by Parish Councils. These solutions are site specific and are based around the three Es of road safety: Engineering, Enforcement and Education. <http://www.srpwestmercia.org.uk/> Interested

4.7 WCC offers parishes the opportunity of devolved highways maintenance services through the Lengthsmen Scheme which includes duties such as drainage maintenance. This is available to any parish or town council of Worcestershire, who would sign a contract with the County Council to deliver these services (see contacts for the Lengthsmen Scheme). Interested Already use

4.8 In partnership with district councils WCC will provide advice and guidance to parish or town councils (and other local community groups) to enable them to prepare local community emergency response plans. This will enable them to be more self-sufficient in the event of a major emergency, e.g. flooding. Interested Already use

4.9 WCC will enable the appointment of, and provide training and support for, Tree Wardens and Parish Paths Wardens in all parishes. Interested Already use

4.10 The County Council will signpost parish and town councils to energy advice for village halls and provide general advice on work they could do such as signing up to the Worcestershire Climate Change Pledge or on becoming a low carbon community. Interested

4.11 The County Council will work in partnership with parish and town councils to create a county that is an environmentally, economically and socially sustainable place to live, work and visit. Worcestershire County Council has a strong commitment to protect and enhance the county's natural environmental resources and built environment and is committed to promoting sustainability in our decision making and the way we deliver our services

4.12 In partnership with parish and town councils WCC is committed to the vision for Worcestershire of a county with a skilled and prosperous economy, communities that are empowered and an environment that is cherished and resilient. This vision is guided by number of core values including treating people with equality and valuing diversity; building cohesive, strong communities and promoting good community relations; and involving and listening to local people and local communities.

The County Council has a corporate commitment to equality which is reflected in the objectives and actions set out in the range of plans and strategies the Council produces.

The overall aim of the WCC Equality and Diversity Policy is to: -

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination;
- Promote equality of opportunity;
- Promote equality of access; and

- Promote good relations between diverse communities

in the Council's employment policies and practices, in our service delivery and in our engagement with partners and communities in the county.

<http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/cms/community-and-living/equality-and-diversity/our-council/corporate-equalities-board/equality-and-diversity-policy.aspx>

(For more information see contact details for the Corporate Equality and Diversity Team)

5. Consultations

Statutory Matters: These are matters in which WCC has a statutory requirement to consult with parish and/or town councils, for example amendments to changes to the definitive map of Public Rights of Way.

Non-Statutory matters: These are matters in which there is no statutory requirement to consult but the county council recognises that the views of its stakeholders and partners are essential to effective decision making. An indicative list of the different types of matters in each of these categories is set out in Appendix 1. There is more flexibility on non statutory consultations.

WCC has a legal duty to make available for inspection at County Hall the public report and background papers on the items on which consultation is taking place. The public reports are also available online.

5.1 WCC will aim to provide parish and town councils with a consultation period of 12 weeks to encourage good working relationships and allow sufficient opportunity to discuss and respond, before the county council makes a decision that affects a local community. If it is necessary to offer a consultation period of less than 12 weeks, WCC will give clear reasons why this is needed. This is in line with the Worcestershire COMPACT which governs WCC's relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector.

5.2 WCC will ensure that parish and town councils are consulted and are involved in the substance and direction of community strategies as they affect the local communities they represent, and that they have the opportunity to take an early and active part in the formulation of policy and service delivery.

5.3 Planning applications and consultation on the new style of development plans, for instance, are covered by national regulations, which set out a timetable for the processes, responses and notifications of decisions. The length of a consultation period can differ with different stages in the procedures and will be clearly set out in the material sent to parish and town councils.

When considering planning applications determined by WCC, the parish or town council will be informed when an application will be reported to planning committee (that is for those applications which have representations against them which will go to committee). In addition, WCC has a scheme of public participation held by our Legal and Democratic Services which sets out the rules by which the planning committee can be addressed. The scheme refers to the nearest private resident to the application site being given the right to speak therefore parish councils are excluded from the scheme. The view was taken when

the scheme was created that parish and town councils are formally consulted as part of the planning process and that their views are formally set out in the report to the Planning & Regulatory Committee. When a parish or town council has been asked to respond to a statutory planning consultation, the final decision of WCC will be communicated back to them.

WCC has a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which sets out how and when the County Council will seek involvement in the planning of minerals and waste and County Council developments such as schools and new roads. Please follow the link below for further information.

<http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/cms/environment-and-planning/strategic-planning/community-involvement.aspx>

Appendix 1

Issues which the County Council will refer to Parish and Town Councils for information and/or consultation.

