

How to develop a local charter

A guide for local authorities





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Foreword



There isn't a single service or development in Britain which hasn't been improved by actively involving local people. Local people use local services and live in their neighbourhoods, so it's no surprise they are often best placed to spot the problems and come up with ideas to solve them, whether the issue is anti-social behaviour, litter, better services for young people or improvements to the local park.

Communities and Local Government aims to give citizens the means to participate in decision-making at every level in order to help solve issues which are important to them. Our *Community Empowerment Action Plan*, launched in October 2007, provides an overview as to how this will be achieved and includes a commitment to the development of more local charter agreements between local authorities and communities.

Local charters provide a way for communities to get involved in the decision making process. The development of a charter should bring local people together, to harness their ideas and to share their ambitions and dreams for their area.

This publication is a practical guide to designing charters that reflect local people's concerns, and that match their priorities to the resources available from councils and service providers. Every charter will be different and that is their strength: the ability to be flexible and tailored to reflect the consensus of local views. Many of the examples published here show how the creation of a charter has had a direct and positive effect on relations between local authorities, local services and local people. The trust that they help to build isn't just a by-product; it's an important reason to promote the creation of charters and is at the heart of our measures to enable people from diverse communities to influence public decisions.

I am delighted to welcome this guide and I look forward to seeing the successful and effective charters that I am sure will be created with its help.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hazel Blears". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line underneath.

Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government



For the last two years the Young Foundation has been working with local authorities all over the country who are committed to empowering communities and strengthening neighbourhoods. The aim of the programme has been to make it easier for residents to become involved in decisions at the very local level – decisions that are often critical to their quality of life. We see local charters as an important new way of taking this work forward, by clarifying who does what and how decisions can be influenced – helping people navigate their way through structures that can otherwise appear confusing and opaque.

Developing charters will, however, require a commitment of both time and resources. This commitment shouldn't be underestimated. But our experience from working with dozens of local authorities and community groups is that the investment is well worthwhile. Where this has been tried, charters have brought structure and focus to authorities' efforts to engage service providers, empower communities and enhance service performance.

As the examples of good practice in this guide demonstrate, charters can contribute to better decisions and to better engagement with the public. They can also enrich democracy and change cultures of working – vital if we are to reverse trends of disenchantment and cynicism.

Geoff Mulgan
Director
Young Foundation

Chapter 1

Introduction

In October 2007 the Department for Communities and Local Government published *An Action Plan for Community Empowerment: Building on Success*. The document set out to create a step change in community empowerment, bringing government closer to the people and passing power from Whitehall to the town hall and directly to local communities. The Action Plan builds on a duty in *Strong and Prosperous Communities – The Local Government White Paper* (2006) to ‘encourage’ the development of charters and commits the Government to producing this guide and a programme of pilots.

Local charters sit alongside other important initiatives found in the Action Plan, designed to strengthen local democracy and empower more people to have their say in the decisions that affect their quality of life.

The concept of local charters is not new and there are already many successful examples around the country. Drawing on some of this good practice, this guide has been produced to help local authorities work with other service providers and communities to develop a local charter. It sets out the key features of an effective charter as well as suggestions on how to overcome the risks and challenges involved in developing one.

Chapter 2

What is a local charter?

A local charter is a voluntary partnership agreement between a community, the local authority and other service providers. It describes the service standards which local people expect from the local authority and other agencies, as well as commitments from service providers, local groups and residents themselves to help meet local community priorities.

A charter therefore gives communities an opportunity for greater participation and genuine engagement with the local authorities involved in making decisions. Charters give local people a direct role in influencing local services. They enable them to become more active in their local communities, and take on responsibilities themselves, so that they can actively contribute to improvements, rather than just being passive recipients.

Charters will be developed by the local authority in partnership with other service providers and the community, usually through a community level organisation such as a parish council, residents' association, or other neighbourhood group.

