



Building Safe and Strong Communities

Principles of collaboration between

Town and Parish Councils,
Cumbria Association of Local Councils and
Westmorland and Furness Council



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Web version

1. Introduction

Westmorland and Furness Council and Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC) want to help build a relationship between the new council and parish and town councils that focuses on people and places and becomes a benchmark of good practice.

There are currently 107 parish and 9 town councils in the Westmorland and Furness area forming the first tier of Local Government and are closest to the people they serve. They are local authorities and take decisions that directly affect the quality of life of the communities they represent.

This document sets out how parish and town councils and Westmorland and Furness Council will work together to support great public services and stronger communities.

2. Vision and foundation

CALC shares Westmorland and Furness Council's vision for Westmorland and Furness to be a great place to live, work and thrive. Building on this, CALC and Westmorland and Furness have identified the four themes for how they will work together to deliver the mission in the council plan delivery framework – "Communities are welcoming, inclusive and provide a good quality of life. They are proud of and care for their local areas and the people who live in them. They are able to make the right choices for them. They are resilient and their voices and choices are heard through local participation". These themes are:

- **Community Influencing** – Involving local people in the decisions that affect them through regular engagement.
- **Community places** – Working alongside community groups to leverage local resources to make towns and villages in Westmorland and Furness great places to live.
- **Safe and strong communities** – Supporting our communities to be more resilient and to thrive by nurturing an ethos of active neighbours who use their gifts to support one another.
- **Community assets** – Sharing control of community-based assets where appropriate, and based on agreed policies, so that they can best contribute to achieving local priorities and maximise the value that they offer.

The Westmorland and Furness Council Plan describes a council seeking to work closely with the residents and businesses it serves to enable them to shape their own destiny, thrive and keep local service centres. Effective local representation and a thriving voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector are critical to achieving this as well as an excellent relationship between Westmorland and Furness Council and parish and town councils.

The foundation of the relationship between the two tiers of local government will be based upon the following values and behaviours:

- Regular and open dialogue based on trust and mutual respect.
- Mutual respect and an appreciation that all councils are different – with varying aims, objectives, and resources. There is no one size fits all.
- A focus on action and “doing with” and having the right skills in the right areas.
- Needs-led and evidence-based decisions that ensure sustainability.
- Focusing on opportunities and trying to overcome any issues. Breaking down barriers together.
- Leveraging relationships between parishes and with key stakeholders to maximise opportunities for synergy and best value.
- Shaping great places to live, work and visit with the right outcomes for our communities.

3. Roles and responsibilities

Parish and town councils will...

- Recognise Westmorland and Furness Council as the tier of local government responsible for the delivery of strategic services and functions.
- Work positively with Westmorland and Furness officers and councillors in a spirit of partnership and co-operation.

CALC will...

- facilitate formal engagement with and input from parish and town councils with regards to future service delivery.
- Enable parish and town councils to work in partnership with Westmorland and Furness Council by establishing good communication links and building upon the links already in place through ward councillors regularly attending meetings of parish and town councils in their area, and District Association meetings / events.
- Pull on expertise and experience from the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and other Associations of Local Councils that have gone through Local Government Reorganisation.
- Assist in shaping local control and delivery where appropriate, enabling devolution of services / assets discussions to take place.
- Help parish and town councils to prepare an appropriate business case if seeking to take on a devolved service or exercise new powers for the first time.
- Continue to build capacity and improve the governance and accountability standards through the promotion of the nationally recognised Local Council Award Scheme and the training of Clerks to obtain the Certificate of Local Council Administration.
- Review its Strategic Management Plan and create a five-year business plan.
- Assist parish and town councils with the delivery of key national targets.

Westmorland and Furness Council will...

- Recognise the importance of parish and town councils as the first tier of local government and

their role in building place and community.

- Define and develop ways of engaging with and working together with parish and town councils.
- Develop an Asset Disposal Policy and Community Asset Transfer Policy to ensure transparency on asset-based decisions.
- Through its three Locality Boards and Community Teams, Westmorland and Furness Council will develop mechanisms for working with our communities alongside parish councils, identifying local priorities and helping our places to thrive.
- With the potential for more proactive and action-based relationships between parish and town councils and various teams within Westmorland and Furness Councils, communications will become more complex. Westmorland and Furness Council will provide a single point of contact for town and parish councils via safe and strong community teams.

4. Ways of working together

1. Participate and influence

Westmorland and Furness Council has three Locality Boards – Eden, Furness and South Lakeland – with core membership of elected Westmorland and Furness councillors and with powers, governance and budgets as specified in the Council's constitution. These boards can act in a community leadership capacity bringing together different interest groups from the public, private and voluntary sectors to work in partnership to meet the council's corporate strategic and local community objectives.

