

## How to... develop a local charter



# Shoulder to shoulder

If you wanted to change something in your neighbourhood where would you start? Local authorities are doing much to engage individuals, but it can still be difficult to navigate the array of public services in a community, let alone influence their delivery. For example, who is responsible for keeping the park tidy? Is there a community festival in the summer? What do you do if the health clinic's opening hours are wrong for you?

Local charters are a good way of bringing all this information together in one place. Residents can see at a glance what's happening locally and service providers can capture the ideas and priorities of local people in order to tailor their delivery to the individual neighbourhood.

Around the country different communities have been trying out different forms of local charter or neighbourhood agreement. Spurred on by their success, the government included charters in the 2006 local government white paper and the *Action plan for community empowerment*. Now local authorities are being encouraged to develop them to help engage and empower people.

### What goes into a local charter?

A local charter is a voluntary partnership agreement between a community, the local authority and other service providers. The published document will be different for each area, but covers the service standards which local people expect from the authority and other agencies, as well as commitments from local groups and residents themselves to help meet local priorities.

In some cases a community group may even take on responsibility for delivering a service through a charter. New guidance from the Young

### Case study Staffordshire Moorlands' community pride agreement

An increase in arson and antisocial behaviour motivated agencies and local people to get together to form the community pride agreement in Staffordshire Moorlands in early 2007.

It takes the form of a contract between all parties, outlining the roles and responsibilities of both service providers and local people to help tackle community priorities. So, for example, service providers have made commitments to remove graffiti, ensure refuse is collected and maintain green space, and local people are encouraged to take responsibility for the environment by reporting

graffiti, separating their refuse and maintaining the grass verges outside their homes.

This sense of shared responsibility has been central to the agreement's success. Arson incidents have gone down dramatically, more crimes are being reported and people's perception of the extent of antisocial behaviour has improved.

The agreement has been particularly helpful for service providers as it is structured around the safer, stronger block of local area agreement outcomes, helping to clarify how agencies work together to meet targets.

Foundation think tank on developing a local charter, published at the end of last month by the DCLG, identifies a series of key questions which need to be considered:

#### 1 What capacity does the community already have?

Local people are the experts on their community, so there will always be a pool of energy and knowledge to tap into. A request for a charter could come from any local community organisation (eg community forum, tenants' and residents' association, parish council) that can take a lead on its development. Local authorities will need to be more proactive in initiating discussions in areas of lower capacity.

#### 2 What area will the charter cover?

The area a charter will cover needs to be small enough to be meaningful to local people as a natural neighbourhood or community, but large enough to be understood and administered by local services.

#### 3 What activities will the charter cover?

Most charters will cover all of the major statutory services provided locally and the issues of primary concern to local people. To help develop a charter more quickly, or to test the model, the charter could be focused on a single set of issues such as 'cleaner and greener' or working with the local housing association.

#### 4 What are the community's priorities?

Charters have to be based around strong engagement with local people, but nothing annoys residents more than being consulted on the same things again and again, so consider what information existing documents, surveys and forums have on community priorities. Not everyone may have had a chance to have their say in the past, however, so it's worth thinking about additional consultation for under-represented groups. There are many guides to good practice that explain how to carry out consultations creatively.

Learning Curve is a New Start resource to help share knowledge of initiatives and approaches that have worked well in regeneration and economic development. If you would like to submit an article, please email an outline of your idea to [news@newstartmag.co.uk](mailto:news@newstartmag.co.uk) or call 0114 281 6133.

### 5 What are agency priorities locally?

There's no point duplicating existing plans and strategies, but a charter can help consolidate the information contained within existing service statements from a number of agencies. Think about using the charter to spell out contact details and opening times, as well as the targets and standards service providers are trying to meet (eg local area agreement objectives).

### 6 How will a charter be negotiated?

Once you're clear on the communities' and local services' priorities, someone needs to put these together and agree what actions will be taken. Councillors and neighbourhood-based staff can play a role in this, along with active community groups in the area.

One of the key opportunities a charter offers is the gathering of local knowledge in order to tailor service provision. Charters should therefore be clear about how local services will differ from the norm and which issues will be addressed first.

If a community group asks for additional responsibility to be devolved to it through a charter, the request must be tested for local backing as well as economic prudence.

### 7 What will the published charter look like?

It is important that the document looks attractive and can be distributed to everyone in the area. An official launch and backing from local councillors and other figureheads can also help raise awareness.

### Overcoming the obstacles

Developing a charter will not necessarily be plain sailing. In fact, when it comes to consolidating priorities you may find that residents and agencies initially have different opinions and perceptions about what is most important for the area. Careful negotiation towards a clear plan of action may be necessary in order to manage expectations on both sides. A charter is not a solution to all local issues, but it does provide a framework to discuss them.

