

Charters for unitary authorities and community and town councils

One way of establishing closer and more fruitful working relationships between town and community councils and unitary authorities are formal charters or agreements. These set out the way that the two tiers of government exchange information and consult with each other.

In Wales there are currently two unitary authorities, Caerphilly and Torfaen that have charters (agreements) with their community and town councils.

The Welsh Assembly Government is keen to promote the use of these charters and has published a guidance document entitled ***A Shared Community: Relationship building and charters for unitary authorities and community and town councils***, which includes a model charter and is available on <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/localgovernment/publications/asharedcommunity>.

Aspects that may be covered by a charter include land use planning. Below you find the relevant chapter of the model charter:

Land Use Planning

Community and town councils know and understand their local area and must be able to comment effectively on planning matters. The unitary council is able to take an overview of the needs of the whole local area and make decisions, taking local views into account.

Unitary authorities	Community and town councils
Will uphold its statutory duty to consult community and town councils on all planning applications in their communities.	Make appropriate responses to the unitary authority recognising the parameters imposed by planning law and agreed planning policy.
Invite representatives from a community council or town council to participate in site visits relating to planning applications in its area.	Ensure that councillors receive training on planning issues and have a sound understanding of how planning law works.
Inform a community or town council in writing for the decision made with respect to a planning application in its area within seven days of the decision being made, and, if necessary explain why the decision is different from the point of view put forward by the community / town council.	Maintain an objective and professional approach to planning matters at all times.
Give community and town councils information about relevant planning committee meetings so that they may attend as observers.	Councillors to take up the opportunity to attend planning committee meetings at the unitary authority.