Statutory
School closures
Road bridge maintenance, closure and diversion
Public Rights of Way – proposals for permanent legal change
Public Path Orders
Definitive Map Modification Orders
Waste and minerals proposals and the County Council's own development applications (known as county matter and County Council planning applications). These proposals and regulations are subject to the provision of specific regulations which will override the consultation provisions set out in this Agreement)
Waste and Minerals Local Development Framework. This is subject to the provisions of specific regulations which will override the consultation provisions set out in this Agreement
Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy (this will include strategies jointly developed by the county and district councils in Worcestershire and Herefordshire for how municipal waste should be collected and managed (e.g. for recycling and composting, and how biodegradable municipal waste will be diverted from landfill by new waste facilities)
Non Statutory (and other consultations in which parish and town councils are stakeholders)
Opening, change of use and closure of county council facilities in the area
Libraries – opening hours, service reviews, buildings issues, mobile library routes and stop locations
Schools Commissioning Strategy (Invitation to public consultation meetings)
Major service changes to services for Children and Young People, including new services, discontinuation of services and impact assessments
Major service changes to Adult and Social Care Services, including new services, discontinuation of services and impact assessments
Community resilience plans
Larger 'one off' projects, for example, prioritisation of maintenance for the Public Rights of Way network.
Pedestrian crossings
Design of major improvement schemes
Traffic regulations (e.g. speed limits, waiting orders, weight restrictions, one-way streets, parking restrictions – initial consultation with parishes who are contacted by email on new proposals.
Roads new and improved: i.e. the need for them, their alignment and the standard of road under consideration (consultation from the earliest stages)
Local Transport Plan
WCC will consult parishes before disposing of any of its countryside sites.

Appendix 2

Functions which may be offered to parish and town Councils following agreement between the County Council and parish/town council.

Services which may be devolved to parish and town councils by WCC if the local councils wish to do so.

Functions :

- Some road safety measures – parish or town councils can buy/maintain and move around Vehicle Activated Signs (VAS) but would have to liaise with WCC as to where to site them.
- Highways maintenance services such as drainage maintenance (e.g. clearing of gully tops, drainage grids, kerb off-lets and grips) and other duties associated with the Lengthsmen Scheme
- Aspects of the maintenance of public rights of way through the Parish Paths Partnership
- Where a parish or town council or community expresses a wish to acquire, develop and manage their own green spaces and WCC is confident of their ability to manage a site sustainably for public benefit, WCC would consider it as an option.

Interested

Interested

PARISH AND TOWN COUNCIL COMMITMENTS

(please tick if making the commitment or leave blank if not or N/A)

1. *Informing and engaging with county councillors*

1.1 The parish or town council will endeavour to inform county councillors of the dates of meetings as soon as they are set and will provide them with a copy of the agenda for each formal meeting, plus a copy of the last parish or town council meeting's minutes, three clear days before the meeting. Any parish or town council that requests an officer from the County Council to attend a meeting should do so one month beforehand.

Yes

1.2 The parish or town council will provide a space on its meeting agenda for the county councillor to provide a relevant report. It should be noted, however, that if the parish or town council resolves to exclude the press and public for an item this will include the county councillor unless specifically invited to remain.

Yes

1.3 Parish and town councils will endeavour to inform their county councillor of meetings in the parish or town, where decisions to be made may be relevant to the County Council.

Yes

2. *Informing the County Council*

2.1 Parish and town councils will endeavour to inform the County Council (see contact details - HUB), when emergency action is needed e.g. dangerous or fallen trees, non functioning and displacement of traffic signals, road flooding, potholes, loose or uneven flagstones and kerbs, bollard knock-downs and fallen or unsafe lighting columns.

Yes

2.2 Parish and town councils will endeavour to report the following to the County Council: (see contact details for the HUB), damage to traffic signs and other street furniture, street lighting failures and non-functioning lights in traffic signs, blocked gullies and broken gully grids or man-holes, loose cat's eyes and road studs and ragwort outcrops and other noxious weeds. Parish and town councils will also endeavour to inform WCC of local issues to do with sustainable transport such as cycling, walking and buses (for example; cycleways and walkways). Once reported the County Council will investigate these issues and make safe or repair in accordance with the County Council's Highways Maintenance Policy.

Yes

2.3 The parish or town council will provide the County Council with the contact details of the clerk to the council. They will also update WCC in the event of changes of clerk or to their contact details. Contact should be made via democraticservices@worcestershire.gov.uk

Yes

2.4 Where parishes are signed up to 'My Parish' web pages – the parish will keep the WCC webteam informed of their current web author and will endeavour to keep the pages up to date.

Yes

2.5 Record keeping: parishes must endeavour to be proactive in reviewing their records – this should be done every ten years or so. They must not await the Record Office to contact them before doing so - this will help to avoid backlogs.