These boards may co-opt members to assist in the discharge of their role – these members will hear updates and may participate in the debate but will have no voting rights.

Locality Boards will be invited to nominate an area based CALC representative to join their meetings.

2. Shaping place

The two tiers of local government can consider how best to collaborate in shaping places within locality board footprint areas.

As an example, where there exists a desire to do so, the councils may consider establishing a place action group with representation from Members, officers and other stakeholders as appropriate. These action groups would be non-decision making. They would present a collaborative space and may formulate place shaping plans, establish local priorities and propose how to pool resources to achieve them.

Local place shaping activity will be reported regularly to Locality Boards.

3. Inclusion and Collaboration

Alongside parish and town councils, voluntary and other community sector organisations can be an integral part of vibrant communities. Area based Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector (VCFSE) groups could be invited to join place action groups (or other locally decided structures) as

appropriate and contribute to place shaping activity, service delivery discussions and asset-based priority delivery.

Westmorland and Furness Council Locality Boards may consider co-opting a representative from the VCFSE sector.

Westmorland and Furness Council and CALC will endeavour to work with local VCFSE infrastructure support organisations to structure strategic collaboration.

4. Community activation

The two tiers of local government will work together to develop structures that increase social contacts and connections leading to increased power within our communities.

5. Community resilience

Community Resilience Forums contribute to robust communities who are resilient and able to respond to challenging situations and emergencies. Through these forums, CALC and Westmorland and Furness Council will continue to encourage preparedness within our parish and town councils - including their local emergency groups – supporting them to plan and maximise their local networks.

6. Asset and service accountability and delivery

Westmorland and Furness Council and CALC will agree structures for discussions around sustainable devolution of assets and services and based on appropriate council policies such as the Asset Disposal Policy and the Community Asset Transfer Policy. The Westmorland and Furness VCFSE will also take a critical role in this structure.

7. Developing skills and capacity

Westmorland and Furness Council and CALC will consider whether sector resources and skills match the aspirations of parish or town councils and the expectations of the collaborative relationship. Consideration will be given to appropriate training opportunities, sharing of resources and boosting specific skills on a temporary basis to enable priority actions.

Parish and town councils will be encouraged to consider area-based clustering with their neighbouring authorities and will be supported through formalising these relationships.

About Parish and Town Councils

As a tier of local government, parish and town councils are elected bodies with discretionary powers and rights laid down by Parliament to represent their communities and provide services for them. The parish and town council sector is incredibly diverse, they are statutory bodies and their members are elected for a four-year term. They raise their own precept and provide local services and representation.

Parish and town councils are the most local level of government for an area and they operate at a grass-roots level to improve community well-being and provide local services. Their activities fall into three main categories:

- Representing the local community
(e.g. on planning matters with principal councils and developers, to the local police and health services, to MPs and government)
- Delivering services to meet local needs
(e.g. leisure facilities, community centres, bus shelters, parks and open spaces, litter bins, car parks, allotments, public toilets, festivals and celebrations, local illuminations)
- Improving quality of life and community well-being
(e.g. community led plans, planning local housing and infrastructure through neighbourhood plans, promoting dementia friendly communities, tackling loneliness, acting as community hubs, supporting climate change and funding community projects / vital services)

Parish and town councils have an overall responsibility for the wellbeing of their local community, and central government is encouraging them to deliver more services and play a greater part in developing and leading their communities.

Parish and town councils play a vital role in supporting and enhancing their community's identity, services and quality of life. They can do this because they are based locally, operating within their local community. This means they are well placed to understand the issues within their areas and can provide a more focused and tailored response as a result.

As well as being able to deliver a range of key local services, parish and town councils are also able to support events and initiatives, which promote community spirit and inclusiveness, award grants to community groups, sports clubs, charities and other voluntary sector organisations.

The role of CALC

- To be the focal point for communication between parish and town councils and partner organisations.
- To maintain and improve the governance and accountability standards within parish and town councils through training and development.

- To harness examples of good practice and share that practice with other parish and town councils.
- To be a single point of contact for parish and town councils.
- To provide parish and town councils with legal advice and guidance.
- To enable parish and town councils to influence decisions that affect their area and build stronger and safer communities.
- To assist in the co-production of service delivery to improve services and reduce cost.

About CALC

Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC) is a membership organisation representing the parish and town councils within the area of Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Council.

More than 95% of the 266 parish and town councils and parish meetings in Cumbria are in membership. The members range from the smallest of parish councils with just a few hundred electors to the largest town councils with thousands of electors.

The Association provides a range of services to member councils and is the primary representative and advocate for local councils in Cumbria.

CALC is partially funded through its membership and partially through grant support from both unitary councils. In addition to its core funding requirements CALC is in a position with additional funding to support key projects that need to be taken forward with parish and town councils such as resilience including the cost-of-living crisis and climate change including hitting the zero-carbon target.