There is no definitive model for a local charter. There are, however, some essential ingredients in charters, which differentiate them from other agreements or plans that may already exist in a local area. An effective local charter should:

1. **be an agreement between the local authority, other service providers and the community**, rather than imposed from the top-down or a technical contract between service providers
2. **be based on both community priorities and needs identified by service providers**, making it unique to the local area
3. **identify and clarify the obligations of service providers, VCS and organisations and residents**, including service standards and any commitments taken on by the local community
4. **give opportunities to tailor the provision of services locally**, by both modifying local statutory provision and clarifying any elements of delivery which have been devolved to other organisations
5. **clarify the role of local councillors and strengthen their local**

profile

6. **complement existing local documents and feed into service plans and strategic city wide documents**, rather than duplicating what is already available
7. **empower local people, showing them how to get involved and in particular how they can hold services to account**, rather than just being a contact list or newsletter
8. **be relevant to local people's understanding of an area or neighbourhood**, rather than covering large geographical areas
9. **be a living document in which priorities are set for a given period and then reviewed**
10. **be easy to read and written in plain English.**

Section four looks in detail at each of these features.

Chapter 3

Why develop a charter?

Charters will take both time and resources to develop locally, so why are they worth developing?

3.1 Charters can improve performance, efficiency and satisfaction with services

The process of developing a charter can improve local agencies' understanding of a community's needs. By tailoring services to meet these specific needs, tackling emerging issues before they become more costly to solve, and encouraging agencies to work together on local solutions, authorities can make efficiency savings and improve performance. This is likely to increase residents' satisfaction with their neighbourhood.

Charters can identify solutions that can be led by residents, parishes or the voluntary and community sector (VCS). This may provide a direct cost benefit, but participation will also enhance the capacity of the community to meet its own needs and therefore improve longer term sustainability.

Charters empower both residents and councillors to monitor the service commitments made in a charter. This scrutiny and improved dialogue can help agencies respond quickly to local needs and make delivery more efficient.

Improving satisfaction with services

Consultation by service providers in Great Lever, Bolton identified the physical environment and the social impact of anti-social behaviour as the issues that most concerned residents of the neighbourhood management pathfinder area.

In response the 'safe and clean' charter sets out agency responsibilities and agreements on service standards, response rates and resources, as well as contact details and practical advice on how residents can help improve the area. The charter has helped shape local service delivery, improve resident satisfaction by 16 per cent and reduce dissatisfaction with litter and rubbish by 18 per cent¹.

3.2 Charters can contribute to a variety of performance measures

As part of the revised Comprehensive Area Assessment local authorities will need to take into account performance measures based on how satisfied residents are with the council, including whether residents feel they can influence decisions in their local area and if they are a member of a community association, school governor or councillor. The information provided to citizens through charters, and the clear opportunities to get involved further, can help local authorities to meet these measures.

Charters can also help local authorities demonstrate how they inform, consult and involve local residents in their decision making, which will be required from 2009 as part of The Duty to Involve².

A charter may also help local authorities to evidence neighbourhood contributions to city wide initiatives, including their approaches to community empowerment and Local Area Agreement targets and outcomes.

3.3 Charters can help build understanding and trust locally

Charters themselves, and the process of developing one, build mutual understanding and trust between service providers and local communities. They allow communities to play an active role in the process of place shaping and create a shared sense of ownership around improvements.

Charters also set clear and transparent standards for service provision which, when delivered, enhance both local understanding and confidence.

Building a better understanding with service providers

As part of the Peel Hall Mancunian Agreement in Manchester, the council agreed to provide various environmental works and features (such as hanging baskets) in response to requests from residents to improve the look of the area. Residents not only agreed to maintain them, but also to maintain each others.

The agreement, and the process of developing it, has helped foster new relationships between residents and encouraged pride in the local area. In particular the ward co-ordinator and environmental officers are seeing an increase in the number of people who have the confidence to come forward.

3.4 Charters can engage councillors and help promote their role locally

Charters can help to strengthen local representative democracy in an area by empowering local councillors. Councillors can play an important role whether providing links into the community or local groups, acting as brokers in neighbourhoods with conflict, or acting as champions in neighbourhoods with low capacity or little history of engagement. This role, as well as including contact details in the charter itself, will help enhance the profile of local councillors and help create a strong and productive relationship between councillors and the communities they serve.

Local councillors will be able to use the service commitments and priorities named in charters to hold services to account. This monitoring role can tie into existing scrutiny structures, local scrutiny or a Councillors' Call for Action.

