

# **Hetton Town Council**

## **Management and Policy Committee - 14 September 2020**

### **Item 4: Engagement with Sunderland City Council**

#### **Report of G Keedy, Town Clerk**

##### **Background:**

In 2009, Hetton Town Council (HTC) entered into a Local Charter Agreement with Sunderland City Council (SCC) which set out how the two bodies could work in partnership.

This included Local Governance arrangements focussing on the role of the Coalfield Area Committee acting as the principal link between the two organisations. The Charter included undertakings that the Town Council could nominate a representative to that forum and appropriate Ward Councillors would be encouraged to attend Town Council meetings.

Whilst the Charter is wider in scope than Governance arrangements, it is this aspect which is considered most relevant to the Council's current issues and priorities.

##### **Current position:**

The Charter agreement had a currency of four years (ie. to 2013), at the expiry of which a review would be undertaken. Scrutiny of historic Town Council minutes and informal enquiries with SCC officers by the Town Clerk indicate that no review has taken place.

In the eleven years since the Charter launch, there have been significant changes to the way local government operates. These include legislative changes (eg. Localism Act 2011) and the levels of central government funding available. At local level, ongoing organisational and personnel changes at both HTC and SCC have seen long-established officer relationships disappear, and the historic interdependencies between HTC and SCC appear to have been significantly eroded.

HTC recognise the important role of the Coalfield Area Committee and welcome continued involvement through formal representation on that body, but regard the role (as defined in the Charter) as largely impotent, its' representative having no more powers or responsibilities than a member of the public in attendance.

Turning to the attendance at HTC meetings by Ward Councillors, this is not something which currently takes place, leading to expressions of frustration at Town Council meetings.

Operating at the first tier of local government, Members and residents are aware of many issues impacting upon the community which rely heavily upon SCC for resolution.

The Town Council has only limited resources (both physical and financial) but is keen to further develop its community representation and enhancement roles, including through a review of engagement with and between SCC.

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### **Next Steps:**

In view of the above, it is considered there is potential scope within the spirit of the 2009 Charter document to revisit existing arrangements for dialogue with SCC.

Committee is asked to consider recommending to Full Council that:

An approach be made to SCC (including option for Town Clerk and Committee Chairman to meet with appropriate senior officer) to explore opportunities to review and strengthen the role of the Council's representative on the Coalfield Area Committee;

Town Clerk routinely invites Members of SCC representing the Hetton le Hole and Copt Hill electoral Wards to meetings of Full Council to deliver updates and hear local concerns;

and,

A review of the Charter be undertaken with SCC to ensure alignment with emerging Government plans for an increased role in communities for town and parish councils.