Yes

2.6 CALC will inform the County Council of those councils, of which it is aware, that are working towards or have achieved quality status.

3. *Informing residents*

3.1 The parish or town council, through the clerk, will endeavour where appropriate (e.g. through use of notice boards, links from their council website or information in newsletters) to allow the County Council to publicise issues and information of local interest and concern.

3.2 Wherever possible, parish and town councils will endeavour to publicise changes to WCC bus services in their areas in parish or town magazines, on noticeboards and on their webpages.

3.3 Parishes will promote the timetable of the mobile library bus to residents and will endeavour to keep the mobile libraries service informed of appropriate times for it to attend their spot or times to avoid (see contacts for mobile services).

4. *Community Engagement*

4.1 The parish and town council will inform and where appropriate, involve the County Council when it is undertaking a community led planning process such as a parish plan or market town health check. Contact should be made through the Area Democracy Unit (see contact details).

4.2 Parish and town councils will seek to keep the public in their parish informed on local government matters and seek to assess public opinion through meetings, surveys and newsletters. Where appropriate, parish and town councils will make the results of major surveys available to the County Council via the Area Democracy Unit (see contact details).

4.3 Parish or town councils will work with WCC and district councils to prepare local community emergency response plans. This will enable them to be more self-sufficient in the event of a major emergency, e.g. flooding.

4.4 Parish & town councils will work with their local communities to reduce carbon emissions and other environmental impacts and increase resilience to extreme weather. They may wish to sign up to the Worcestershire Climate Change Pledge for communities and/or work towards becoming a low carbon community.

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/climatechangepledge
<http://lowcarboncommunities.net/>

5. *Consultations*

5.1 Parish and town councils will endeavour to respond to community planning consultations and invitations to participate either individually or collectively through the Worcestershire CALC.

5.2 The parish or town council will endeavour to respond to consultations by the County Council on planning and any other matters within the time limit specified in the consultation. They will put in place mechanisms such as delegation to a committee or the convening of extra council meetings to meet the consultation documents

deadline. Responses must be a representative view of the parish or town council involved.

WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL CONTACT DETAILS

www.worcestershire.gov.uk

Adoption & Fostering - Freephone 0800 028 2158
Area Democracy Unit – HRobinson@worcestershire.gov.uk or 01905 766724 or Ddale@worcestershire.gov.uk or 01905 766282
Bus Timetables Tel:01905 765765
Carers Unit Tel: 0800 389 2896
Corporate Equality and Diversity Team, 01905 76 6225 E&D@worcestershire.gov.uk
Complaints Procedure Tel: 01905 766364 or email: jarmitage@worcestershire.gov.uk
Countryside Service Tel: 01905 766493
County Museum Tel: 01299 250416
Democratic Services (for changes of clerk and updated contact details) democraticservices@worcestershire.gov.uk
Family Information Service Tel: 01905 790560
Highways & Transport Tel: 0845 607 2005
Lengthsmen Scheme: email lengthsmenscheme@worcestershire.gov.uk
Libraries & Learning Tel: 01905 822722 (and for the Mobile library service) Bromsgrove and Redditch Mobile bromsgrovemobile@worcestershire.gov.uk Evesham Mobile eveshammobile@worcestershire.gov.uk Malvern Mobile malvernmobile@worcestershire.gov.uk Stourport Mobile stourportmobile@worcestershire.gov.uk
Public Rights of Way Tel: 01905 768214
Record Office/Worcestershire Archives Tel: 01905 766351 or email: Recordoffice@worcestershire.gov.uk
Registration Service Tel: 0845 603 2859
School Admissions Tel: 01905 822700
School Transport Tel: 01905 765765
Student Finance Direct Tel: 0845 607 7577
Social Care Tel: 0845 607 2000
Street Lighting "Lights Out Line" Tel: 0800 137 352
Sustainability Team Tel: 01905 766855 or email sustainability@worcestershire.gov.uk
Trading Standards: Consumer Direct 0845 404 0506 Trading Standards: Business Advice 0845 330 3313 Email: Tradingstandards@worcestershire.gov.uk
Waste & Recycling Tel: 0845 607 2007
Webteam (for the 'My Parish' web pages) webteam@worcestershire.gov.uk
Worcestershire HUB To find your local Worcestershire Hub Customer Service Centre and the contact details for that centre, visit the Worcestershire Hub Online web pages. If you need information or advice about council services, you can email the Worcestershire Hub at worcestershirehub@worcestershire.gov.uk or call the Worcestershire Hub Contact Centre on 01905 765765 (Monday to Friday 8am - 8pm, Saturday 9am - 5pm).
Youth Support Tel: 01905 765463