The importance of councillors

In Walsall each local ward has a local neighbourhood partnership which brings together council and other service providers with ward level organisations, community organisations and councillors. Each partnership produces a neighbourhood agreement which reflects what the various parties are going to do over the next year.

Local councillors have an important role in the development of their local neighbourhood agreements. They chair the local partnerships and negotiate commitments with the service providers and local groups so that the community's priorities are met.

3.5 Charters can help build community capacity

Involvement in creating a charter will help develop the knowledge and capacity of the residents and community groups. Charters can help residents engage better with agencies, ward councillors and scrutiny processes. This can lead to greater community participation in other forms of neighbourhood working – such as the development of community organisations, Neighbourhood Policing Agreements and community kitties – and taking up opportunities for more formal democratic engagement.

The process of designing local solutions, often led by parishes, VCS organisations and residents themselves, will also enhance the capacity of the community to meet its own needs with sustainable solutions.

3.6 Charters can help clarify partnership work and avoid duplication between agencies

The process of developing a charter will bring council services and other agencies together with ward councillors and residents to consider how best to meet local needs. Sharing information between providers and finding joint solutions will help avoid duplication between agencies. The service standards outlined in a charter will also help clarify the nature of partnerships locally and their separate responsibilities for delivery.

Charters can also help reduce the need for additional consultation and the associated expense, by bringing together existing information about the community from previous consultation exercises by different agencies or groups.

Chapter 4

Ten features of an effective local charter

This section looks at charters in detail, giving examples of successful practice from around the country. We have broken this down into ten key ingredients that define an effective local charter.

4.1 An agreement between the local authority, other service providers and the community

The local authority's role

The local authority should consider how it will:

- **support the development of charters**, in particular considering how it will both respond to requests from active areas and support areas where there is little existing activity
- **promote the opportunity for communities to request and develop charters**, in partnership with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)
- **provide local leadership**, negotiating the commitments contained within charters and considering requests for devolving responsibility, to find appropriate local solutions
- **inform and engage council directorates and other public sector service providers**, so that they are aware that a charter is being developed and are encouraged to participate in place shaping locally
- **ensure appropriate and genuine community consultation has taken place over community priorities** by collating existing information and, where necessary, undertaking additional consultation.

The Local Strategic Partnership's (LSPs) role

LSPs have a lead responsibility for community engagement and service improvement, and they can play a role in promoting the opportunity of a charter to communities.

LSPs should provide strong leadership, encouraging service providers to engage with the process of developing a charter. To ensure a charter carries weight, the LSP could endorse and monitor it, linking it to service performance structures and reporting progress.

The local community's role

Some communities may come forward to request charters, others will not, so the initiation of charters in each area could take a number of forms.

In areas with **good local capacity** a charter may be requested and brokered through an active community group, parish council or residents association. This will help draw on the enthusiasm, knowledge and networks of local people and link the charter's development to existing activities and consultations. Councillors should be involved in this process to ensure the needs of the whole community are taken into account.

In areas of **poor local capacity**, where civic engagement is low, local authorities should consider how they will promote charters. Councillors should be supported to engage residents and champion their development with groups representing communities of interest rather than geographical communities (for example older people). This type of community development work could lead to the creation of a time-limited group of volunteers to develop the charter locally. This approach will require additional resources, particularly to engage with 'hard to reach' groups. The development of charters in areas with little existing activity could be used to build local capacity.

In some areas the development of a local charter may spark interest from a town or parish council or VCS organisations in **taking responsibility for delivering some services or managing local assets**. Local authorities will consider these requests through normal procedures for the procurement and delivery of services by an external provider, including an assessment of local demand for this model of delivery. Should devolved provision be agreed, the charter can make sure residents are clear about local responsibilities.

In all areas there is a need to ensure that the diverse voices within a single community are represented in the development of a charter. Councillors should be supported and empowered to create links and consult with residents from all backgrounds and marginalised groups. Where there is a difference of opinion about the content of a charter, the local councillor has a key role to play in negotiating an agreement. This will be particularly important if it is felt commitments in the charter do not reflect the views of the whole population, if requests are made which go against council policy or if commitments would be too burdensome for one agency. This is not an easy task, but as local leaders councillors are best placed to undertake it. Support and training should be available as necessary.