The commitment of time and resources should not be underestimated, but the experience of the neighbourhoods which have tried charters so far is overwhelmingly that the investment is worthwhile.

Charters have helped bring structure to the work many authorities are already undertaking both to engage service providers and communities and to enhance service performance. Done well, charters provide an excellent opportunity for residents to be involved in local decision-making and action that will improve their quality of life and transform neighbourhoods.

## Case study **Kendray clean and tidy agreement**

The 'keeping Kendray clean and tidy agreement' was established in 2006 between local service providers and the residents of this estate in Barnsley. The agreement explains which service provider is responsible for what, and the service standards residents can expect with regard to street cleaning, lighting, refuse, litter, graffiti and other aspects of environmental management. Because the agreement is two-way, it also spells out the residents' responsibilities.

A group of 12 local resident volunteers, known as 'neighbourhood champions', monitor the performance of the environmental services against the commitments set out in the agreement. The agreement has helped improve service delivery, residents' perceptions of the area and satisfaction with local service providers.

### » find out more

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*How to develop a local charter – a guide for local authorities*, written by the Young Foundation and published by the DCLG, can be downloaded at [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

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## Don't miss out

### Working with government: challenges for civil society

Issues to be discussed at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations annual conference include the impact of immigration from the EU on the third sector, governance and public service delivery. Speakers include Ed Milliband, minister for the Cabinet Office and chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Pam Giddy, director of the Power Inquiry on reinvigorating democracy, will also speak.

Venue: London  
20 February  
Details: [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk)

### Sustainable communities and regeneration

CIH/Bura masterclasses  
Venue: Solihull  
13-14 February, 21-22 March, 18-19 April  
Details: [www.cih.org/training/regeneration](http://www.cih.org/training/regeneration)

### Financial inclusion

Capital City Partnership seminar  
Venue: Edinburgh  
15 February  
Details: [www.capitalcitypartnership.org](http://www.capitalcitypartnership.org), tel 0131 270 6035

### Working our way out of poverty

Poverty Alliance seminars  
Venue: Glasgow  
15 and 22 February  
Details: [www.povertyalliance.org](http://www.povertyalliance.org)

### Engaging young people in parks

Greenspace conference  
Venue: Manchester  
19 February  
Details: [www.greenspace.org.uk](http://www.greenspace.org.uk)

### Modernising the justice system

Skills for Justice conference  
Venue: Edinburgh  
19 February  
Details: [www.skillsforjustice.com](http://www.skillsforjustice.com), tel 0131 662 5234

### Leadership for sustainable communities

ASC training workshops  
Venue: Bristol  
19-20 February  
Details: [www.ascskills.org.uk](http://www.ascskills.org.uk)

### Fit for the future

5th Prowess annual international conference  
Venue: Peterborough  
20-21 February  
Details: tel 01603 762355, [conference@prowess.org.uk](mailto:conference@prowess.org.uk)

### Every day makes a difference

New Start NLP masterclass  
Venue: Sheffield  
21 February  
Details: [www.nlpconferences.co.uk](http://www.nlpconferences.co.uk)

### Voice 08

Social Enterprise Coalition conference  
Venue: Liverpool  
26-27 February  
Details: [www.socialenterprise.org.uk](http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk)

### Supporting social enterprise development

Cles course  
Venue: London  
27 February  
Details: [www.cles.org.uk/events](http://www.cles.org.uk/events)

### Delivering better outcomes for people and places

LGA annual improvement conference  
Venue: Bristol  
27-28 February

Details: [www.lga.gov.uk](http://www.lga.gov.uk)

### Faithful capital

Annual convention of the Churches Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber  
Venue: Leeds  
28 February  
Details: [www.crc-online.org.uk](http://www.crc-online.org.uk), tel 0113 244 3413

### Successful selling into the public sector

Ingenium IDS masterclass  
Venue: London  
4 March  
Details: tel 01483 422900, [mccross@ingenium-ids.org](mailto:mccross@ingenium-ids.org)

### Innovation and change

Centre for Public Innovation workshop  
Venue: Manchester  
5 March  
Details: [www.publicinnovation.org.uk](http://www.publicinnovation.org.uk)

### Poverty and prophets

Ebor Lectures event  
Venue: York  
5 March  
Details: [www.yorks.ac.uk/eborlectures](http://www.yorks.ac.uk/eborlectures)

### National Family Learning Network annual conference

Venue: London  
7 March  
Details: [www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk](http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk)

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