TODMORDEN TOWN COUNCIL

Community Volunteer & Partnership Charter

Working together for a respectful, inclusive and thriving Todmorden

Approved by: Todmorden Town Council
Approval date:
Review date: Every 2 years

1. Purpose of this Charter

Todmorden Town Council recognises the important contribution made by community groups, voluntary organisations, charities, residents' groups, clubs, societies and individual volunteers across Todmorden.

The Council values the knowledge, enthusiasm, commitment and local expertise that community organisations bring to the town. Strong communities depend upon people and organisations working together constructively.

This Charter sets out the shared standards of behaviour and principles that Todmorden Town Council and the community groups and organisations it works with agree to uphold.

It is intended to ensure that everyone involved in a Council-community partnership is:

- treated with courtesy, dignity and respect;
- able to express their views and concerns;
- listened to fairly;
- able to disagree constructively;
- encouraged to work collaboratively;
- clear about their respective roles and responsibilities; and
- able to work together in a safe and positive environment.

This is a two-way agreement. The standards apply equally to Todmorden Town Council, its councillors, officers and representatives, and to community groups, volunteers and their representatives.

2. Our shared commitment

By working together, Todmorden Town Council and participating community organisations agree to promote a culture where:

We work together, not against each other.
We may have different views, priorities and approaches, but we will seek to find constructive ways forward.

We challenge ideas, not people.
Disagreement is a normal and healthy part of community life. We will challenge decisions, proposals and ideas respectfully without attacking or belittling individuals.

We listen to one another.
We will make a genuine effort to understand different perspectives and will not dismiss concerns simply because we disagree with them.

We communicate respectfully.
Whether communicating face-to-face, by telephone, email, letter, social media or any other method, we will remain polite and professional.

We recognise each other's contribution.
The Council and community organisations have different roles, responsibilities and expertise. We will respect those differences and recognise the contribution each party makes.

3. Principles of partnership
All parties agree to work according to the following principles.

Respect
We will treat councillors, Council officers, volunteers, community representatives, residents and members of the public with courtesy, dignity and respect.

Collaboration
We will seek opportunities to work together and will approach problems with the aim of finding solutions rather than assigning blame.

Openness
We will communicate honestly and openly while respecting confidentiality and legal obligations.

Inclusion
We will seek to ensure that people are not excluded or disadvantaged because of age, disability, sex, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, or any other characteristic protected by law.

Accountability
We will take responsibility for our own actions and commitments and will raise concerns through appropriate channels.

Good faith
We will assume, unless there is evidence to the contrary, that those we are working with are acting with positive intentions.

Community benefit
We will keep the interests of the wider Todmorden community in mind when working together.

4. What community groups can expect from Todmorden Town Council
The Council commits to treating community groups and volunteers fairly and respectfully.

Where practicable, the Council will:

- listen to community groups and consider their views;
- provide clear information about Council decisions and processes;
- communicate in a timely and appropriate manner;
- explain decisions where appropriate;
- be clear about what the Council can and cannot do;
- avoid making promises that cannot reasonably be delivered;

- respect the independence and identity of community organisations;
- recognise that community groups may have different views from the Council;
- provide appropriate opportunities for dialogue;
- deal with concerns professionally;
- seek to resolve disagreements constructively;
- provide reasonable opportunities for community representatives to raise concerns; and
- recognise and celebrate the contribution made by volunteers and community organisations.

The Council will not always be able to agree with a community group or support every proposal. Where the Council cannot agree to a request, it will seek, where appropriate, to explain the reasons and identify alternative options.

5. What Todmorden Town Council expects from community groups

Community groups working with the Council agree to:

- treat councillors, Council officers and other Council representatives with courtesy and respect;
- communicate concerns through appropriate channels;
- provide accurate information to the best of their knowledge;
- recognise that Council officers and councillors have different roles and responsibilities;
- respect Council policies, procedures and legal obligations;
- respect decisions made through the Council's lawful democratic processes;
- raise disagreements constructively;
- avoid personal criticism, insults or attacks;
- work collaboratively where possible;
- respect confidentiality where information is appropriately provided on a confidential basis;
- honour agreed commitments wherever reasonably possible;
- communicate changes or problems at the earliest reasonable opportunity;
- avoid behaviour that could intimidate, threaten, bully or harass Council staff, councillors or volunteers;
- encourage their own members and representatives to follow this Charter; and
- work towards positive outcomes for the wider Todmorden community.

6. The right to disagree

Todmorden Town Council recognises that community groups will not always agree with Council decisions.

The Council welcomes constructive challenge and recognises that disagreement can improve decision-making.

Community groups are entitled to:

- question Council decisions;
- ask for information;
- express dissatisfaction;
- make representations to councillors;
- submit petitions or correspondence;
- attend appropriate public meetings;
- make representations through established democratic processes;
- request clarification of decisions; and

- campaign for changes to Council policy or decisions.