4.2 A charter is based on both community priorities and needs identified by service providers

Identifying community priorities

A comprehensive view of residents' priorities can often be arrived at by pulling together the results of existing engagement and consultation such as forums, community or parish plans, action plans, regeneration projects, ward plans and local councillors' casework.

Where further engagement is needed to understand the community's priorities, this should be well designed and carried out to avoid 'consultation fatigue'. In particular it should be clear how it fits with existing engagement activities including neighbourhood management, community planning or regeneration strategies. Good practice guides and consultation toolkits are available from a number of sources (see the section on Challenges and troubleshooting).

Local authorities should provide clarity on minimum standards for community engagement before they will sign a charter. The Duty to Involve² sets out useful guidelines for defining *genuine* local engagement including how to ensure opinions are representative of diverse populations.

Capturing data on known local challenges and needs

Councils and other service providers should be actively engaged in the development of charters from an early stage. They will often have data from surveys, previous consultation with service users, national statistics and LAA targets and outcomes, which together will present a comprehensive picture of local needs. This works best where agencies have good local data.

Service providers may already be targeting specific provision and resources in a particular area. This will be captured in service plans and, together with an understanding of the flexibility and constraints of resources, will help inform negotiations on local priorities and actions. Strong local leadership from the council and LSP is essential to encourage agencies to engage directly with residents at the local level.

4.3 A charter identifies and clarifies the obligations of all the players

Responsibilities and obligations of local service providers

Charters should provide clarity on the type and breadth of services delivered locally, by the council and other agencies such as the Police, Primary Care Trust, skills agency and Registered Social Landlords. Rather than providing

standardised information each service should make clear any local variation in services. Charters therefore provide a good opportunity to advertise services to local people.

The council and other agencies should include information on how they can be contacted and what the community can expect to receive from them, or be consulted upon during the year, within the charter.

What you can expect from services in your area

The Rother Valley West charter is marketed under the strap line '*what you can expect from local services in your area*'. The document contains general service information (such as response rates and contact details) as well as specific locally negotiated commitments from service providers including the council, Police and Primary Care Trust.

The charter clearly sets out the type of information residents can expect to receive, how to contact their local councillor, and how to get involved in decision making locally.

The role of parishes and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations

In many cases, a town or parish council or a VCS organisation (a neighbourhood forum, community group or VCS service provider) will take a lead in helping develop local charters, and it is important their role is acknowledged in the final document.

Where a parish or VCS group is interested in or has developed a contract with the local authority to deliver a specific service, service level agreements will be in place. A charter should not replicate this detailed legal document but can be utilised to help explain to residents who is responsible for each service.

Clarifying the role of parish councils

Charters in Easington, Durham have been developed to clarify responsibilities between the principal authorities, Easington District Council and Durham County Council, and the area's Town and Parish Councils. In particular they have focused on the standards of communication, consultation and collaboration that are expected at each level.

The charters ensure residents know where to go and how the agencies are working together. They have also strengthened relationships between the three levels of local government, providing more opportunities for collaboration and devolution of services.

The role of residents

Charters empower communities to get actively involved in helping to make their area a better place. Individual residents can take responsibility for what happens in their areas through agreeing community commitments within charters. These can include reporting problems or an agreement to cut the grass next to their home. This harnesses the energy and knowledge of local people and helps promote collective responsibility.

The nature of such a voluntary agreement means there is no right of redress if a community fails to meet its obligations. The agreement, however, can help raise awareness of people's responsibility as individuals and increase a sense of local ownership.

Developing the responsibilities of residents and service providers

An increase in arson and anti-social behaviour motivated agencies and local people to get together to form the Community Pride Agreement in Staffordshire Moorlands.

The Agreement sets out the roles and responsibilities of both services and local people to help tackle community priorities. Services have made commitments to clear graffiti, ensure refuse is collected and maintain green space. Local people are encouraged to take responsibility for the local 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 reduced dramatically; more crimes are being reported and people's perception of the extent of anti-social behaviour has improved³. The agreement has been particularly helpful for service providers as it is structured around Local Area Agreement outcomes, helping to clarify how agencies work together to meet targets.

