

Committee: **Cabinet**
 Date of meeting: **19th July 2023**
 Report Subject: **Charter of Common Agreement between the Town & Community Councils and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**
 Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Steve Thomas, Leader**
 Report Submitted by: **Andrew Parker, Service Manager Policy and Partnerships**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
	29 June 23	29.06.23				19 Jul 23		

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for new liaison arrangements between Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (BGCBC) and each of the four Town and Community Councils (TCCs) from 2023/24.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 The current Charter of Common Agreement between BGCBC and each of the four CTCs was last reviewed during 2019. It was refreshed in line with the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 (WFGA) and The Independent Review on TCCs in Wales published in October 2018, to ensure it remained fit for purpose.
 - 2.2 The Charter is designed to build on existing best practice and embrace the shared principles of openness, respect, honesty and common priority of putting citizens at the centre. It sets out how BGCBC and each TCC aim to work together towards our collective long-term goals in a collaborative, preventative and integrated way, particularly in relation to the WFGA as well as:-
 - Ethics
 - Local governance and information
 - Consultation
 - Land use planning
 - Budget setting
 - Practical support
 - Monitoring and reviewing the Charter
 - 2.3 The Charter contains expectations around the facilitation of quarterly Liaison Committee meetings between the leadership groups from the county borough council and each of the four TCCs. These committee meetings help to foster good communication, working relationships, and better joint working for the benefit of local people.

2.4 In addition to the member Liaison Committee, a regular quarterly officer meeting comprising the four TCC Clerks and Corporate Policy staff also exists to support the partnership working arrangements. Going forward, this meeting will seek to strengthen arrangements for advice and interaction with TCCs and will look to seek support from the Council's Wider Corporate Leadership Team to ensure all local issues are considered appropriately.

2.5 The recommended 2023/24 partnership meeting arrangements is as suggested below:

- Autumn 2023: Quarterly Liaison Committee meeting to review the existing Charter of Common Agreement and consider Forward Work Programmes for 23/24 – 24/25, as well as any regular partnership business.
- Winter 2023: Quarterly Liaison Committee meeting to consider regular partnership business as part of FWP 23/24.
- February 2024: Liaison Committee meeting to consider the 24/25 BGCBC Budget (generally one-item on agenda)
- Spring 2024: Liaison Committee meeting to consider a refreshed Charter of Common Agreement for 24/25 onwards
- Regular quarterly Clerks meetings in between the QLCs to support the partnership working arrangements at an officer level.
- That the Policy & Partnerships Team requests the TCC Quarterly Liaison Committee and its commitments and consequences is placed on the Wider CLT agenda at an appropriate time. This is to ensure that senior officers across the Council are aware and understand the content of a Charter and put arrangements in place to effectively support both the operational functioning of liaison committee going forward, and associated work that comes from being part of a Charter (e.g. strategic and operational considerations at a service level).

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 Option 1: Cabinet to approve a return to the existing Charter of Common Agreement arrangements with the four TCCs, with a revised Charter for 2023/24 onwards to be presented for agreement at a future meeting.

B) Cabinet is invited to approve the recommended meeting arrangements with the TCCs for 2023/24 as outlined in the report.

3.2 Option 2: Cabinet to provide specific further considerations prior to the approval of the partnership arrangements with TCCs.

4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 A Charter of Common Agreement between BGCBC and the TCCs aligns to the council's well-being objectives and the Corporate Plan, and supports local delivery of the Well-being Plan.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There is a reputational risk for the council if partnership arrangements with TCCs and a Charter of Common Agreement is not in place, as well as a risk of the council not maximising opportunities to work with TCCs effectively through an agreed Charter.

5.3 ***Legal***

In 2007 the Welsh Government published a Local Government Policy Statement “A Shared Responsibility” which set out the expectations of Local Authorities and the support that the Welsh Government aimed to provide. It focused on:

- ensuring that public services are centred on the needs and experiences of citizens
- encouraging specialisation and economies of scale to be achieved through cross boundary collaboration
- encouraging integration and responsiveness to the diverse needs of citizens to be achieved through cross sector collaboration.

In response to this policy statement, a joint guidance document “A Shared Community - Relationship Building and Charters for Unitary Authorities and Community and Town Councils” was released in 2008 by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), One Voice Wales and the Welsh Government.

The focal point of the guidance is the emphasis on establishing formal relationships between county borough councils and TCCs by agreeing a Charter of Common Agreement.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

The relationship management and liaison between the Council and each of the four TCCs is under the remit of the Head of Governance, Partnerships & Democratic Services.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

To support the implementation of the existing Charter, a TCC Clerks Forum was established. This Forum enables TCC clerks to meet regularly with each other and the policy team to share issues and best practice, as well as raise matters for consideration in advance of upcoming QLC meetings.

Arrangements will be strengthened to ensure an appropriate strategic agenda and forward working programme for the QLC meetings, whilst additional support for TCCs such as practical briefing sessions on matters directly affecting TCCs can be arranged.

With the exception of the annual budget consultation meetings, the TCC liaison committee has not met since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even so, the above mentioned Clerks Forum has continued to meet with officers from the Council and each of the four TCCs.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

Maintaining good, collaborative working relationships between BGCBC and the TCCs in line with the WFGA will increase accountability amongst partners and improve outcomes for the public by protecting and enhancing the social, economic, cultural and environmental well-being of Blaenau Gwent in ways that are sustainable for current and future generations.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

The existing Charter of Common Agreement was developed through a period of consultation and engagement with the TCCs. Brynmawr Town Council, Nantyglo & Blaina Town Council and Abertillery & Llanhilleth Community Council all formerly signed up to the existing Charter, however Tredegar Town Council did not commit due to a localised issue, and the perception that the charter principles had not be appropriately followed.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

Putting robust collaborative partnership working arrangements in place through the ongoing QLC and Charter will enable all partners to work together to balance short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to meet long-term objectives. The monitoring and review procedures built into a new forward work programme will enable partners to ensure that the joint commitments remain appropriate and relevant in the long-term.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The preventative nature of the joint partnership arrangements and commitments within the existing and revised Charter is expected to improve working relationships amongst all partners.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

BGCBC together with Abertillery & Llanhilleth Community Council, Brynmawr Town Council, and Nantyglo & Blaina Town Council are all partners committing to work together collaboratively within the Charter of Common Agreement. Tredegar Town Council did not formally sign up to the previous charter in 2019 but continued to collaborate as partners in the interim period, and will be invited to commit to a new charter covering 2024/25 onwards as it is considered.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

The commitments set out to involve the Wider Corporate Leadership Team in the partnership working arrangements encourage a coordinated, integrated and collaborative approach across the council and each of the TCCs.

6.8 ***Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

There are no climate change or decarbonisation considerations for this report.

6.9 ***Integrated Impact Assessment***

An integrated impact assessment will be carried out as part of the development of the revised updated Charter for 2024/25 onwards.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

Reviews will be undertaken jointly by all partners (BGCBC and the TCCs) once during each Council term, or more often as appropriate if deemed necessary.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- ***Appendix A – 2019 Charter of Common Agreement between the Community and Town Councils and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council***
- [*Independent Review Panel on Community and Town Councils in Wales Final Report \(October 2018\)*](#)