Nothing in this Charter is intended to prevent legitimate criticism or democratic challenge. However, disagreement must remain respectful and proportionate.

A person may strongly disagree with a decision without being abusive towards the person who made, communicated or implemented that decision.

7. Communication standards
All parties agree to communicate in a way that supports constructive working relationships.

This applies to:
- meetings;
- telephone calls;
- emails;
- letters;
- social media;
- messaging services;
- public meetings;
- community events;
- informal conversations; and
- any other communication connected with Council-community working.

We will:
- use polite and appropriate language;
- allow others to speak without unnecessary interruption;
- listen to different viewpoints;
- avoid personal attacks;
- avoid deliberately provocative or inflammatory language;
- distinguish between fact, opinion and allegation;
- avoid spreading information that we know to be false or misleading;
- give people a reasonable opportunity to respond where appropriate; and
- seek clarification before assuming someone's intentions.

8. Zero tolerance for abuse, threats and harassment
Todmorden Town Council is committed to maintaining a safe working environment for councillors, officers, volunteers and community partners.

The Council will not accept:
- verbal abuse;
- shouting or aggressive behaviour;
- threatening or intimidating behaviour;
- personal insults;
- bullying;
- harassment;
- discriminatory or offensive comments;
- abusive emails or messages;
- repeated unreasonable contact;

- deliberately humiliating or belittling individuals;
- threats of violence;
- threatening or abusive social media posts directed at individuals; or
- any other behaviour that causes a person to feel threatened, intimidated, humiliated or unsafe.

This standard applies equally to Council representatives and community groups.

The fact that someone is passionate, angry or strongly opposed to a Council decision does not justify abusive behaviour.

9. Supporting Council officers
The Council recognises that officers are often the public-facing point of contact for community organisations.

Officers are responsible for implementing Council decisions, providing advice and carrying out their professional duties.

Community groups agree that:
- an officer should not be personally attacked because of a Council decision;
- officers should not be expected to defend decisions that are outside their authority;
- concerns about an officer's conduct should be raised through an appropriate process;
- officers should not be subjected to repeated or unreasonable demands;
- disagreements with Council policy should not become personal disputes with individual officers; and
- officers should be given a reasonable opportunity to respond.

Similarly, Council officers will ensure that they do not use their position to dismiss, belittle or unfairly disadvantage community groups or their representatives.

10. Supporting Councillors
Councillors are democratically elected representatives.

Community groups may contact councillors, raise concerns and seek their support.
However, councillors should not be subjected to personal abuse, harassment or intimidation because of their views or votes.

Community groups agree to distinguish between:
"I strongly disagree with the Council's decision."
and
"The councillor is a bad person because they made that decision."

The first is legitimate democratic debate. The second is not an acceptable basis for partnership working.
Councillors will similarly ensure that their interactions with community groups are respectful, professional and consistent with their responsibilities as elected representatives.

11. Meetings

Meetings between the Council and community organisations should be conducted in a constructive manner.
Participants agree to:

- arrive prepared where reasonably possible;
- allow everyone an opportunity to contribute;
- avoid unnecessary interruptions;
- remain respectful when disagreeing;
- keep discussions focused on the relevant issue;
- avoid personal criticism;
- respect the chair's role in managing the meeting;
- agree actions where possible; and
- communicate any concerns about the meeting through an appropriate channel.

If behaviour becomes abusive, threatening or seriously disruptive, the meeting may be paused or ended.

A further meeting may be arranged where appropriate and where all parties can agree to participate constructively.

12. Social media and online communication

The same standards of respect apply online as they do in person.
Community groups and Council representatives should take particular care when using social media because comments can be widely distributed and can have a significant impact on individuals and organisations.

Participants should:

- avoid personal attacks;
- avoid publishing confidential information;
- avoid identifying individuals unnecessarily;
- check information before presenting it as fact;
- avoid encouraging others to target an individual;
- avoid threatening or intimidating language; and
- remember that disagreement with an organisation does not justify abuse of an individual employee, councillor or volunteer.

The Council recognises the right of community groups to campaign and express opinions online. This Charter does not seek to prevent legitimate criticism, campaigning or political debate.

13. Handling disagreements

Disagreements should, wherever possible, be resolved at the lowest appropriate level.
Where a disagreement arises, the parties should seek to:

Step 1 – Discuss

Speak directly with the relevant person or representative and explain the concern calmly.

Step 2 – Clarify

Ensure that both parties understand the issue and distinguish between factual disagreement, difference of opinion and misunderstanding.

Step 3 – Seek a solution
Identify whether there is a practical way forward that addresses the concerns of both parties.