4.4 A charter gives opportunities to tailor the provision of services locally

Tailoring the provision of services by local agencies

The process of developing a charter can give communities opportunities to suggest improvements to the services they receive from a range of agencies. This can mean tailoring delivery to a local area based on local knowledge, negotiating additional provision or agreeing local targets to improve performance and tackle urgent needs.

These local targets can help to improve public scrutiny, enabling ward councillors and the community to hold service providers to account.

Tailoring the delivery of statutory services

The Whitton Lodge Community Association has been involved in improving the housing and environment of Birmingham's Perry Common for many years.

The Community Association has recently developed a protocol with local environmental services to help shape the way in which the city council's street scene budget is spent in Perry Common to reflect local priorities. Residents now prioritise the work and this has contributed to the overall

improvement in maintenance of public spaces.

Delivery by voluntary and community sector organisations

As part of a charter, a VCS organisation, Town or Parish council may ask to take on additional responsibility for delivering specific devolved services or managing local assets. This can be an efficient way to use local knowledge to meet demand, but the local authority should make sure that residents want services to be delivered in this way and that the voice of the whole community is heard.

Local authorities will need to follow the normal processes for commissioning and delivery of services through an external provider. If it is agreed that a VCS organisation or parish is to provide a service, the nature of the service standards will be outlined in the local charter, so it is clear to residents what has been changed.

4.5 A charter identifies local councillors, engages them in the process of developing a charter and clarifies their role

Local councillors are democratic champions for their communities. Charters should name local councillors and provide their contact details so that everyone knows who their councillor is and how to contact them.

Ward councillors should be briefed and involved by the local authority when a charter is requested by the community. They should play a key role in developing, consulting, negotiating and monitoring charters in a variety of circumstances. In particular there is a role for local councillors to reach out to new communities, ensure the views of the whole population of an area are represented in a charter and mediate where differences of opinion arise. Councillors will need support from the authority to do this.

Councillors will be able to use the service commitments in charters, and the community priorities identified through them, to monitor service delivery and

hold services to account. This may be done through existing structures, local scrutiny or, as a last resort, the Councillors' Call for Action.

4.6 A charter complements existing local documents and feeds into service plans and strategic authority-wide documents

To avoid duplication and 'engagement fatigue', charters should draw on existing information. This would include previous consultation exercises, detailed service plans for services provided by the council and other agencies (including the police, health services and the skills agency), local regeneration strategies, parish, community or neighbourhood plans and tenant participation structures.

Charters can inform both individual service plans (the council's or those of other agencies) and strategic authority-wide documents such as Local Area Agreements, the Sustainable Community Strategy, Neighbourhood Renewal strategies and the VCS Compact. The process of developing a charter can also help local authorities meet targets for capacity building, providing influence and opportunities to get involved, which will contribute to the new Duty to Involve².

Delivery of Local Area Agreement targets by the community

Birmingham's Strategic Partnership has devolved elements of its Local Area Agreement to smaller areas. Community groups in three areas of the city have developed neighbourhood area agreements, taking responsibility for the delivery of activities which meet LAA targets and outcomes in their area.

These lead community groups will decide how services are commissioned locally. In some cases they will provide services themselves and in others they will negotiate with service providers locally and monitor their delivery. This innovative approach is designed to help tackle entrenched problems so that solutions are tailored to the local area.

4.7 A charter empowers local people

Charters will be available to every resident in the area. They should demonstrate how local people can contact their local councillor or service provider and how to get involved in activities locally, including holding services to account.

Improving engagement

Experience suggests that where communities are involved in the development or monitoring of a charter, the capacity of the community to work together and connect with services increases. Charters can also provide a way for residents to become involved in other community activities, improving their knowledge of their local area and the opportunities available to get involved. For example, charters can empower residents by signposting them towards neighbourhood policing teams, ward councillor surgeries or community forums.

Developing skills among local residents

The Foxwood Neighbourhood Agreement shows how local involvement can empower residents and improve services. The neighbourhood agreement is monitored by a community action group and, more formally, within a local partnership including residents and elected councillors.

The monitoring has enabled residents to hold service providers to account and makes the allocation of resources and the setting of targets more visible. This small scale project has led to better working between agencies, the empowerment of local residents (both through the monitoring process and skills development), and improved services⁴.

Holding service providers to account

Charters should include information about how residents can contact local services and how they can hold providers to account where a service falls short of what they expect. Charters can provide opportunities for local residents to become actively involved in monitoring their local charters, whether this is through highlighting issues directly to service providers or taking on a more 'formalised' role such as checking local litter levels. In addition local councillors, using the enhanced community focus that charters provide, can help set up negotiating meetings of local partners, local scrutiny structures or, as a last resort, through a new Councillors' Call for Action.

The monitoring and accountability of local services can be strengthened by linking the performance aspects of a charter into existing council scrutiny structures, which have a formal route to the council cabinet. The LSP can also take the lead role in overseeing charters and their results locally, providing performance information directly into the LSP executive.

Monitoring service performance

The 'Keeping Kendray Clean and Tidy Agreement' was established in 2006 between local service providers and the residents of the Barnsley estate. The agreement explains which service provider is responsible for what, and the service standards residents can expect. 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 providers⁵.

4.8 A charter is relevant to local people's understanding of an area or neighbourhood

Charters should be relevant to the local area, covering an area which is recognised as distinct by residents. Where charters are instigated by local demand the area they cover will be self defined. Where local authorities take the lead on developing charters they should be in line with natural neighbourhoods⁶. Charters covering areas with a population in excess of 10,000 are not recommended as areas of this size are often too large to be seen as a distinct area.

Mancunian Agreements, Manchester

Manchester City Council and Manchester's LSP have supported the development of seven neighbourhood agreements in the city to date. The council have developed a toolkit to help communities develop agreements and make an officer available to act as a 'broker' locally.

Agreements are usually about a recognised neighbourhood or area, but can be about people living on a street or about a single issue that is causing concern locally. The agreements look different in each area, but are essentially pledges made by local service providers, residents and community groups outlining how they will each contribute to a project or priority locally.

4.9 A charter is a living document where priorities are set for a given period and then reviewed

Charters should include a commitment to long-term community engagement. Local priorities will vary over time as circumstances change. A date for review, determined locally, should therefore be agreed when the charter is

first signed. Refreshing the charter on a regular basis enables people to assess progress and celebrate what has been achieved. This can help create momentum and increase people's satisfaction with the results.

4.10 A charter is easy to read and written in plain English

Charters should always be clear and easy to understand. They should be written in plain English and offered in other accessible formats if requested, including languages other than English.

As charters combine contributions from service providers, residents and councillors they could become more detailed, taking on an action plan format for future joint activity. However, a shorter version could be published that gives the essential information and contacts. This version can then be distributed to every resident.

Clear and concise information

The Beanhill Neighbourhood Agreement is Milton Keynes' first community owned Neighbourhood Agreement. The agreement outlines the major statutory services provided to residents in the area, giving descriptions, opening times and contact information which are specific to Beanhill. The simple design is accessible and designed particularly for residents who have had little previous engagement.

The council, local Parish Council, Police and PCT have made commitments in the document, naming individuals in the Action group who are accountable. There is also a gentle reminder of what is expected of residents as members of the community.

Chapter 5

Step by step guide to developing a local charter

To help develop a charter, and determine what it might look like, the following questions should be considered:

What capacity does the community already have?

1. In areas with **good local capacity**, which organisation is taking a lead – community forum, tenants association, parish council? How will you ensure all voices in the community are represented?
2. In areas of **poor capacity** how will the local authority support councillors and officers to engage communities and service providers?
3. In areas where VCS organisations are interested in **delivering additional services** how will this be negotiated?

Where a VCS organisation wants to take on increased delivery:

- What is the business case for the function?
- What standard local authority procurement or commissioning procedures need to be started?
- How will the option be tested with local people?

What other documents exist already?

Do similar agreements, frameworks or statements already exist for the agreed area?

- Would a charter help to simplify these?
- Or would it duplicate the function of these, in which case there may be no need to produce charters at this stage?

Could the information from a charter be used to inform local authority strategies?

What area will the charter cover?

Is the proposed charter area an appropriate size?