Step 4 – Escalate appropriately
If the issue cannot be resolved informally, it should be referred to the appropriate Council officer, committee, councillor or formal Council process.

Step 5 – Review
Where appropriate, the parties should review what happened and identify how future disagreements can be handled more effectively.

14. When the Charter is breached
The Council hopes that breaches of this Charter will be rare.

Where concerns arise, the Council will seek to resolve them proportionately and constructively.

Depending on the circumstances, the Council may:

- speak directly with the individual or community group;
- remind participants of the Charter;
- request an apology or clarification;
- arrange a facilitated meeting;
- identify a different point of contact;
- introduce reasonable communication arrangements;
- limit communications to written correspondence;
- require communications to be made through a nominated representative;
- suspend a particular partnership or activity while concerns are addressed;
- review access to Council resources, premises or funding where relevant and where the applicable terms permit;
- use the Council's complaints or other formal procedures; or
- take other appropriate action where necessary.

Serious incidents involving threats, violence, harassment, discrimination or other potentially unlawful behaviour may be referred to the appropriate authorities.

Nothing in this Charter prevents the Council or any community organisation from exercising its legal rights or using formal complaint, grievance, safeguarding or other statutory processes.

15. Partnership status
Where a community organisation formally works in partnership with Todmorden Town Council, the Council may make adherence to this Charter a condition of the partnership agreement, funding agreement, use of Council facilities or other relevant arrangement.

The Council may review or suspend a partnership where there are serious or repeated breaches of the standards contained in this Charter.

Any such action will be taken fairly, proportionately and in accordance with the relevant agreement, Council policy and applicable law.

16. Equality and inclusion
All parties agree to promote equality, diversity and inclusion.

We will not tolerate discriminatory behaviour based on protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Community organisations and Council representatives should seek to ensure that meetings, events, communications and partnership activities are accessible and inclusive wherever reasonably practicable.

We recognise that people may have different communication needs and will seek to make reasonable adjustments where appropriate.

17. Confidentiality and information
The Council and community organisations may sometimes share information that is sensitive or confidential.

Where information is clearly identified as confidential, or where there is a legal or legitimate reason for confidentiality, all parties agree to handle that information appropriately.

At the same time, the Council must comply with its legal obligations concerning transparency, access to information, data protection, financial accountability and democratic decision-making.

Community groups should therefore not assume that all information provided to the Council can automatically be treated as confidential.

Where confidentiality is important, this should be discussed and agreed at the earliest opportunity.

18. Volunteers
The Council greatly values volunteers and recognises that volunteers give their time freely for the benefit of the community.

Volunteers working on Council-supported activities are expected to:

- treat others respectfully;
- follow reasonable instructions relevant to the activity;
- comply with relevant health and safety requirements;
- respect confidentiality;
- behave appropriately towards members of the public;
- raise concerns through the appropriate person; and
- follow the standards contained in this Charter.

The Council will similarly ensure that volunteers are treated fairly, respectfully and appropriately.

19. Shared responsibilities
Both parties agree that these responsibilities are mutual and should be upheld in good faith.

Todmorden Town Council	**Community Organisations**
Listen to community concerns	Raise concerns constructively

Communicate clearly	Communicate respectfully
Explain decisions where appropriate	Accept that not every request can be agreed
Respect different opinions	Respect democratic processes
Treat people fairly	Treat councillors and officers fairly
Provide appropriate routes for concerns	Use appropriate routes for complaints
Support collaborative working	Work collaboratively
Avoid personal criticism	Avoid personal criticism
Address inappropriate behaviour	Address inappropriate behaviour within their own organisation
Recognise community contributions	Recognise the Council's role and responsibilities

20. Our shared pledge

By signing this Charter, we agree that:

- We will work together in the interests of Todmorden.
- We will treat one another with courtesy, dignity and respect.
- We will listen to different views, even when we disagree.
- We will challenge decisions and ideas constructively rather than attacking individuals.
- We will communicate honestly, professionally and respectfully.
- We will seek solutions rather than blame.
- We will not tolerate abuse, threats, bullying, harassment or discrimination.
- We will recognise that councillors, officers, volunteers and community organisations have different roles and responsibilities.
- We will encourage our members, representatives and colleagues to uphold these standards.
- We will work together to make Todmorden a better place for everyone.

21. Agreement

This Charter represents a shared commitment between Todmorden Town Council and the community organisation named below.

By signing, both parties confirm that they have read and understood the Charter and agree to work in accordance with its principles.

For Todmorden Town Council

Name: _____

Position: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

For the Community Organisation

Organisation: _____

Name: _____

Position: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Review

This Charter will be reviewed periodically by Todmorden Town Council to ensure that it remains effective, proportionate and appropriate for the Council's relationships with community organisations.

The Council may also review individual partnership arrangements where there are concerns about compliance with this Charter.