- Is the area recognised as a natural neighbourhood or community?
- Does the area make sense to local people or is it too large?
- Do agencies recognise the boundaries of the area? If not, what will need to be done to help agencies work with the charter or to agree the use of a different sized area?

What are the community's priorities?

- What do existing documents, surveys, and forums tell us about local community priorities?
- What do local councillors believe community priorities are?
- Is additional consultation on priorities needed?
 - Are all areas of the community represented by the existing information?
 - What could additional consultation be coordinated with?

**What are agency priorities locally?**

- What services do agencies provide locally?
- Where does the delivery vary from the norm?
- Which LAA targets are particularly relevant for the area?
- What are agencies' priorities locally and which initiatives do they wish to pilot or promote?
- What local level data do agencies have on the community and community level needs?

**What will the charter cover?**

- What actions are planned to meet local priorities?
- Is the charter going to focus on all relevant issues or will the charter be better focused on a single set of issues?

**Is there consensus on local priorities?**

- Is there a consensus on priorities for the local area? Do agencies and communities agree? Do voluntary and community sector organisations agree?
- Is there a community organisation with an appropriate mandate to agree community input and responsibility on behalf of the community? If not what further consultation is necessary?

If agencies won't engage, what is the role of the local authority, LSP, local members to encourage buy in?

**What will the published charter look like?**

- Is the charter short enough to publish in its original form? If not, how can a shorter, more readable version be produced?
- How will the costs of publication be met?
- Is the charter written in plain English and in an accessible style?
- Does it include contact details for service providers and local councillors?

**Charter signed and published**

- Who will sign the charter on behalf of the local authority and community?
- Is there LSP endorsement of the charter and commitment by them to monitor?
- Will there be a high profile launch event?
- What wider monitoring and evaluation will be put in place?

Chapter 6

Challenges and trouble shooting

6.1 How long will it take to develop a charter?

Time should be allowed to agree the process for developing a charter, recruit enthusiasts to help, consult locally, develop relationships with service providers in each locality and reach agreement from all partners. Therefore a charter may take six to twelve months to develop, depending on the existing capacity of the community, the amount of consultation that has taken place already and the extent of previous partnership work and planning.

Where a group is looking to take on new responsibilities for service provision, additional time will be needed to meet the authority's procurement procedures.

6.2 How do you pay for charters?

Developing and publishing the charter can be costly, especially if different formats and versions need to be produced. Local authorities should make an assessment of the cost of developing charters and how staff time and publication costs will be resourced from the outset. It is worth considering:

- where mainstream community development or neighbourhood management resources can be diverted to help develop charters
- how grant funding streams can be used to help fund the cost of development or additional consultation – for example community chests or local area agreements
- where existing structures, information and processes (and the skills of enthusiasts) in each locality can be used to help keep costs down
- if charters in some areas (such as those with low existing capacity or marginalised groups) will take priority over other engagement techniques when resources are tight

It is difficult to determine exactly how much the development of charters will cost authorities, as each case will differ. After developing charters in Kendray, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council estimate it takes one or two days of officer time a month in the first stages of charter development, in addition to publication costs. After this a smaller commitment of ongoing officer time is needed to monitor and manage the charter.

6.3 Trouble shooting

Getting started

Challenge	Solution
You may need inspiration from elsewhere.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As well as the examples in this guide there are sample charters from around the country on IDeA knowledge www.idea.gov.uk.
The term local charter may cause confusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local authorities could also call local charters a parish/community/neighbourhood charter or agreement. Care should be taken when developing charters in areas where different, but similarly titled, documents already exist such as service level charters or parish charters.
The area covered by a charter may be too small or large for the local authority to engage with effectively, or for residents to feel a link to.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The geography of a charter should be locally relevant. Request the use of natural neighbourhoods (usually 4,000-10,000⁷ people) where they have been identified, unless smaller areas are practical and more relevant (eg in parishes).
Multiple requests for charters may come from different community groups in a single area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Councillors should ensure the views of the whole community are represented, brokering agreement where there is conflict or competition.

Getting officers, councillors and other agencies involved

Challenge	Solution
Officers and councillors will need training and support to implement charters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some independent training is available from local authorities and consultancies.
Some councillors may feel that community empowerment initiatives undermine their role and responsibilities locally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of councillors in developing, negotiating and monitoring charters should be made clear from the start. If necessary, councillors should receive training to help them fulfil this role.
Local service providers may feel threatened and resist engaging with the process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opportunity for efficiency savings and contribution to improved performance measures should be explained. Strong leadership from the LSP should engage providers. The Duty to co-operate may also help.⁸

Achieving genuine community involvement in developing a charter

Challenge	Solution
Charters may be requested by organisations or individuals that are not representative of the whole neighbourhood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important that a charter reflects the views of the whole community. • Local councillors can help resolve issues and enable genuine engagement to take place with the whole community. • Further consultation could be commissioned.
People can suffer from engagement ‘fatigue’, particularly if additional consultation is needed to clarify local concerns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As charters should build on the existing information available from consultations and plans, new consultation may not be needed. • Make sure people receive feedback on how previous consultation was acted upon and what will happen as a result of any further engagement activity.
Some groups are hard to reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once under represented groups have been identified, tailored and innovative methods to work with them can be used. • There is a role for councillors in reaching out to new communities and brokering relationships with community leaders. • See www.peopleandparticipation.net and www.idea.gov.uk for more information.
Additional community engagement may be costly, especially in areas with little previous engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authorities should be clear about resourcing and priority areas from the outset. • Keep costs down by using existing data, local forums, ward councillors, in-kind time from other agencies, standing polls or surveys and innovative engagement methods. • See www.peopleandparticipation.net and www.consultationinstitute.org for more tips.

Agreeing what goes in a charter

Challenge	Solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There may be high expectations of what a local charter can deliver. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be realistic about what can be achieved with the resources available. A charter is not a solution to all local issues, but does provide a framework to discuss them.
<p>Local agencies may try to use the charter as a contact list or newsletter to promote their activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain that a charter is a two way partnership between the community and services and will get more support in this way. • An accessible charter which reflects the community it represents is more important than a glossy style of presentation.
<p>Residents may perceive that local conditions (such as crime figures) are worse than they are.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain clear and accurate local data to inform discussions. • Be willing to work on reducing such a perception and any fears.
<p>Gathering existing information and plans will take time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow for this in work planning and the allocation of resources and aim for flexibility. • Local service providers and residents may also be able to help and they can be engaged, with leadership from the LSP.
<p>A community may not wish to sign a charter.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve parishes, community associations and other resident bodies from the outset. • Councillors have a key role in negotiating any conflict should the proposed charter not meet a community's expectations.
<p>The local authority does not wish to sign the charter.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve locality officers and councillors in the negotiation of a charter from the outset. • Be realistic about what will stop a charter being signed – such as a lack of community engagement, disagreement with council policy or a lack of resources.

Publishing and monitoring the charter

Challenge	Solution
Publishing the charter can be costly, especially if different formats are required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask residents which formats they will need and build the production and translation costs into the budget from the outset. • Consider the mainstream and grant funded options available to cover costs.
Agreements made in the charter may not be fulfilled and underperformance will need to be challenged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be realistic about what you can deliver, so that underperformance is rare and trust is maintained. Clearly communicate the reasons for any underperformance. • Deal with underperformance constructively through the local councillor. Where necessary link underperformance to scrutiny processes and Councillors' Calls for Action.

Chapter 7

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The Young Foundation is a unique organisation that undertakes research to identify and understand social needs and then develops practical initiatives and institutions to address them.



The Young Foundation's work on neighbourhoods is rooted in practical work with local authorities and other partners through the Neighbourhood Action Network. This two year programme is designed to encourage and accelerate innovation in neighbourhood working and community empowerment through action learning, action research and experimentation. Its aim is to maximise the chances for residents to be involved in local decision-making and action that will improve their quality of life.

Partners in the Neighbourhood Action Network include London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, Birmingham City Council, London Borough of Camden, London Borough of Hackney, London Borough of Haringey, Housing Corporation, IDeA (Improvement and Development Agency), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Kings Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Local Government Association (LGA), London Borough of Lewisham, Newcastle City Council, Surrey County Council, London Borough of Tower Hamlets and Wakefield Metropolitan District Council.

For more information please visit www.youngfoundation.org

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